
For many Americans living with a disability, learning some form of personal protection as well as how to escape a hazardous situation is an important aspect of independence and mobility.

There are, however, four simple principles that will aid everyone: awareness, avoidance, escaping, and safety.

AWARENESS: Have a good sense of your environment and immediate surroundings. Plan ahead; think of where you are, or where you are going and consider the possibilities.

AVOIDANCE: If possible, stay out of danger to begin with.

ESCAPE: If avoidance is not a choice, do anything you can to escape. If the attacker wants your belongings, give them up. Material things can be replaced. A life cannot!

SAFETY: Once you have escaped, or the attacker(s) have left, go to a safe place, and report the incident to authorities. Try to remain calm. Write down what you remember about the attack, and don't clean up or shower until you have been thoroughly examined by the authorities.

Non-violence is best; physical aggression should only be used as a last resort. There are no guarantees. First, get away with the least possible amount of injury. Personal security is primarily common sense. It is also different for each individual, so each of us will have to make things work for our particular needs.

PERSONAL SECURITY

Most people are capable of protecting themselves effectively. The trick is to stay as calm as possible so any counter measure is decisive. To defend yourself, you must use leverage, cunning, deceit, and surprise to your advantage. When an attack cannot be avoided, your response should be quick, accurate, and adequate to deter any further action by the assailant(s).

When assailants attack someone seated, they compromise their own balance by bending at the waist. The very act of grabbing the intended victim leaves the attacker vulnerable to a counter attack. This vulnerability may aid the intended victim.

The opposite may be true if the assailant attacks someone using crutches or a walker. In this case, the intended victim may lack balance. Sitting down on the ground forces assailants to make a choice: either continue and severely over extend themselves, or stop the attack and leave. However, this tactic is not applicable to everyone.

HOME SECURITY

Contrary to popular belief, the possibility of being attacked at home is just as high as anywhere else. Here are some ways to make your home less desirable to criminals:

Have a clear view of your home's front and rear approaches.

Install adequate outside lighting.

Don't place your name on the outside of your home or mail box.

Avoid routine times of departure or arrival.

Install strong doors and locks on all entrances to your home. Use peep holes to identify individuals before opening your door.

Make windows difficult to access from the outside.

Do not hide an extra key outside.

Know who has a key to your home.

Never leave house keys on the same keyring as car keys when your car is being worked on.

Change locks immediately if your keys are lost or stolen.

If you think someone is in your home, leave immediately and call the authorities.

Consider buying a dog for protection and as an early warning device.

Criminals target homes where the rewards are easily worth the risks; the more risks, the less appealing the rewards become.

VEHICLE SECURITY

Being secure in a vehicle means being able to fend off an attacker as well as being prepared to handle roadside emergencies. As always, the goal is to avoid a crisis situation whenever possible:

Keep your vehicle in good operating condition.

Always keep your fuel tank at least 1/4 full.

Ensure that your spare tire and jack are well maintained.

Keep doors locked while vehicle is unattended.

Vary routes, and times of departure and arrival.

Check rear seats before entering the vehicle.

Purchase a cellular phone to carry in case of an emergency or roadside break down.

If a failure does occur, raise the vehicle's hood, get back in, and lock the doors. If someone stops to help, ask that the police be notified.

Whenever possible, travel with friends; there is strength in numbers.

When entering and exiting the vehicle, keep your keys ready.

Travel and park on well-lit streets as much as possible.

When pulling into your garage at night, turn on the brights to illuminate the interior.

WEAPONS

Using a weapon for self-protection is possible for some individuals. However, what if that very weapon is taken away and used on you? Could you defend yourself against your own weapon? People who are not 100% proficient in the use of firearms are a danger to themselves and others. If you chose this means to protect yourself, find a qualified firearms instructor. It could be the best life insurance you ever bought. Also, you will need to investigate the legal aspects of carrying and using a weapon in your area.

REASONABLE FORCE

Although the law states that you can only use a reasonable amount of force to protect yourself, the problem is defining reasonable force. It is also a federal offense to attack someone who is disabled, but first you must survive the attack to call the authorities. Until then, you're on your own! Most attacks occur when least expected and are often perpetrated by someone you know. In any case, do whatever you must to survive.

Self defense is primarily based on common sense. All of us are different; self defense varies, depending upon the individual. Play around with a few ideas; then make them work for YOU!! Turn what is seemingly a disadvantage into YOUR advantage. Decide how best to defend yourself. Don't make decisions lightly; it could cost you your life! When in doubt, remember: "It's better to be judged by twelve than carried by six!"

Sidebar: Finding An Instructor

There are a number of resources for locating instruction in self-defense. The first step is to determine the degree of training you want.

Then, start calling potential teachers or organizations which are likely to offer training, making sure to identify your disability and any other details concerning your overall physical condition. Clearance from your physician and/or therapist is also a sound idea before beginning any individual or group program.

Where to look:

- Your local YMCA or YWCA
- Your local Parks/Recreation Department
- Area fitness centers and health clubs
- An outpatient rehabilitation facility
- Martial Arts facilities

If you contact a martial arts center, explain that your goal is simply self-protection, and that you're not interested in tournament or sports training. Make appointments to interview the most likely instructor candidates, and then choose the one with whom you have the greatest comfort level.

About the Author...

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