



4 Star Self-defence

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Seven Principles of Self-defence

1. **There's more to self-defence than physical techniques:** No matter how much training and practice in martial arts or self-defence techniques you may have you aren't truly equipped for self-defence if that's all you have. Practical self-defence is about more than counter-attacking or out-battling an opponent. While it may not always be possible, if you thwart an attacker by not becoming a victim, avoiding or escaping rather than engaging, you succeed.
2. **Awareness and Avoidance:** First, you must learn to recognize and avoid confrontations, especially potentially violent situations, before they occur. This is where we win with our brains and our perceptions rather than our fists and feet. When it isn't possible to avoid a confrontation you may still be able to avoid entrapment. This can mean walking out into the middle of the street instead of trying to hide in a doorway or alley or it can mean doing something totally bizarre and unexpected, causing a potential assailant to think twice about attacking.
3. **De-escalate:** Any and every blow that is struck increases the level of intensity, therefore decreasing the chances of safely extracting yourself from the situation. There are two keys to de-escalating the level of a physical confrontation. The first is separation. When the distance between potential combatants decreases so does the intensity of the conflict. The second key is control. First get control of yourself – don't let your actions be determined by an attacker. Secondly, try to get control of the situation. Figure out what is contributing to the escalation and if there is anything you can do about it – it could be as simple as speaking slowly and calmly, or, there is an object under dispute, moving the confrontation away from that object. Of course if other parties to the conflict aren't inclined or able to control themselves, you may have to.

4. **Control:** This may mean physical restraint, employing control techniques such as holds and joint locks, but you may also control an attacker with positioning or engaging a third party intervenor, but in any case the self-defence objective is to prevent further escalation and injury, not apprehension and restraint.
5. **Minimize risk of injury:** The odds are very high that you WILL be injured if a confrontation escalates to a physical struggle. Therefore your first line of defence after avoidance is to de-escalate things before they reach the physical struggle stage. This could involve capitulation (your money, iPod, etc. or your life should not be a difficult decision) or sometimes speaking in a calm, firm but non-confrontational voice to convince the assailant that he or she doesn't really want things to get out of hand either. But remember two things: First, attacking another human being is not necessarily a rational act, so don't be surprised if attempting to reason or negotiate with someone engaged in an irrational act is unsuccessful. Secondly, someone who does attack is probably not the most trustworthy individual, so don't be surprised if they don't hold up their end of the bargain.

If things do escalate, the key to survival is to use dodges, redirection and misdirection and, if necessary, releases, escapes, blocks, holds and throws to minimize exposure and injury. Counter-attack only makes sense if it can be done without increasing your risk. If a counter attack doesn't create an opportunity for escape or isn't definitive enough to at least temporarily disable your attacker, it will only escalate things and therefore make your situation worse.

6. **Create the opportunity for escape:** On the street our objective is survival, not victory. The sole purpose of any counter-attack should be to create the opportunity for escape – sometimes that means neutralizing (by means of inflicting serious pain or injury) one or more attackers. If, however, you can escape without counter attacking, do it. Creating the opportunity for escape may be as simple as attracting attention by making noise, exaggerated gestures or other behavior to attract attention (and potential witnesses) to your situation. Whatever else you do, if avoidance isn't possible, release and escape techniques are preferable over counter-attacking.

7. **If you must fight back:** Remember that, not only does any counter attack that fails to create an opportunity for escape represent a waste of energy and an ill-advised exposure, it also escalates the conflict. So if you must fight back you must be able to do so effectively.

If you can't create an opportunity for escape without counter attacking, don't count on overpowering an adversary. There are very few people, including experienced martial artists, who can deliver the theoretical one-punch knockout on demand. In real life situations the most effective counter attacks are usually sweeps, strikes to sensitive areas and, to a lesser extent, techniques which inflict pain.

Remember that sparring in a martial arts class is a training exercise, not a self-defence simulation. In self-defence there should be no wasted blows – even a strike that penetrates an attacker's defences is wasted if it is not delivered definitively to a vital point. The easiest vital points to strike include the knees, throat, temples, the base of the skull and the eyes. Important control points are the wrists, elbows, shoulders and knees.