

# *Womens' Self-Defense* *in a changing world*

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**COMPLIMENTARY**

**COPY**

**OF**

**CHAPTER 2**



*Another step toward your safety from*  
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## PREVENTION AND AVOIDANCE

### PREVENTION AND AVOIDANCE START WITH AWARENESS

Many people who seek to learn self-defense think primarily of the physical skills of blocking, striking, or throwing an opponent. Yet, prevention and avoidance are perhaps the most critical self-defense skills of all. If you become adequately skilled in these areas, you may never have to use the physical aspects of self-defense. And, if you ARE attacked, these skills will put you in a better position to defend yourself physically.

Prevention and avoidance start with awareness. The importance of awareness cannot be overstated. This is especially true for women, who may be chosen in disproportionate numbers as potential targets by assailants. Informing yourself is the first step in awareness. How do perpetrators choose potential targets? What environments, circumstances, habits, or behaviors place you at a greater risk? How can you learn to better assess possible threats to your safety in different situations? What tactics can you employ to deter a physical assault before it starts?

Gaining insight into factors which may impact your safety can give you strategies to make the best choices about your personal security, therefore lowering your risk of becoming the target of a crime or physical assault. It's not about becoming paranoid, it's about becoming aware.

#### **Who is the Attacker?**

It is worth noting that throughout this book “the attacker” is usually referred to in the singular and sometimes by the pronoun “he.” It is important to realize that an assailant may be a male or female of any age, or even a group of teenagers hanging out on a street corner. Do not ignore safety precautions due to preconceived notions of what you believe a typical attacker should look like.

#### **How Does an Attacker Choose a Victim?**

When an assailant is looking for their next target, they observe you. Evaluating your posture, demeanor, habits, and behaviors allows them to calculate their chances of success (robbery, assault, or rape). They would rather be certain of an easy target than to risk an unsuccessful attempt that could potentially draw the attention of bystanders who could act as witnesses.

For a perpetrator, the ideal target is someone who is available and vulnerable. An available target is someone who is alone, in an isolated area away from potential witnesses, or perhaps in an area that obstructs the view of others (a location the assailant has probably chosen in advance to observe potential targets). A vulnerable target is someone who appears weaker, easily intimidated, unaware or distracted, or appears as if they would not be able to react because they are compromised in some way (intoxicated, disabled, or even just encumbered by carrying several bags or packages). Predators do not tend to prey on those who may be stronger than they are. One of the reasons women are targeted in disproportionate numbers is because of the perception that they are weaker and less likely to fight back. Of course this is not always true, but it is one reason why a perpetrator may choose a female over a male target.

It should be said that even if you don't fit the profile of a typical victim, and are a physically strong and athletic female, you could still be targeted simply by bad luck. Sooner or later, everyone who throws dice rolls snake eyes. Based on this, you must always be ready.

### **Decrease Your Risk of Being Identified as a Target**

The best way to avoid being the victim of an assault is to make yourself an unappealing target. The following tips can help you. You may not even realize when these techniques are working, of course, because a predator will simply quietly pass you by, looking for someone who appears to be an easier target.

- **Improve your body language** – Always walk assertively as though you have a destination. Hold your head up. Good posture displays self-confidence and self-assurance. If your eyes are up and you're paying attention to what's around you, this also sends a message that you are alert and aware of your environment. Slouching with your head down suggests a lack of self-confidence or that you may be afraid or easily intimidated. Being engrossed with your cell phone or electronic device, means that you are distracted and can be caught off-guard. These are things that may make an attacker decide you are an easy target.
- **Avoid being alone** – A person walking alone is a much more appealing target than one walking with someone or in a group of people. If you have to walk to your car every night after work, try to coordinate with a fellow coworker to leave together, ask a security officer to escort you if possible, or reduce your predictability by taking a slightly different path out of the building or through the parking lot. If you feel someone may be following you, make your way toward a populated area or into a store with other people.



*With her head down and distracted by her cell phone, she is vulnerable to being caught off-guard.*



*Alert and scanning her environment sends the message that she is not an easy target.*

- **Avoid isolated places** – If you enjoy trail running or hiking, try to take a buddy or go where there are other runners or hikers. Avoid isolated locations in offices or public buildings. Look inside an elevator before you enter. If someone in it looks suspicious, wait for the next elevator. When you get on an elevator, stand near the control panel. That way, if you have trouble, you can press the alarm or all the buttons so that the elevator will stop at every floor. If a suspicious looking person gets on, leave before the door closes. Be wary of infrequently travelled or dimly lit hallways. Restrooms can sometimes be located in out-of-the-way places. Ask another woman to accompany you if you feel unsafe. If you must work alone after hours or on weekends, special precautions should be taken. Lock your office door. Be familiar with the security system in your building.
- **Be less predictable** – If you tend to leave and return to your home every day at the same time, consider varying your routine and installing motion detector activated lighting at your entryways. If you are a walker or runner for health, change your route each week and vary your time out from home.
- **Know where you're going** – Familiarity with your surroundings makes you less of a target. If you are traveling in an unfamiliar city or shopping out of town, stay with a group if possible. When you must travel alone, try to become familiar with the area in advance. You can become better acquainted by purchasing guidebooks or utilizing the Internet's resources. Wandering around in a city looking lost makes you more of a target.
- **Be aware of your attire** – Physical assault is sometimes associated with robbery. If you are dressed in expensive clothing or wearing a lot of jewelry, you may become the target of a mugging. If you're going out on a date or to celebrate a special occasion, of course you will want to dress up, but chances are that you won't be alone in these situations. If you are just going out to run errands or travelling in unfamiliar areas, it is wiser not to draw attention to yourself and wear practical clothing and footwear that is easy to move (or run) in.
- **Stay fit** – Someone who takes care of their health and fitness naturally moves with better posture and appears stronger and more able. Remember that a predator tends to seek weaker prey. Staying physically fit is not only beneficial to your overall health and confidence, it may also cause an assailant to discount you as an easy target.

## **PRECAUTIONS / SAFETY HABITS**

Safety habits focused on prevention and avoidance are a proactive approach to self-defense. These precautions are simply ways to eliminate easy opportunities for criminals to take advantage of you. To be effective, they must become part of your daily routines, choices, and way of thinking. When practiced consistently, they will become second nature and can make a significant impact on your personal security.

### **Precautions Regarding Your Car**

1. Before you leave the store or office to walk out to your car, have your keys ready in your hand. Searching for your keys in a pocket or purse, or being preoccupied with your arms full of packages or shopping bags, distracts you from what is going on around you.
2. Before you enter your car look in the back seat and make sure that no one is hiding there. Be aware that a dark parking lot allows an assailant to blend in or hide behind another nearby car.
3. Once you are in your car, lock all of the doors immediately. This precaution prevents someone from opening your door and pulling you from the vehicle. It also stops them from getting into the car with you.
4. Never hitchhike or accept rides with strangers. Never pick up hitchhikers.
5. If you are driving alone, do not stop to help a stranded motorist. Call the proper agencies to assist them instead.
6. If your car breaks down, you should have a cell phone with you to call for assistance. Keep a small portable cell phone charger with you or in the car for emergencies. If you do not subscribe to cellular service you can still keep a cell phone in your glove compartment for emergencies only. As long as the battery is charged, you will still be able to connect to 911 for assistance. If another motorist stops to assist you, consider asking them to call the local police department to come and help you instead.

### **Precautions Regarding Your Purse**

1. A purse is an excellent way to carry a variety of items that you may need when you shop or travel. However, carrying a purse does create a target for theft, so you should consider taking the following precautions.
2. Don't put all of your money in your purse. Put some in your coat or pants pocket, as well.
3. Don't carry all of your credit cards with you. Take only the ones you will need for what you're doing. All of your credit cards are not needed to pick up some groceries.
4. Keep your driver's license or credit cards in a small wallet or folder separate from your money wallet.

## Precautions at the ATM

An ATM provides a criminal with an opportunity to plan an assault because it is a predictable location and the target will be carrying money. Following these steps can help you reduce your risk.

1. Avoid using an ATM at night. If you must withdraw money after dark choose an ATM in a well-lit area, preferably inside a store or bank lobby.
2. Have your card in your hand before you approach the ATM.
3. Put your money away before you leave the ATM area.
4. Be aware of people around you who can steal your PIN number as you enter it and look out for camera phones that can record your PIN or credit card number.
5. If you use a drive up ATM make sure all your other windows are up and your doors are locked.
6. Use your ATM card as a credit card rather than a debit card because it will minimize how often and the number of places you make your PIN number available.



## Home Precautions

1. Have a safe room in your home. This room will have an extra lock on the door and another means of leaving the room.
2. Have your keys ready when approaching the door.
3. Never leave a spare key in a hiding place outside.
4. Keep doors and windows locked. Have the locks changed when you first move to a new home.
5. Have a way to identify someone at your door before you open it (window, peephole, or intercom). Never feel obligated to open the door for someone you don't know or trust.
6. Use your last name and first initial only for any public listings.
7. Notify a close friend or trusted neighbors if you are going away, but only a day or two before you go. Do not post travel or vacation plans on the Internet.

## **Technology – General Precautions**

The growth in technology (computers, tablets, smart phones, and the internet) has made finding you, knowing your daily patterns and stalking you much easier. Use common sense and limit the amount and kind of information you give out. Also, do not be afraid to refuse to provide a site or agency any information that you feel is personal or not relevant to your transaction.

### **Phone Precautions**

1. Cell phone technology is being updated all the time, as is the capability of people tracking you through your phone. Make yourself aware of the safety and privacy features of your phone and stay up-to-date.
2. Choose wisely the kind and amount of information you give out over the phone. Telling someone that you are alone or that you are leaving your house unattended puts you at risk for assault.
3. Regarding a home landline phone, if you are alone and someone calls for your husband or roommate, tell them that you are expecting them home momentarily. This indicates that you will not be alone. Ask for their number so that you can have whoever they called for call them back later. If they call back and you are still alone, you can tell them that the person is running late and that you expect them home any minute. Specifically tell the person not to call again because you don't want them to tie up the phone line in case your husband/roommate is trying to reach you. If after this they call again, it is appropriate to tell them that you will call the police if they call again.
4. Always document and report threatening or obscene calls or texts to the police. Even if it seems to be only a childish prank, it is best to inform the authorities. You may be in no immediate physical danger, but criminal acts have a tendency to escalate when a perpetrator gains confidence. Failure to report the incident the first time it occurs may later limit some of the protections the police could afford you. Together with reports of similar incidents in your area, your accurate reporting may also result in the police having a better chance of apprehending the perpetrator.

### **Internet Precautions**

The Internet is a versatile information technology with a variety of applications that are becoming more complicated every year. Criminal exploitation on the internet means you need to stay alert and on top of your precautions. It is tempting to let your guard down when you are using the internet on an electronic device in a place where you feel safe and comfortable. Remember to observe the same precautions that you would if you were in public: if you would never get overly friendly with a complete stranger and offer them a lot

of personal information face to face, why would you do it online? Be extra cautious when online interactions become personal in nature. Realize:

1. A person's physical appearance may not actually be how they describe themselves. Even pictures they post online may not be of themselves.
2. A person may not live where they claim to live. Even though they may say they live in another city or state, they may actually live close by.
3. Don't give out personal information such as your home address, phone number, etc.

Before you agree to meet anyone that you have only communicated with online, take the following precautions:

1. Confirm that the person is who they claim to be. Do you know anyone who knows them personally? Ask them where they work and live. What are their phone numbers? Can you call them at their place of employment?
2. Arrange to meet in a public place on your terms.
3. Bring a friend along.
4. Insist on a meeting at a restaurant or social event with a group of people.
5. Have your own transportation to and from the meeting or date.

Always report harassment or any conduct that you find obscene or threatening to the service provider. Most service providers have instructions for filing a complaint. Print and keep a copy of the offense, and keep a record of all details regarding the situation or concern. Also record any contact information you have such as their e-mail address. Follow the same rules as for an obscene phone call.

## **SITUATIONAL AWARENESS: HONING YOUR OBSERVATIONAL SKILLS**

In addition to raising your awareness by educating yourself about daily safety precautions, awareness also refers to being observant of your surroundings and alert to what is going on around you. It involves recognizing what factors in your immediate environment could impact your safety in a positive or negative way through continuous evaluation of your constantly changing surroundings. This type of awareness allows you to better assess your safety in a variety of places and circumstances in real time, and as situations change or unfold.

Good situational awareness gives you more control over what happens to you because it allows you to anticipate and avoid most situations that could jeopardize your safety. Even if you do find yourself in a threatening situation despite your best efforts, good awareness

skills prepare you to react more effectively before, during, and after an attack. The following are factors to consider as you begin to practice improving your observational skills.

- **Look ahead** – Look beyond your immediate vicinity toward your destination. Taking note of unusual sounds, movement, and people helps you identify and avoid a potentially risky situation before you get too close. For example, if you are about to enter a parking garage and can see someone in the distance lingering near your vehicle, turn back and get help.
- **Your environment is 360 degrees** – Be aware of your whole environment, not just what is straight ahead. Remember to scan or use peripheral vision to be aware of who and what is to your left and right, and periodically turn or glance behind you. You may also utilize reflective surfaces, such as windows, to monitor things to the rear. Notice shadows that may indicate someone's presence out of your direct line of sight.
- **Use all of your senses** – Unusual sounds or odors may also alert you to danger. Listen for noises behind you or for things happening in places you can't see. In crowded places, if you can feel someone brush against you unnecessarily, it's possible you are being pickpocketed. Pickpockets are fun to watch in a show or on TV, but the skill is real. Be aware that these common criminals are on the streets and at major public events all over the world.
- **Exits and entrances** – Indoors or outside, always identify safe exit routes. Which direction would get you closer to people that could assist you? Look for well-lit populated areas. Identify where other people could enter your current area. Be aware of people entering and leaving your immediate vicinity.
- **Obstacles** – Identify obstacles that may impede your escape or that could potentially be exploited to prevent or slow an assailant who is trying to reach or chase you. Examples include chairs, tables, cars, or a group of people.
- **Concealment** – Identify places that an assailant could hide. Be alert when walking near cars, dense shrubbery, or building doorways or corners where someone could be waiting. Look in the backseat before entering your car. Concealment may also be a place that you could hide if necessary, but may not offer physical protection.
- **Cover** – Random shootings in the world have become more common. Identify things or places in your environment that may offer some measure of physical protection or would stop a bullet. Ducking behind a car, concrete wall, corner of a building, or behind a land feature such as a hill may qualify.



*Using the reflection in a store window to monitor things behind you.*

- **People** – Whenever unfamiliar people are near you, you should increase your level of vigilance. Be aware of other people’s position and proximity in relation to you. Notice appearance or behavior that stands out as unusual, or anything about them that makes you feel uncomfortable. Do they appear to be focused on you? Are there people nearby that you would identify as someone who may assist you if needed? Are there bystanders who appear to know the person you are concerned about who may join them as a potential group of attackers? Also remember to listen to the people around you. Voice is an indicator of emotion and intensity, and can allow you to read a person or crowd more accurately. When people become agitated they may speak louder and faster. If you feel an argument is breaking out, leave the situation before trouble starts. Also be alert to one or more people reacting to something that you might not be able to see.
- **Positioning** – When you enter a room or area, position yourself where you can best observe as much of the space as possible, especially entrances and exits, and where you can easily access routes of escape. If people cannot get behind you, such as sitting with your back to a wall, all the better. Remember also that, barring a firearm, distance is time; the farther away you are from potential threats, the longer it would take for them to get to you and the more options you have if a difficult situation should develop.
- **Time of day** – Your safety may be impacted depending upon the time of day and whether it is daylight or dark. A certain area or situation may be perfectly safe during the day, but not at night for a woman alone. Walking to your car from work in the afternoon is different than after working late at night. The rush of the morning commute with people still waking up as they drive is a greater risk time than the hassle of the 5 o’clock trip home.
- **Social situations** – If you are going to a social gathering, consider factors such the location (is it a safe area, are you familiar with the area), people (will there will be a lot of people there that you don’t know), and what time of day the gathering will take place. Will you be leaving late at night? This may influence where you decide to park when you arrive. Will you be alone when you leave? If you leave with someone, are you certain you can trust them? Do you believe there will be alcohol or drug use present? Drug use is already a crime so, by nature, it invites crime; situations involving it are inherently unsafe. Also be aware that where there is alcohol consumption, there is clouded judgement and sometimes more violent behavior. This is especially true the longer the social event lasts. Knowing when to leave a social situation is an important decision-making skill.
- **Improvised defensive tools** – Capitalizing on your surroundings is part of effective self-defense. Recognize the potential for everyday items to be used as defensive resources. In case of a physical assault, what objects in your environment could be exploited as an impromptu defense tool to aid you? A pen or key may penetrate the eye, a rock may be used to strike an attacker’s head during an altercation on the ground, or picking up a chair and thrusting the legs toward an attacker to maintain distance during a knife

attack, are some examples. In all cases, throwing something at the attacker makes them duck and blink, taking their eyes off you for a moment to run. Canes, folding umbrellas, or ice scrapers can be used to break free of a grab or to strike. Practice identifying daily objects that could act as possible tools to assist you in an attack scenario, and you will be better able to use whatever is available in a real emergency. An example of using an umbrella as an improvised defensive tool is pictured below.



*Do not drop your guard when the weather is poor. This is when assailants think that you are not paying attention. You may be looking down because it's raining or snowing, or because you're not sure of your footing. This situation allows you to use something as a defensive tool that is already in your hand: your umbrella. At the approach of the attacker or even after they've grabbed you, drop your umbrella down between you and the assailant. Do this as hard as you can, even if it breaks the umbrella, to guarantee that you're going to strike the assailant in the center of their body – down from the face, throat, to their solar plexus - with the tip of the umbrella. When you bring the umbrella down hard between the two of you, grasp the inside of the stem with your free hand and push the handle straight forward with your other hand, sliding the tip forward as you would a pool cue. At this point you have options to run away, to get in your car quickly and lock the doors, or to use the umbrella to strike the assailant one or two more times in an effort to make sure you will be able to get away. Once free, report the incident to the police.*



## **Practicing Your Awareness Skills**

Improving your observation and awareness skills takes practice. Whenever you go to a public place, practice identifying who and what is around you, including safe paths of escape, obstacles, places that may conceal an assailant, and bystanders who could help. You should try to identify these things within the first few moments of entering any new situation. Start making it a point to look at the places you go frequently with a fresh perspective. On your way from the parking lot to your workplace, from your car to the entryway to your home, the routes that you walk or jog on, or even going to the supermarket or mall, pay special attention to your environment and the aspects we have discussed here. You may be surprised at the things you haven't noticed before. The more skillful you become in reading situations and people, the more likely you are to avoid dangerous situations altogether.

## **Listening to Your Instincts**

Many years ago, primitive humans' survival depended upon their ability to accurately perceive potential threats to their well-being and react quickly and appropriately when in danger. Though many of the natural instincts of early hominids may seem to be dulled in modern humans, it is important to realize that these instincts still persist in us at some level. So many times we hear people use phrases such as "I had a gut feeling," or "Something just didn't feel right."

If you have a feeling of uneasiness or anxiety in a certain situation, do not dismiss it. Do not tell yourself, or let anyone else tell you, that you are being silly, overly suspicious, or paranoid. And above all, do not ignore these signals of potential danger because you hope they will just go away. Denial is not an effective approach for your personal safety. Feelings of apprehension, as uncomfortable as they may be, are a signal to increase your awareness and evaluate the situation and environment so that you can make an informed decision about how to prevent or avoid a potentially threatening situation from developing. Your primitive instincts are providing useful information for your self-preservation. Draw upon this ancestral human instinct and use it to your advantage just like all *Homo sapiens* before you did. Learn to listen to and trust your intuition. Period. If it is nothing, then nothing is lost. If it is something and you ignored it, you may find yourself in a difficult situation with a lot to lose.

## **Your Safety is YOUR Responsibility**

When you are with your husband, boyfriend, or other adult friends, it is easy to be lulled into a sense of complacency and assume that they are looking out for your safety. Never transfer responsibility for being aware of your surroundings to someone else. Your safety is your responsibility. It should also be mentioned that if you feel the person or group you are with is unaware of a potential threat or taking careless chances, speak up and take charge to avoid danger. That may mean turning around, changing your route, or changing your

plans. Be firm and don't worry that you may offend those you are with. There will always be time to discuss it or educate them later, but the time for action may be now. Your safety and the safety of those you are with is certainly worth more than any minor inconvenience it may cause.

### **The Greatest Predator on this Planet**

This section has been very mentally demanding and at this point, it is not wrong that you wonder if you can do this many things and be so alert. The human species has found ways to manipulate, control, injure, and kill every other living creature on this planet, including itself. It is this predator, the human being, which you are defending yourself from. You cannot underestimate them. They do not think as you do, their moral code is different than yours, they have justified that you have something that they should have but were cheated out of by the world in general. They do not see you as a fellow human being, but rather as a means to an end. Some even view the masses as orchards, or berry-picking fields in which they simply harvest their daily supplies by taking them from you. It is even more complicated, because as one would pick the apple off the tree, one might accidentally break the limb, meaning you go to the hospital or worse.

Can you do this? Of course you can. A rabbit can live a healthy life, have a family, and grow old, while staying alert 24 hours a day due to the number of predators that stalk it. It teaches itself to use its ears and eyes, and to be ready to run at any second. The rabbit does not find this alertness a chore, simply a part of daily life. Your life will not be limited by your new awareness, but rather improved and enhanced. Is not your wellbeing, long wonderful life, and the love of your family and friends worth your effort? Of course it's worth it. You may be a rabbit or an orchard to the humans that prey on others, but you're not. You yourself are a predator who can choose to use your skills to stay alert to others and to protect yourself and your own loved ones.