

## IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding an attacker's motives and methods
- » Breaking down the two components of self-defense
- » Taking a reasonable, practical approach to self-defense training
- » Reclaiming your life and your outlook after an attack

# Chapter 1

## Laying the Groundwork for Self-Defense

Self-defense involves both mind and body. I can present and demonstrate self-defense techniques, but to avoid attacks, train effectively and efficiently, and apply what you learn to real-life situations, I encourage you to approach the topic with a higher level of understanding — a bird's-eye view. This overall understanding serves as the framework for grasping more detailed and nuanced concepts, tactics, and techniques.

In this chapter, you begin to formulate your general understanding of self-defense by developing a clear idea of what you're up against, getting up to speed on the two main components of self-defense, taking a reasonable approach to training, and finding out how to incorporate self-defense into your life. And, if you happen to be a victim of violence, I encourage you to start working through that traumatic event as you make yourself less vulnerable to future attacks.

# Getting to Know the Real Enemy

Knowing who your attacker is — what they want, what they're capable of doing to get it, how they operate, where they strike, and more — improves your ability to avoid and respond to attacks. Here are some details about attackers to enable you to develop the insight you need:

» **People who commit violent crimes are not like you.**

They're willing to do things you would never dream of doing to a fellow human being. Don't make the mistake of projecting your thoughts and reasoning onto them. They're making choices based on broken values, and they'll use your reasoning and good sense against you.

» **They may be intelligent and skilled fighters.** Don't underestimate an attacker. Just because someone doesn't train in a gym, doesn't make them "inferior" or "weak" — in fact, it can make them even *more* dangerous. They don't play by the rules that govern martial arts competitions.

» **They're probably armed.** About one-third of all attacks are committed by unarmed attackers. The other two-thirds involve an *impact weapon* (a club of some sort), a firearm, or an *edged weapon* (such as a knife). And just because they don't threaten you with a weapon initially, doesn't mean they don't have one. They may think you're going to be a pushover, but after they discover you're not, out comes the weapon.

» **They may not be alone.** You should assume they have friends nearby, ready to pounce on you if you put up any resistance.

» **They probably have a plan and a track record of getting what they want through force or coercion.** They've probably done it before. They know what to say and how to say it. They know how to isolate you and distract you.

Don't believe anything an attacker tells you. Anyone who uses or threatens violence to get what they want isn't likely to tell the truth.



WARNING

» **They're probably not looking for a fight.** Attackers choose victims they determine to be easy marks — people who look like they can't or won't put up a fight. By making yourself appear less vulnerable, you decrease your odds of being targeted. Resisting an attack increases your odds of ending it in your favor.



WARNING

Although you can make some basic assumptions about an attacker, you never know who you're going to face. They could be an ex-con, a street fighter, an athlete, or a soldier. They could be emotionally disturbed or jacked up on PCP or meth. Assume the worst and seek to end the conflict as quickly as possible by whatever means possible.



REMEMBER

Assailants don't "come out of nowhere." They need to find an opportunity to strike, which requires time and observation. Be aware of your surroundings, pay attention to that little voice in your head, and manage your personal space. Taking these precautions enables you to sense when you're being set up or stalked, so you can take evasive action and be prepared in the event that the assailant closes in on you.

## Recognizing the Two Components of Self-Defense

Self-defense can be broken down into the following two components:

- » **Soft skills:** Soft skills involve developing a heightened awareness, avoiding places of ambush, maintaining your personal space, knowing how to spot a setup, deciding when to stand your ground or escape, and being able to unleash your inner beast when you're threatened. You can develop these skills very quickly and with little effort.
- » **Hard skills:** Hard skills involve techniques for fighting off an attacker, with and without the use of weapons. These skills require some practice. You need consistent repetition to program them into your muscle memory — to build new neuropathways in the brain that make them instinctive. The more you practice, the more powerful and confident you'll become, and the better your chances of responding effectively at the moment of truth.

## Soft skills: Getting your head in the game

Soft skills can be broken down into two groups: those that enable you to avoid danger, and those that empower you to defeat it. In this section, I offer guidance on how to develop your rational and intuitive mind (to avoid trouble) and your animal nature (to deal with unavoidable threats).

### Avoiding attacks

The best way to avoid an attack is to make yourself a hard target, as opposed to an easy target. An easy target is a person who's in the wrong place at the wrong time, distracted (not paying attention), confused or afraid, and smaller/weaker than the attacker. In contrast, a hard target avoids high-risk places and situations (such as poorly lit streets), stands tall, walks confidently, and makes eye contact (a quick glance is all it takes). A hard target also listens to that little voice inside their head warning them of trouble and engages in whatever evasive maneuvers are necessary to move out of harm's way in a hurry. In Chapter 5, I provide additional information and guidance on how to make yourself a hard target.

### Being ferocious

You're a nice person. The thought of hurting another human being probably sickens you. That's good. You're normal. I feel the same way. However, sometimes good people need to do bad things. When you're facing someone who wants to assault, rape, torture, or murder you, you have to be willing to do whatever is required by whatever means necessary to survive.

The British Special Air Service's motto is "Who Dares Wins." In an attack, whoever dares to attack first, whoever dares to do whatever it takes, whoever launches the most brutal and effective attack first and doesn't stop 'til it's over wins.



REMEMBER

Deliver the most brutal strike you can, fast and first, before your assailant has a chance to do it to you. Then don't stop. Continue driving forward into your assailant giving them everything you've got until you can escape safely or until the assailant can no longer harm you.



WARNING

Don't play "tit for tat" (someone pushes you, and you push them back), and don't wait for someone threatening you to throw the first punch. As soon as you sense that an attack is imminent, as soon as the attacker even twitches toward you, smash 'em in the face and keep smashing them until they no longer pose a threat. If you can't escape, you *must* attack!

Don't take any chances. If you let an attacker make the first move, you stand to lose your last chance to defend yourself. If they stab you, shoot you, club you, or hit you just right, it's game over. Even if they just shove you, you could fall and hit your head on the concrete, and — you guessed it — game over. Don't play that game.



REMEMBER

Your willingness to protect yourself and your loved ones at all costs doesn't make you a violent person. In fact, the opposite is true; when you're trained, you're confident and you have a respect for violence. You understand that any altercation can result in serious loss, so you're less likely to get angry and get involved in altercations. However, when necessary, you'll be able to flip the switch from Peaceful Citizen to Brutal Combatant. Think of yourself like the family dog — playful and cuddly most of the time, but a ferocious beast as soon as somebody threatens their family.

To train your mind to flip the switch, take the following steps:

1. Get comfortable. Sit in a comfortable chair or lie down on your couch or bed — wherever you're most comfortable.
2. Think of someone you love — a family member, friend, pet, whoever. Imagine, for a few minutes, a great time you had together doing something you totally enjoyed. Then let that memory fade away.
3. Think of something you did that you're proud of, a major accomplishment in your life — something at school or work, an athletic achievement, a performance. Think about that for a few minutes. Enjoy it. Then let that memory fade away.
4. Imagine your worst nightmare — a big, mean, armed attacker moving toward whoever you imagined in Step 2. The attacker intends to subject them to an unthinkable cruelty. Feel the panic, the frustration, the rage.
5. *Attack!* Imagine what you'd do to the assailant, whatever it takes to stop them. Attack and keep attacking — kick, hack, bite, gouge, stomp every part of that assailant's anatomy. Picture yourself *winning* and *defeating* the enemy! Enjoy that accomplishment.

## TRAINING PARTNER REQUIRED?

If you're training in a combat sport, such as judo or tae kwon do, you need training partners for sparring, but when you're training for self-defense, you don't need a partner as often. In fact, you can develop some bad habits training with a partner — for example, pulling your punches, stopping and saying “sorry” when you hurt them, and letting up when they start begging for their life.

In self-defense, you need a training partner only about 10 percent of the time, just to get a feel for some of the positions. For the primary and most critical self-defense training, train on a dummy, which you can attack with 100 percent force and zero regard for its safety. Going all out on a dummy is the only way to develop the correct technique, power, and attitude. It's the only way to program ruthlessness and relentlessness into your muscle memory.

6. Go and train, unleashing all that emotion on your training dummy. (When you're training with a partner, you need to hold back to prevent harming them, but with a training dummy, you can go all out.)

## Hard skills: Fighting back

Like soft skills, hard skills can be divided into two groups — fighting *without* weapons and fighting *with* weapons, such as pepper spray, a gun, a knife, a club, or some other implement that can cause bodily harm.

### Fighting empty-handed

Your body is equipped with some very effective, natural weapons, which you can deploy easily to disrupt an attack and injure your assailant. Any dense bone and a few other parts of your body can cause some damage. Let's start at the top and move down:

- » **Skull:** The forehead, *crown* (just above the temples), the top, and the upper part of the back of the skull are great for headbutting an assailant or grinding into their face.
- » **Chin:** Drive your chin into an eye socket, the throat, or the side of the neck when *grappling* (wrestling).

- » **Mouth:** Bite anything soft that comes close to your mouth. However, grab hold of whatever you're going to bite before chomping down to protect your teeth as your assailant tries to pull away. You can also use your mouth to tell the assailant "No!" and "Stop!" Sometimes, that's all it takes to stop an attack (see Chapter 6).
- » **Shoulder:** Drive your shoulder into your attacker.
- » **Elbows:** Hold up an elbow and tuck your face behind it to defend yourself as you close in on your attacker. Throw elbows to the head, face, neck, throat, stomach, *solar plexus* (just below the sternum) . . . really any part of the attacker's body.
- » **Forearms and hands:** Strike your assailant with the edge of your hand, heel of your hand, or forearm (see Chapter 9 for details).
- » **Fingers and thumbs:** Gouge, rip, and tear the eyes, ears, testicles, nose, mouth, and fingers, and use your hands to choke your assailant.
- » **Hips and butt:** Drive a hip or your buttocks into an assailant to throw them off balance or to create space if they have you in a bear hug, so you have some space to strike back.
- » **Knees:** Drive your knees up into your assailant's groin or any body part for that matter. You can also use your knee as an anvil, for example, grabbing the assailant's head or hair and smashing their face into your knee.
- » **Feet:** Kick the living daylights out of your assailant and stomp the tops of their feet to crush their arches. If you're wearing boots, especially steel-toe boots, kicking can be especially effective.

Turn to Part 3 for more about fighting without weapons.

## Improving your odds with a weapon

A weapon is any object you can use to distract, injure, and stop your attacker. It could be designed specifically for combat, such as pepper spray, a club, a knife, or a firearm. Or it could be an improvised weapon, such as a rock, a baseball bat, a chair, or a fistful of dirt. Anything that increases your reach, impact, or odds is a weapon, which is why weapons are also referred to as *force multipliers* or *force equalizers* (they even the odds in what might otherwise be an unfair fight).



WARNING

*Don't just stand there. . . .* Many martial artists train to face their attacker unarmed like in some bad karate movie. If someone comes at you with a knife (or any weapon), *move!* Run and dodge behind and around furniture, walls, doorways, cars, trees, utility poles, anything that will trip up and slow down your attacker. Grab a chair and play lion tamer to keep them at a distance. Don't ignore your environment — use it to your advantage.

See Chapter 7 for details about choosing and using weapons and Part 4 for guidance on how to neutralize weapon attacks.

## Making Self-Defense Training Less Overwhelming

People often avoid or put off self-defense training (or any self-improvement challenge) because it seems so overwhelming at first glance. I get it. You don't have the time, the equipment, the space, or the energy to take on something new, especially something that requires training. Don't let any misconceptions you may have about self-defense discourage you from getting started. I'm not going to promise that it's easy, but it is probably much easier than you think, especially if you accept the following advice:

- » **Incorporate self-defense into your everyday life.** You can practice anytime, anywhere — you don't need to join a gym. To some degree, you're already practicing self-defense. Now that you're reading this book, you're simply discovering ways to do it better.
- » **Take a gradual approach.** Look, you're not training for a prize fight or the Olympics. The skills you develop in one chapter or even one section of this book improve your ability to defend yourself and others. You don't need to know everything right now to be effective.
- » **Advance from one level to the next.** Self-defense has three levels:
  1. Awareness and avoidance
  2. Escape and evasion
  3. Control and domination

You can develop awareness and avoidance skills and start using them immediately to significantly reduce your risk of

attack. When you're ready, you can move up to the next level. In contrast, martial arts require that you train for weeks or months to develop some low level of proficiency.

» **Follow my system.** My self-defense system doesn't have a lot of complex moves, countermoves, holds, and so on. It's built on the repetition and slight variations of fundamental tactics and techniques. As such, it's much easier to master and to program into your muscle memory than something like judo or jujitsu.



REMEMBER

The more you can do and the sooner you can do it, the better off you'll be. Like the old saying goes, "Don't wait until you're thirsty to start digging the well."

In the following sections, I detail what it really takes to develop self-defense skills. How often and how long you should practice to get proficient in self-defense is often exaggerated. Because these skills are simple and natural, they require a lot less time to master than martial arts and combat sports do.

## Everybody lies

Part of what drives people away from getting started with self-defense is the people who exaggerate their training or abilities. When you hear people telling you that they train full contact every day, they either don't know what full contact is or they're lying. Stop reading posts and comments on social media from self-defense experts and aficionados. You should know by now that nearly everyone on social media bends the truth — it's just not possible for everyone to always be "doing great" and feeling so "blessed."

People love to glorify the past and exaggerate their accomplishments, especially when it comes to martial arts training. You'll read things like, "I trained eight hours a day, seven days a week for ten years, and we always went *full contact!*"

That's nonsense. I played Division 1 sports in college (wrestling and football); I've trained with Olympians in wrestling and judo; I've even seen professional and amateur fighters prepare for contests — and I'm telling you that you can sustain intense training on the elite level only for a few weeks before your body and your mind start to break down.

Besides, they're not you.

## Less is more

Slow and steady wins the race. Self-defense is a marathon, not a sprint. When you start practicing the hard skills, the tendency is to jump in and get after it, and while I love the enthusiasm, I'm going to urge you to start slowly, especially if you've never "hit" anything before.



TIP

Start slow and soft and slowly build your power and intensity. Let pain be your guide. A little sore is okay; bruised and bloody, not so much. You don't want to injure yourself so you're unable to defend yourself. That kind of defeats the purpose.

Over time, your hands will toughen through training. You're going to be striking primarily with the edge and the heel of your hand, which are naturally pretty tough. Your other primary weapons (forearms, elbows, knees, and boots) are extremely tough.

Start with five- to ten-minute sessions. Don't even change your clothes, in fact, it's better to train in what you normally wear; your attacker won't wait for you to change into your yoga pants.

## A practical approach

Self-defense isn't a sport; it's an education and a life skill. The best way to develop skills is to incorporate them gradually into your daily routine. That may include improving your physical fitness, practicing striking or using weapons (see Part 3), heightening your awareness of your surroundings (see Chapter 5), practicing tactical driving (see Chapter 5), and taking the position of advantage (see Chapter 8) whenever you're interacting with someone in person.

Here are a few more suggestions for taking a practical approach to developing self-defense skills:

» **Don't try to learn everything in a day.** Focus on one skill and work on it until you feel comfortable and confident. In fact, studies show that shorter, more frequent sessions improve retention.

The number of repetitions doesn't matter so long as you practice until the skill is instinctive and convulsive (like a reflex). *Don't do it just until you get it right; do it until you don't get it wrong.*



REMEMBER

- » **Maintain your physical fitness.** The better shape you're in and the more punishment you can dish out and take, the less likely you are to be targeted for attack (because you look like you're prepared to put up a fight) and the faster you'll recover from any injury.
- » **Practice even if you're sick or injured.** If you can leave the house, you'd better be able to defend your life regardless of any injury or illness you have.
- » **Keep training regardless of your age.** You may age and lose muscle mass, agility, and endurance, but you continue to be exposed to attackers at their peak of strength and agility, and the older you are, the more likely you'll be targeted.

Imagine your attacker is a ripped, tattooed, mixed martial arts (MMA) fighter. Imagine fighting the guy in your prime and then fighting that same guy when you're older, slower, and weaker. No doubt, you'll take a different approach when you're older; for example, you may be more inclined to use a firearm or a crowbar to improve your odds.

## Incorporating Self-Defense Skills into Your Everyday Life

Unlike a sport, which requires training for a specific contest or competition, self-defense demands that you adapt your current physical and mental ability to a constant threat. (Your physical ability may diminish over time, but your attacker will always be the same — same age, same size, same strength.) As long as you're alive and breathing, you're under threat of a possible attack. The threat level varies according to the self-defense condition:

- » **Condition green:** You're in your home, relaxed; the doors are locked and the security system (if installed) is armed (on).
- » **Condition yellow:** You're out in the world, going about your day, paying attention, and managing how you interact with your environment.
- » **Condition red:** You're being attacked or threatened.

As you go about your day, pay attention to changes in condition from green to yellow to red and from red to yellow to green. Adjust your level of awareness and vigilance accordingly. Imagine different scenarios at the different threat levels and how you might respond to them. Train for the different threat levels and scenarios.

As you incorporate self-defense into your daily routine, you'll find that you're constantly practicing self-defense. You don't have to spend an hour in the gym every other day. You're practicing as you're going about your business. You're paying attention to areas of ambush. You're getting comfortable carrying one or more weapons.

By combining this everyday training with more formal training sessions to develop specific hard skills, you're transforming yourself into a formidable foe for anyone who makes the mistake of attacking you. In terms of training for hard skills, do as much as you can when you can. Five minutes is better than zero minutes.

## Recovering After an Attack

Any potentially dangerous or deadly situation will impact different people in a variety of ways. I've seen people who were able to recover from the most brutal attacks relatively quickly and others who've agonized after a close call. There's no timetable or specific process of recovery, but you will recover.

The two biggest questions people have after an assault are "Why me?" and "How did this happen?" To answer the first question, you were probably singled out because you were in the wrong place at the wrong time, you had something they wanted, and you looked like an easy mark. To answer the second question, it happened because this big, beautiful world has some twisted and desperate people in it. There's a reason it's called *senseless* violence. As hard as you try, you may never make sense of it. Just realize that it wasn't your fault and there are things you can control moving forward.

Every victim of violence goes through a recovery process. It usually begins with any physical recovery that's necessary and continues with a typically longer process of psychological recovery. Much of

the psychological damage is the result of a lost sense of control — control over your own will and even over your body. You've been violated in some way.

In my experience working with victims of violence, I've found that the sooner someone starts preparing to prevent this from happening again, the faster they recover. Through self-defense training, victims start to rebuild the control they lost during the attack. They develop a plan for dealing with something they previously didn't have a plan for.

If you're a victim of a violent attack, the good news is that you can do something to minimize the chances of it ever happening again. Self-defense is about percentages. There are no absolutes, but there are ways to increase your chances and minimize your risk.

