

What is Self Defense?

Self-defense is the act of defending one's person against attack by the use of physical force.

In order for a person to defend themselves properly against a variety of attacks, it is necessary to analyze the various types of attacks, and the techniques available to defend against them. Also important, is to know the strengths and weaknesses of these different techniques, as well as your own limitations.

There is a story of the cat and the fox, which illustrates how self-defense should be approached. The fox was a master of evading the hounds and had a thousand and one ways in which to "out fox" the hounds. The cat met the fox and was truly in awe of the fox and his many ways to escape death, for he knew of only one. So while the fox and the cat were talking one day, they heard the sound of hounds and the bugle. Immediately, the cat ran up the nearest tree. However the fox, while trying to figure out which of the thousand and one tricks he would use was killed by the hounds. The lesson to be learned from the story is a valuable one for all martial artists. One should have at their disposal, one or two simple techniques which will work in all circumstances. Keeping self-defense as simple as possible will keep you alive. However, to learn which defenses work best for each individual, then a variety of techniques need to be learned so that one may pick those techniques that are most suitable.

Self-defense, just like the martial arts, should be learned in a progressive manner. The very simplest techniques are learned first, then later once more proficiency is gained, more advanced techniques are taught. The defenses against the most simple of attacks are learned first and then the more difficult attacks later on. One does not learn to run before they walk, neither should one learn attacks against knife attacks before the student has gained proficiency in defending against unarmed attacks. You will find that in many instances the very same principles apply against a grabbing attack can be used in defending against a punch. In other words, the techniques and principles learned at the very beginning stages make up the building blocks that apply to more difficult attacks.

Another important reason for learning self-defense progressively is the endless variety of attacks that must be defended against. The two types of physical attacks that can be directed toward you are: violent and non-violent attacks. A violent attack is an attack that would kill or gravely injure you. An example would be the knife attack, a choke, kick or punch, headlock, etc. A non-violent attack is one that will not directly cause great physical harm. Examples would be a wrist grab, lapel grab, a push, etc. Often non-violent attacks are preludes to more violent ones. Since there are a variety of attacks than could be directed toward us, we need to have a variety of defenses that are appropriate to the different intensity of these attacks. In other words, we should never respond with more force than is necessary to adequately defend ourselves. If a student were to defend against a wrist grab in the same manner he would against a knife attack, then you could be facing a lawsuit or criminal prosecution. Use of excessive force in a self-defense situation may be personally gratifying, but would be viewed by law enforcement officials and a jury in a very negative manner.

The rules of self-defense are very simple. Self-defense is after all; common sense. Common sense goes a long way in the prevention of attack. So the first rule of self-defense is avoidance. Common sense dictates that a person should avoid placing him or herself in a situation so that attack is unavoidable or invited. In other words, don't go walking down a strange neighborhood alone, and don't flash large sums of money. Avoidance also means that when an attack comes, avoid the weapon by moving yourself outside the line of attack.

Another rule to remember is that in a self-defense situation, one should take advantage of their surroundings, being careful that you are not cornered or flanked by your opponents. Look around the area. Is there anything that can be used as a weapon? Remember; basically anything can be used as a weapon to give yourself the advantage. Keys, pencils, a brick, trash can lid, or even throwing grass or sand into your opponents eyes may be the only edge you need to escape unharmed.

Now back to the avoidance of the opponent's weapon. Moving outside the line of attack can is always the first step. Then what? After you have moved yourself outside the line of attack, then seize and control the opponents weapon. Next, disarm the attacker, and then neutralize the attacker. These principles work whether the opponent has a knife or is empty handed.

When facing an assault, the simplest techniques are usually the most effective. Remember the fox! A person may have the training and ability to kick an attacker in the head, but it is much safer and more effective to kick to the knees or groin. The higher the kick, the less power and hold on the ground you will have.

The defender has a wide range of natural weapons at their disposal. The human body has two hands, two feet, two knees, two elbows, and the most important weapon of all, a brain. Even the forehead can be effective at close range.

It is important that you learn to strike effectively with each of your natural weapons. Striking at the body's weak points and not just randomly punching and kicking at the attacker will make your strikes much more effective and end the confrontation much quicker. The human body has a number of pressure points and nerve points throughout the body. Each should be struck in a different manner as to have the maximum effect. One should learn and practice as many of these as possible so that your counter-attacks are quick and decisive.

Striking Techniques

Hand strikes, can be performed with either the open or closed hand. Punching with the closed fist, generally the striking area will be with the first two knuckles. This striking area is utilized when performing a straight punch, hooking punch, of the back fist. The bottom, meaty portion of the hand between the bottom of the little finger and top of the wrist can be used for a hammer fist strike. For open hand strikes, various parts of the hand is used. Most popular of these strikes, the knife hand (commonly known as the Karate Chop) uses the meaty portion of the hand between the bottom of the little finger and top of the wrist with the hand held open and rigid. Other open hand strikes include the palm heel strike, the ridge hand strike, and the spear hand and spear finger strikes.

Kicking techniques can be performed using the ball of the foot, the knife edge of the foot, the heel (both bottom and back edge), and the instep. Kicks that should be emphasized for self-defense are the front kick, side kick, back kick and stomping kick.

Elbow strikes are your close in weapons and can be performed to the front, rear and side in both a vertical and horizontal manner.

Knee strikes are the other close is weapon, and can be executed in both a vertical and horizontal motion.

Joint Manipulation

All joints of the human body can be manipulated for self-defense. However, primary focus should be given to the wrist, elbow, shoulder, fingers and neck. Although other joints such as the knee and ankle can be manipulated, these areas are stronger and more resistant to manipulation than the other joints. Under special circumstances such as defending while on the ground, the knee and ankle can be quite effective.

Joint manipulation is intended to disable an attacker either by breaking the joint, making it painful enough that the attacker will be placed in an less than advantageous position or just has a change of heart and discontinues their attack. Although an opponent may be larger and stronger, by utilizing a striking technique prior to applying a joint lock, it will "loosen" them up and allow you to apply the technique. Also, striking the opponent will draw their attention always from your preparing to apply the joint technique. Surprise itself is often times enough to successfully employ a technique. By using your opponent's motion against him and going with the attack rather than against the momentum, you can use this as additional leverage in applying a joint manipulation.

Counter Attacking

Counter attack means that you will either block or evade your opponent's initial attack, and then immediately counter with a controlled attack of your own. The focus of the counter should always to render your attacker incapable of further aggression. Defensive techniques and counter attacks are taught in a progressive manner and should be learned in the following order.

- Wrist Grabs – straight, diagonal, and double.
- Elbow and should grabs
- Lapel grabs and chokes- both front and rear
- Hair grabs
- Hand Attacks – against a roundhouse punch, overhead strike, straight punch, back fist and upper-cut.
- Kicking Attacks – Front kick, "sucker" groin kick, side kick, roundhouse kick, etc.
- Club Attacks – overhead, backhand motion, inside strike, and jab
- Knife Attacks – Overhead, slash (inside and outside), straight stab.
- Multiple Attacker scenarios