

## My Priorities & My Stuff

Priorities – You have to know what's worth fighting for – you have to have priorities. What are your priorities?

My 1<sup>st</sup> Priority is \_\_\_\_\_

My 2<sup>nd</sup> Priority is \_\_\_\_\_

My 3<sup>rd</sup> Priority is \_\_\_\_\_

I am NOT my \_\_\_\_\_

Things I carry on me that are worth dying for:

Things I could lose that I'd want to replace:

Item (ID, Bike, Computer...)

Phone#, Website, Serial #...

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# Self-Defense

...the Zine

written by Laurel

illustrated by Axle & Lucy



\*\*This is a work in progress.\*\*

I crave your feedback – please send me your opinions, experiences, critiques, etc!

Write me at SelfDefense.Brooklyn@gmail.com



## Notes

This zine is about self-defense. In order to talk about self-defense, we must discuss violence. A few of the anecdotes (indented and italicized) describe acts of abuse and sexual assault. This may be triggering for some people to read. Please take care of yourself and find a safe and supportive space where you can process and talk to someone you trust.

My intention is to help you feel empowered, educated, curious to learn more, and generally better prepared for navigating the world; not triggered by memories or paranoid about things that may never happen to you.

# Notes

## History of this zine

Physical and sexual assault, (especially on women and queer folks), is all too prevalent in today's society. This zine is intended to supplement a women's self-defense class that I teach at my martial arts school, in Brooklyn, NY. We started offering these classes in 2013, after reports came out of a creep in our neighborhood who was violently targeting women.

I decided to write this in order to have more time to show physical techniques during class. I strongly encourage you to attend the class or one like it if you're concerned with what to do if someone actually puts their hands on you. The class is free, open to the public, trans\*-inclusive, and taught by women.

## Theory

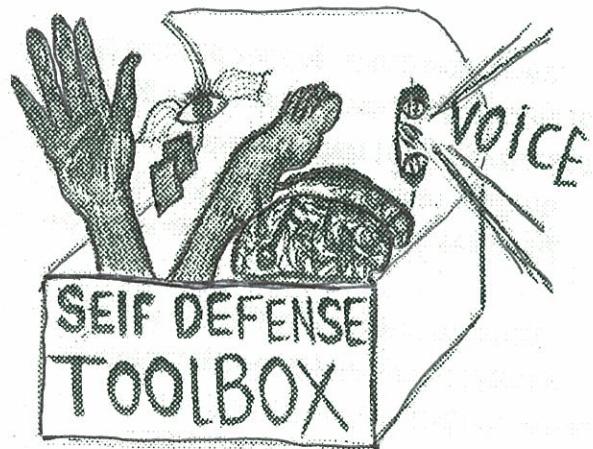
In truth, self-defense classes treat symptoms, not causes. They give us some tools to keep ourselves safe in case we're attacked, but they don't stop that attack from occurring. The best way to solve a problem is to attack the root cause. In this case, that would be working with perpetrators and young men to unlearn abusive behavior. However, while we're waiting around for the whole world to overcome whatever their personal history is and turn into respectful, well-adjusted people, abuse and violence continues. Therefore, I feel we must use a diversity of tactics when resisting an issue as complex as gendered violence. Training in self-defense is one of the tactics I've found helpful and empowering.



## The Basics

1. Accountability for violence lies with the person who commits it.
2. Everyone has the right to make decisions about whether or not to fight back.

My intention is to offer facts, ideas, options, techniques, and ways of analyzing situations; some tools for your toolbox so that you *really do* have that choice if you ever have to make it.



Henry Street Settlement has a shelter for domestic violence survivors consisting of 13 furnished apartments where families can stay for up to 90 days  
Emergency Shelter: 917-521-3917  
Domestic Violence: 1-800-621-4673 or 212-577-7777  
[henrystreet.org](http://henrystreet.org)

Center for Anti-Violence Education develops and implements comprehensive violence prevention programs for individuals and organizations. Through a combination of education, physical empowerment, and leadership development, CAE provides underserved communities throughout the New York metropolitan area with skills to break cycles of violence. Among other programs, they offer a 5-week women's self-defense class, as well as ongoing karate and tai chi classes.  
718-788-1775  
327 Seventh St. #2, Brooklyn, NY 11215  
<http://caeny.org/>

Battered women's legal help  
123 Remsen St., Brooklyn, NY 11201  
Hotline: 718-624-7700

City-run shelters in NYC (Call 311 for more info):  
Brooklyn women's shelter - 116 Williams Av, Brooklyn, NY 11217  
Franklin Shelter - 1122 Franklin Av, Bronx, NY 10356

NYC Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-621-4673

NY State Domestic and Sexual Violence Hotline: 1-800-942-6906

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

## Resources for Survivors

Safe Horizon offers emergency shelters, transitional housing, counseling, support groups, legal support, and much more.  
[www.safehorizon.org](http://www.safehorizon.org)

Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-621-HOPE (4673)

Rape & Sexual Assault Hotline: 212-227-3000

Crime Victims Hotline: 1-866-689-HELP (4357)

[help@safehorizon.org](mailto:help@safehorizon.org)

Center Against Domestic Violence offers support, shelter, and education through counseling, safe houses, and school programs for teens.

[www.cadvny.org](http://www.cadvny.org)

24-Hour Hotline: 718-439-1000

Violence Intervention Program provides bilingual services to women over 18 who are victims and/or survivors of domestic violence, including hotline services, nonresidential services, emergency safe dwellings and transitional housing.

24-Hour Hotline: 1-800-664-5880

Safe Homes Project is a community-based domestic violence advocacy service program which provides a hotline, counseling, safety-planning and advocacy for survivors of domestic violence and runs a 20-bed shelter.

<http://www.goodshepherds.org/programs/community/shp.html>

## What is Self-Defense?

Self-defense is anything *you* do that helps keep *you* safe.

- Looking both ways before you cross the street
- Crossing the street to avoid a creepy stranger
- Talking calmly to someone who is angry
- Hitting someone who is trying to hurt you

## Priorities

Knowing what's worth fighting for is a very important element of self-defense. You see, if you fight, there are three possible outcomes:

1. you get hurt
2. they get hurt
3. you both get hurt (this is the most common)

In 2 out of 3 of those, you get hurt. I don't like those odds!

So ask yourself, what do you think is worth fighting for? I mean actually, physically fighting; risking your physical safety.

I can't tell you what your priorities are, but I'll tell you what mine are: my life and my body... and that's about it.

If someone is trying to rape or kill me, I'm going to fight. But if someone just wants my stuff, I'm probably going to give it to them. I am not my stuff. I can get more stuff and my safety is more important. It may be hard or sad or inconvenient, but I will survive without my stuff.

(According to my research, weapons are *infrequently* used in sexual and violent assault, which implies that resistance is quite likely to be effective. However, almost half of all muggings involve weapons.)

## Compliance/Running

So the tool I'm talking about here is compliance. But if you choose to comply, don't just give them your stuff; **throw it in one direction and run in another while screaming like a lunatic until you get to a safer place.**

The back of this zine has space to make a list with every phone number, serial number, website, etc. that you'd need in order to cancel and/or replace all the important items you carry on you. I encourage you to fill it out, tear it off, and keep it updated. This way if you ever do have to give up your stuff, you won't have as much anxiety about the hassle. (Leave the list at home, not in your wallet!)



Some people keep some of their cash outside of their wallet, this way you can access money without pulling out your wallet. If you throw a wad of cash, a mugger is going to follow the money, not you.

**What if they have a gun?** Well, first of all, if they show you a lump under their shirt and claim it's a gun, don't believe them. Run and scream like a maniac. It's not a gun. If they really have a gun, they'll at least flash it. People with guns love to show them off.

If they actually have an actual gun and you know because they showed it to you, still run, but this time, run in a zig-zag. You're way less likely to get hit if you're a moving target.

And don't be afraid to run from a gun, no matter what they want from you. Statistics say that if someone threatens you with a gun, the chances that they'll actually shoot are less than 50%. Beyond that, *if* they shoot, chances are they won't hit you, and *if* they hit you, chances are it won't be fatal. On the other hand, if you get in that car, chances are you won't come back.

*I have a friend who was in an abusive relationship. She and her partner used to have pretty serious fist fights. They both participated. At some point, they realized that this only happened when they were drunk. At the same time, they realized how often they were drunk together. They decided to stop drinking entirely, and it worked. They're still together, the relationship seems to be going well, and they're not hitting each other anymore. They were able to disrupt the cycle by identifying the root of the problem and eliminating it.*

*I have another friend who was in an abusive relationship and, after finally ending up in the hospital one night, she decided to make a clean break and leave her partner for good. She's never even so much as spoken to him since that night. For years he continued to try to get in touch with her, but she's never once returned his calls. She broke the cycle by removing him from the equation. She's never been in an abusive relationship before or since.*

So leaving for good isn't always the answer, but it *is* a surefire way to end the abuse.

Of course, it's not easy. **Leaving an abuser is not an event, it's a process.** But if this applies to you, you're not the first and you're not alone, and there are people that can help you.

Turn the page for a list of resources for abuse survivors. The list is mostly local to NYC but I'm sure they have info about resources in other parts of the world, as does the internet. (DuckDuckGo.com is a safe search engine that doesn't save your history.)

A psychologist once explained to me that during the period where tension is building, sometimes people actually intentionally do things to trigger each other in order to speed up the cycle; the idea being to get the abuse over with so they can hurry up and get back to the making up and calm periods. What this tells me is that, consciously or not, people in abusive relationships are aware of this cycle.

I think the first step to ending abuse is disrupting this cycle. Leaving before the violence begins is one way to disrupt the cycle and it's a way for you to avoid getting hurt.

Defending yourself during the abuse is another way. If your partner is hitting you, (well, if anyone is hitting you!), of course it's ok to defend yourself. But don't just fight, fight *out*. Defend yourself physically for exactly as long as it takes to physically remove yourself from the situation, from your home, as the case may be.

"But won't they get mad if I fight back?" Maybe, but they're already hurting you. You can just take it, and likely get hurt, or you can defend yourself. And if you defend yourself, they *may* think twice before resorting to violence the next time.

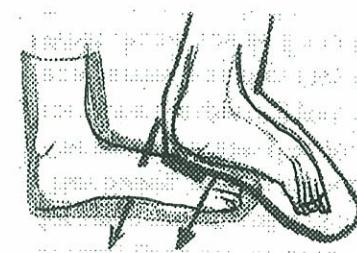
If someone who claims to love you is hurting you, physically OR emotionally, that's called an abusive relationship. If you're in an abusive relationship, it's not your fault. But I hope you'll find the strength to do something about it, before it's too late.

## Being Restrained

When we're being restrained, all we can think about is what we're being prevented from doing. But it's hard to restrain the whole body all at once. **Don't get distracted by what you can't do, focus on what you can.**

Let's take the example of a bear hug from behind, arms pinned. You can't run away, you can't lift your fists, what *can* you do from here? What targets are open on them, what weapons are available on you? Well, if they're pinning your arms, they can't very well cover your mouth, so screaming is an awesome addition to anything else you may do. Here are some other ideas:

- Head butt the nose (depending on height difference)
- foot stomp (use your heel to stomp)
- pry fingers open to break the grip



## Pocket weapons

Something that gives me piece of mind when I'm feeling unsure about my safety is all the weapons I carry on me, all the time. Think you don't carry weapons on you? You do.

You have tons of weapons on you, even when you're naked – your brain, your voice, your feet... You usually have a number of other weapons on you, too. You keep them in your pocket or purse or on the ground near you:

- Big key chain – grab part of it and use the rest like a whip
- Small key ring – put the keys between your fingers and rake with it; don't punch, you'll stab yourself in the palm
- Pen – hold it in your fist or cup it and stab
- Hot beverage – throw the hot liquid in their face!
- Credit cards – you think paper cuts are bad...?
- Hairspray + lighter = fire!
- Rocks:
  - Throw them
  - If it's smooth & heavy, hold it in your fist to add weight to your strikes
- Sticks, backpacks, belts – swing them to strike and/or create and maintain distance
- Jacket – can smother a knife

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## Domestic violence

Remember that bit about going away and not engaging while anyone is angry? This applies to everyone: strangers, acquaintances, friends, dates, and long-term partners.

In the case of an argument inside your home, unfortunately, you still may have to leave. It feels bad to offer that advice. I don't like telling people to leave their own home, it's not fair. But that may be what has to happen, at least temporarily, until you can figure out how to end the cycle of violence within your relationship.

According to [domesticviolence.org](http://domesticviolence.org), the cycle of violence within abusive relationships looks something like this:

1. Incident – Abuse occurs, physical/sexual/emotional
2. Making-Up:
  - Perpetrator may apologize for abuse
  - Perpetrator may promise it will never happen again
  - Perpetrator may blame the survivor for causing the abuse
  - Perpetrator may deny abuse took place or say it was not as bad as the survivor claims
3. Calm
  - Abuser acts like the abuse never happened
  - Physical abuse may not be taking place
  - Promises made during 'making-up' may be met
  - Survivor may hope that the abuse is over
  - Perpetrator may give gifts to survivor
4. Tension Building
  - Perpetrator starts to get angry
  - Abuse may begin
  - There is a breakdown of communication
  - Survivor feels the need to keep the perpetrator calm
  - Tension becomes too much
  - Survivor feels like they are 'walking on egg shells'
1. Incident – Abuse occurs again

(36)

Some truths:

*Assertiveness requires self-esteem.* Self-esteem is, believing that what you want for yourself is more important than what others want for you. Like I said before, our society teaches many people, especially women, to sacrifice their own needs for those of others. This isn't necessarily bad; a parent sacrificing for their children can be a good thing. But putting the wishes of a stranger or casual acquaintance ahead of your own can compromise your safety.

*Being assertive may hurt someone else's feelings.* That's ok, they were making you uncomfortable. Someone puts their hand on your knee and you politely remove the hand. Then they put their hand back onto your leg. This time, you move their hand and speak: "Don't put your hand on my leg." Maybe their feelings are hurt. Maybe they won't go out with you again. Maybe that's not such a bad thing.

If speaking assertively isn't effective, the safest thing to do is leave. If in the end you have to fight your way out, you made your feelings clear before you had to resort to violence.

Dating tip: bring enough money to get home by yourself!

Some people carry more traditional weapons on them, like a pocket knife or mace. **Reminder: if it takes you 10 seconds to dig the pepper spray out of the bottom of your purse, it isn't going to do you any good.** Make sure your weapons are accessible.

I don't recommend knives for self-defense. A rule of thumb is, if there's a knife involved in a fight, whether it's yours or theirs, *all* parties *will* get cut. Plus it could be taken away and used against you. Knife fighting is a very skilled and deadly art that requires lots of training.

Note: when we talk about pocket weapons, we're not talking about dueling to the death with a pen. We're talking about putting up enough of a fight, enough of a defense to make your assailant decide you're too much trouble.

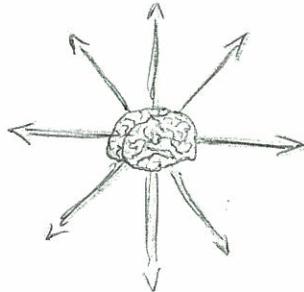
*Shortly after learning about using pens as weapons from a self-defense class on campus, a Bard College student was approached in the park by 10 men who said they were going to rape her. Without thinking twice, she shoved her pen up one of their noses and they all ran away.*

## Ethic of least harm

This is a convenient point to briefly bring up the ethic of least harm. The ethic of least harm is a legal and moral standard that says you are not supposed to do more harm than is necessary to get away from an attack. That is to say, it's better to talk to someone than to bruise them; better to bruise than to break, better to break than to cripple, better to cripple than to kill.

## Awareness

But ideally, I'll never have to practice the ethic of least harm because I won't be fighting my way out of anything, right?



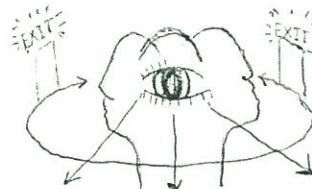
**What's the best way to win a fight?  
Don't get into one!**

**What's your farthest reaching self-defense weapon?  
Your brain!**

Make good choices and be aware of your surroundings. Try to identify the threat before it has identified you. If you can do that, your chances of escape grow exponentially.

A short list of simple things that improve awareness:

- If you're inside, know where your exits are.
- When you're leaving a building, look both ways as you walk out the door.
- If you feel sketched out on the subway, switch cars. If you can't, stand by the emergency pull thing. It's a last resort, but that thing will lurch the train to a halt for like an hour and lots of people will come investigating.
  - A lot of elevators have mirrors in the back corner. Look for those so you can see who's inside before you get in.
  - Don't get into an elevator with someone who creeps you out. Feel weird about it? Try this: "Oh shoot, I forgot something. I'll catch the next one, thanks."



- Name the behavior. "You're standing too close to me." "Don't ask personal questions." "You're still touching me, even though I asked you to stop." "You're trying to manipulate me." Don't use qualifiers, like "I think..." "Please..." "If you don't mind..."
- Clearly communicate your expectations: "Stop touching me." "Knock before coming in my room." "Leave me alone." "Leave." "I'm leaving."



## Assertiveness

But what if you say no and they don't listen? Hell, what if you say no and they get angry or violent? Now it's time to use your voice again. Remember all that stuff about de-escalation? In this case, throw it out the window. *De-escalation is not useful in cases of sexual assault.* You're never going to say, "Look, I know you're excited, but let's just sit down and talk about it."

In the case of sexual assault, from the pushy date to the stranger in the dark alley, **the best non-physical tool is assertiveness.** Sexual assault is often motivated by a desire for dominance and control. Assertiveness shows that you are not going to be easily manipulated and will not make an easy victim.

So how do we speak assertively?

- Use your voice, face, and body; try to get all 3 channels of communication in synch to avoid mixed messages.
- Project confidence and calm; you can act serious and firm even when you're panicked or furious.
- Repeat yourself. It may get them to do what you want. And if they don't hear you, or respect your request, that gives you important information about them and their intentions.
- Stay on your own agenda. You don't need to respond to diversions, threats, questions, blaming, guilt-tripping, etc. Just stick to your point. Again, repeat yourself.
- Don't make excuses; "no" is a complete sentence. Being polite is fine at first, but if they don't respond, drop the niceties. You don't need to explain yourself. You don't need to apologize for how you feel or what you want. You also don't have to wait for your "turn" in the conversation.



More awareness tips, specific to urban or crowded places:

- Headphones! Blue Tooth! Cell Phones! If you're listening to headphones talking on the phone, or text walking, then you're not listening to your surroundings. You can't hear as people approach *and* you're flashing your valuables. Some ideas:
  - Consider not using these items in public.
  - Don't allow looking at your phone to become your default. Start by looking around and just being in your environment for some period of time, first.
  - Stop walking while you look at your phone.
- If you want or need to stop (to check your phone, for example, to tie your shoe, to wait for the train...), stand next to a pole or wall. This way there are less directions you could be approached from.
- In some situations pulling your phone out while walking is actually good self-defense: If you feel really sketched out for some reason, call a friend, (or pretend to call a friend!) "Hey, I'm just a block away, can't wait to see you!" What does this communicate? You know where you're going and someone is expecting you; someone will notice if you don't arrive, and they may even come looking for you.

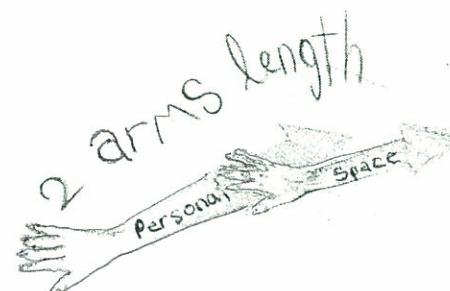
- What should you do if you think someone's behind you? Turn around and look! Turns out people don't go away if you pretend they're not there. It's ok if they notice.

You're allowed to look behind you. If there *is* someone, now at least *they* know that *you* know that they're there. They're probably harmless; most people are not trying to hurt us. But if they are, now at least they can't sneak up on you, and they know it. Feel weird about turning around? Make up a story: "hm, did I forget my...." "...what street did I just pass?" etc.

- And if you think someone's following you, or you're approaching someone that sketches you out, cross the street. If they cross after you, cross again. If they cross a second time... well, at least now you know what you're dealing with!

- If you can't cross, make eye contact and maintain at least 2-arms-length distance.

- Don't watch your feet while you walk, keep your head up and look around you. Don't be afraid to turn your head.
- Hoods limit peripheral vision. Hats and ear muffs keep you warm in the winter, too.



## Date Rape

If you say no and the person you're with gets mad or pushy, that's a red flag. How does a truly wonderful person respond when you say you don't want to go any further? "Ok, wanna snuggle?" "Should I go?"

You see, we operate like we'll know it when we see it. But rapists don't look a certain way. That super sexy person at the party may not be so respectful behind closed doors.

Rapists don't act a certain way, either. They may be the nicest, most charming, charismatic person you've ever met! But nice is not the same as good. Everyone acts nice when they think it will get them what they want.

Unfortunately, not everyone even respects the 'no means no' rule, let alone the new, progressive, 'yes means yes' rule.

You deserve to assert your boundaries and be respected. Say it out loud:

### **I deserve to assert my boundaries and be respected!**

It's critical that you start believing that, especially if you want others to. (To be clear, not communicating your boundaries does not give anyone the right to violate them. People shouldn't assume they know what's ok and feel entitled to do something without checking in with you.)

No one ever owes anyone else sex or sexual favors. Even if this is an ongoing relationship and one partner is feeling sexually unfulfilled, it doesn't mean the other partner *has* to have sex with them. Maybe it's time for a conversation or couples counseling. But it is *never* time for manipulated, forced, or otherwise non-consensual sex. That's called sexual assault or rape.

## Saying “NO”

Learning to know what you want is a skill all on its own. But only when coupled with the skill of **saying it out loud**, to the person or people you want it from, will it be effective.

So here's the tool: figure out a way to overcome all those social norms, and learn to say no! Practicing in non-sexual situations helps:

- *No. I always type up and send out the meeting notes; I'd like someone else to do it this time.*
- *No. I won't lend you my books anymore because you never remember to return them.*
- *No. I'm sure the party will be fun but I have to go to sleep.*

Then begin to apply these skills and techniques to your sex life:

- *I want to make out with you, but I don't want to have sex.*
- *I need more time to think; I want you to stop touching me.*

As with any new skill, you'll be clumsy at first. That's ok. The more you do it, the easier it will get. And it's worth it, because if you don't have a heartfelt "no" in your life, all your yeses are compromised. The beauty of having a firm "no" is that it allows you to say "yes" to the things you do want in your life. And how can we implement the "yes means yes" rule or the "no means no" rule if we don't know how to say either one?

I say have all the sex you want. Just make sure you have ONLY the sex that you want. Assert your boundaries. See what happens. The way someone responds to your boundaries tells you if they're intentionally violating them, or if they didn't mean to and want to respect them.

And you don't have to yell or be a certain way, just say no and keep saying no. Feel empowered to say no! You can always change your mind later.

## Intoxication

The final, and maybe most important, issue to discuss on the topic of awareness of your surroundings is intoxication. Drugs and alcohol can negatively affect things like response time and decision-making skills. If you choose to partake, being responsible and intentional about substances is very important to your safety.

Before I decide to consume drugs or alcohol, I check in with myself and my surroundings. I try to have a good idea of how the whole experience will go, from start to finish. I ask myself some questions:

- Am I with friends?
- How and when will I get home?
- What if my friends want to leave before I'm ready? Should I plan to go with them?
- Is anyone pressuring me? If so, what are their intentions?

Answering these types of questions helps me make good decisions about if, and to what extent, I want to lose my sobriety this time. Every situation is different so I have to do this every time. At risk of sounding more like an afterschool special than I already do, don't forget that it's always ok to say no.

\*\*\*\*\*

So that was a long list of things, related to awareness, that are easy to do most of the time and will be helpful in reducing your chances of finding yourself in a scary situation. I know you won't manage to do *all* those things *all* the time. But even if you did, unfortunately this stuff is not fool proof. You could be the most careful person in the world, and still something could happen to you. I reiterate: *if* something were to happen to you, it would never be your fault. It didn't happen because you screwed up or reacted wrong. You weren't asking for it. Accountability for violence lies with the person who commits it. It's not ok to attack people. Period.

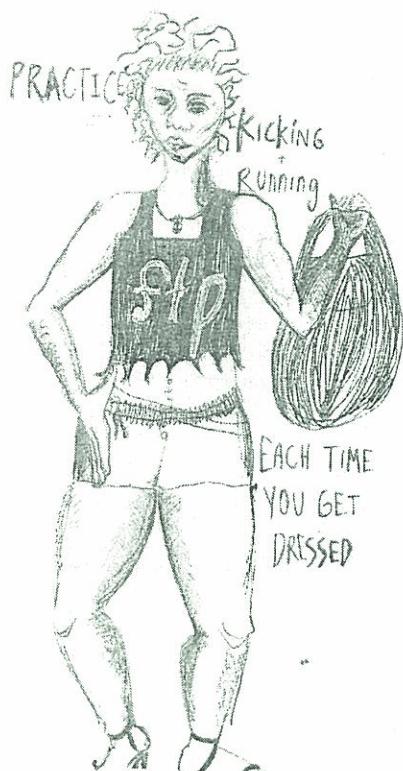
## Clothing

First and foremost, I want to say that you should feel free to dress in whatever way makes you feel good. I think the sentiment that “she was asking for it,” because of the way she looked or what she was wearing, is bullshit. It’s an example of how sexual assault is excused and even encouraged in our society.

Rape is about power, not sex. So your body language and confidence, (or lack thereof), probably have a lot more to do with whether or not you’d be targeted by a rapist than your clothing choices.

What I *will* say is that some types of clothing, (high heels, short skirts, tight pants), can limit certain body mechanics that are useful for self-defense, like kicking and running. A predator knows that and preys on people they expect to not be able to fight back.

An attacker is not looking for a fight; they’re looking for a victim.



I recommend, no matter what kind of clothing you wear, practice things like kicking and running *each time* you get dressed. Get good at it! Take ‘em by surprise! High heels can be awesome for self-defense: if you’re good at balancing in them, you can drive a heel right through someone’s foot. If not, take off your shoe and stab ‘em in the eye with it! (I know, brutal. But if they’re trying to hurt you, do what you gotta do.)

Any of those sound familiar? Then you were probably socialized as a woman. Women are taught to be submissive, and to seek to please others. Men, on the other hand, are taught to be dominant and aggressive.

Society teaches men to be sexual aggressors and women to be sexual gatekeepers. This is an unfair, binary, and false set of roles. No matter what your gender is, it’s ok to want sex. It’s also ok to not want sex. But we all have a responsibility to be clear and communicative about our current needs and desires, and to work to find out what the current needs and desires of our partners are. This is an active and never-ending effort that comes from both sides, because needs and desires (and triggers) can be ever-changing.

This kind of active consent can be hard. In some situations, we’re not even sure *what* we want so we can’t ask for it. Even if you’re not ready to ask for it, just **knowing what you want is an important self-defense tool**. If you can’t identify your own feelings and needs, it’s impossible to put them out there. **Finding a way to have enough time to process is an excellent self-defense tool**. If you’re not sure, or you think your partner’s not sure, take it slow or stop altogether. This may be an opportunity to try out some other self-defense tools, like **creating distance or walking away....**

## Consent

When we're assaulted, sexually or otherwise, our consent has been violated. Something was done to us that we didn't agree to. Sometimes this occurs due to poor communication. Knowing what we want and what we don't want, and communicating clearly about it is a good way to avoid those miscommunications.

We've all been taught the old consent rule, 'no means no', right? When a girl says no, that means no! Right? Well there's a new consent rule: 'yes means yes'. The idea is that no still means no, but the absence of a no does NOT mean yes; only yes means yes.

But here's where it gets complicated: have you ever said NO when you really meant YES? Even more common, have you ever said YES when you really meant NO?

What do we say instead of no?

- "umm..."
- "maybe..."
- "I don't know"
- "not now, maybe later"
- [...silence]

It's hard to say no. Saying no requires that we override the social mandate to "be nice", which can seem impossible. Sometimes our internal voice shuts us down:

- I don't want to be rude.
- I don't want to make a scene.
- What if I'm wrong?
- I want them to like me.
- I have to work with them.

## Body Language

So, our awareness is what helps us avoid danger. Let's combine that with some skills that make danger want to avoid us.

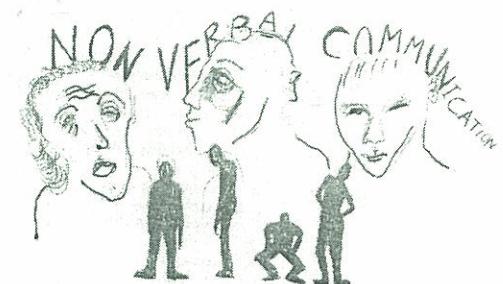
An attacker is looking for a victim, not a fight. Things like body language and facial expression affect how an attacker sees you. When it's clear that you're aware of your surroundings and have some confidence, you don't look like an easy target.

This is a tough skill to teach, but here are some things I like to keep in mind:

- Don't look obviously lost.
- Don't look obviously scared.
- Be aware of your surroundings, and don't be afraid to be obvious about it. (head up, good posture, etc)
- Be comfortably and confidently in the space you occupy, (even if you're faking it!)
- Use body language that says, *don't bother with me, I'm not gonna go easy.*
- Have an attitude that says, "I don't want to fight, but I'll defend myself if I have to."

And I'm not saying you have to look mean or angry.

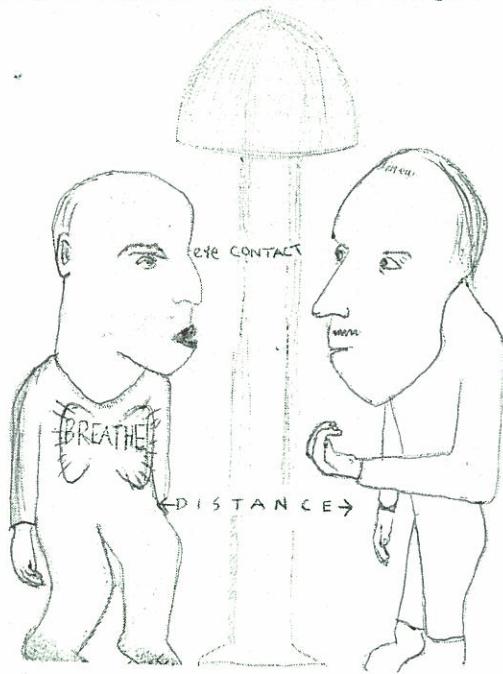
When I feel awkward around strangers, I often smile or say hello to relieve the tension. For me this is humanizing, respectful, friendly, but not flirtatious. My tone and body language make all the difference. Everyone's different and you have to figure out what works for you. Try people watching. Practice in the mirror. Practice on your friends. Learn to be careful and intentional with your non-verbal communication.



## Stance

If you're approached in a sketchy way, stay calm, focus on your breathing, and use your body language to show that you take yourself and your safety seriously. Some of the ways this might look are that you:

- Face the person head on; don't shy away.
- Maintain eye contact. Both eyes. Eyes are very intimidating. (But don't glare, just look.)
- Keep a neutral facial expression.
- Maintain good posture. Aside from this looking confident, it maximizes your lung capacity.
- Maintain good balance by putting one foot in front of the other with a slight bend in the knees
- Keep your hands free and out of your pockets
- Put something in between you and the other person (a table, a street, your hands, etc.)
- Keep your distance, at least 2 arms' length.



Try some of this stuff the next time you piss someone off, when stakes aren't so high that you're afraid that things may get violent. You have to practice if you want to be able to do this stuff in the heat of the moment.

Some important notes:

1. De-escalation is not the thing that's going to change people's behavior in the long run. It's not the thing that's going to help them understand how their behavior affects those around them and how or why it needs to change. But if it works, de-escalation can be the thing that gets you both calmed down enough to reach the place where that opportunity for education lies. People aren't in a place to learn or change while either of you are worked up.
2. De-escalation is a tool that I want you to have so you can use it if you want to. Having this tools doesn't change anything about fault, whether or not you decide to use it, and whether or not you are successful in using it. It's never your fault if violence occurs. Accountability for violence lies with the person who commits it. This point could not be more important to reiterate. It is so common for survivors to blame themselves for violence that was inflicted on them.
3. De-escalation is not a good tool to use in cases of sexual assault! If someone is getting pushy with you sexually, **the tool is assertiveness**, [see section on assertiveness to follow].

And when it's time to respond to what they're saying:

- Keep your voice calm, firm, and low – speak to them the way you *wish* they were speaking to you
  - Speak slowly and evenly
  - Communicate clearly
  - Listen actively by repeating what they've said
  - Acknowledge their feelings
  - Don't escalate!
- (Shouting; Cursing; Using insults; Not listening; Making threats/Using threatening gestures; Arguing; Commanding; Being competitive/self-righteous; Invading personal space; etc.)
- Brainstorm solutions together
  - Find common ground, whether or not it's related to the conflict; get them to say the word 'yes'
  - Define your limits – "You can yell but you can't touch me."

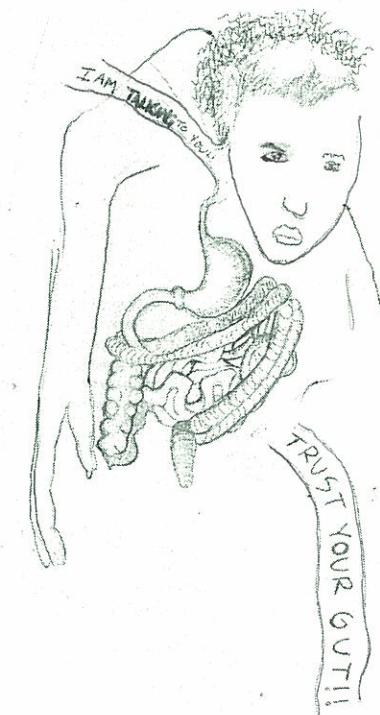


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## Identifying danger

Again, what's the best way to win a fight? Don't be there! But how do we know where 'there' is? First of all, trust your gut. Also, look out for telltale signs. There are things that people do *before* they get violent or attempt to force you to do things you don't want to do. Here are some things to look out for:

- clenched fists
- raised voices
- wide eyes
- drastic change in behavior
- talking about or threatening violence
- knocking stuff over/breaking stuff
- hitting a pet
- being drunk or otherwise intoxicated
- not taking no for an answer
- being pushy or manipulative
- wanting you to go somewhere more private



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## Don't go to the second location

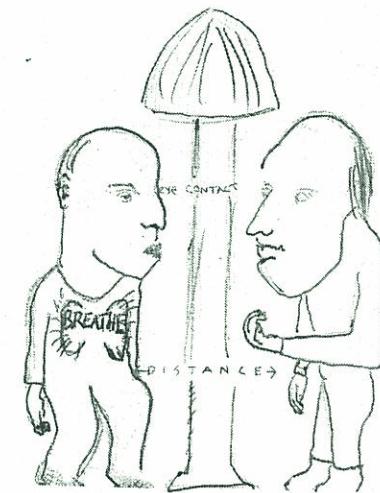
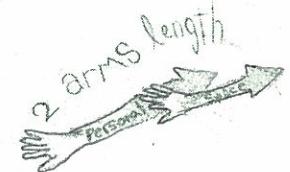
That last one is a really big deal. Never, ever go to the second location. I don't care what your relationship is with this person. If someone is intimidating you or pressuring you in some way (whether with a scowl or a smile), don't go somewhere private with them! That behavior is only going to get more intense behind closed doors. If you don't feel safe or you just don't want to go, don't go. Whatever it is they think they're going to do to/with you, let them try to do it wherever you are. It won't be any better for you in the second location. **Trust your gut.**

- In the context of date rape, this could mean going from the party to the bathroom; from the living room to the bedroom. If you go to that second location, it will be easier for your date to convince you, or force you, to do things with your body that you didn't want to do.
- In the context of partner violence, this could be from the bar to the apartment you share. "No. Calm down first. I don't want to be alone with you while you're yelling like this. In fact, I'm walking away for now. I'm going somewhere else (a friend's house, another bar) while you cool off."
- And in the context of stranger violence, I'm talking about from the street to the van; from the stairwell into the apartment.

So, that last one is fucking scary. Stranger violence is the thing that most people seem to be most afraid of. Just so you know, stranger violence is, by far, the least common form of violence against women. The vast majority of attacks come from someone that the survivor knows.

So if you decide a situation calls for de-escalation *and* you want to attempt it, here are some tips:

- Maintain eye contact but don't glare, that's provocation
- Have a neutral facial expression
- Keep your posture relaxed but alert
- Minimize extraneous movements – people will feed off your actions, if you're jittery then they will be too; if you want them to be calm, try to be calm, yourself
- Breathe deeply and evenly
- Have positive internal self-talk – not 'I'm in trouble/gonna get hurt', but 'I'm gonna find a solution to the situation'
- Still keep your distance (at least two-arms-length)
- Keep your hands free – if you do have to defend yourself, you don't want your hands in your pockets
- Pay attention to their hands, too; wonder what they're holding if you can't see...
- Use barriers – could be a chair, a desk, a car, a fence, anything to delay them
- Try to get them to sit down; if they will, sit down with them



## De-escalation

So, your brain is your number one most effective and farthest reaching self-defense weapon, and your voice is second.

Like most useful tools/weapons, your voice can be used in a number of ways; shouting is not the only option. If the situation calls for it, start by talking.

Sometimes you can de-escalate a situation instead of deciding between fighting or running away. (Not that there's any shame in running away.)

de-escalation – verbal, psychological and nonverbal techniques for defusing potentially dangerous situations.

Most attacks start with words. Very rarely do you hear '*I was just minding my own business and....*' Before a fight breaks out, there is often a period of verbal confrontation. '*We were arguing and the whole thing just got out of hand.*' '*One thing led to another and before I knew it....*' We often have more control over these situations than we may realize.

When someone is losing their temper, the way you react to that anger can make the difference between whether or not that anger becomes violence. If I'm angry and you react with disdain or indifference, how is that going to make me feel? But if you react with patience and sympathy, it's going to be a little harder for me to consider you part of the problem.

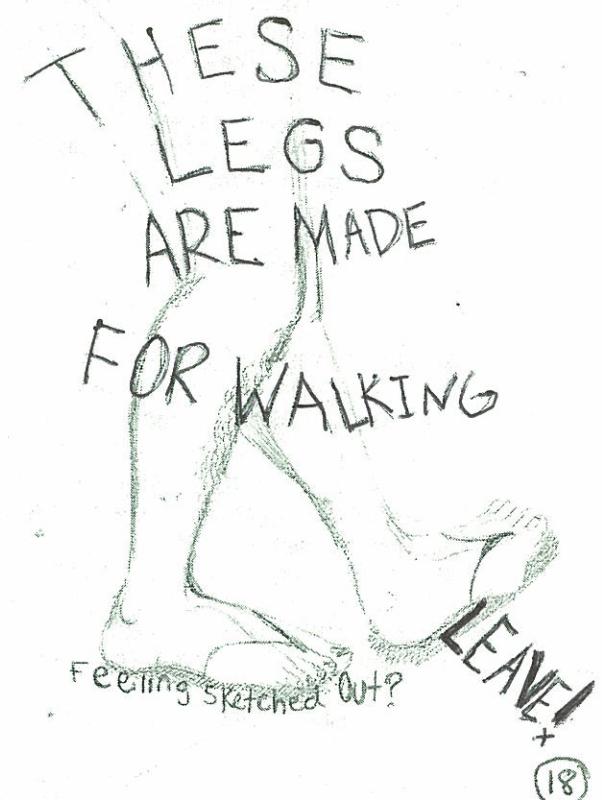
The obvious reason to consider trying to de-escalate is because it can prevent a situation from becoming violent. Another reason to consider using this tool is that de-escalation can aide in educating people. If this is someone you either care about or can't get rid of, you may want to try de-escalating the situation instead of getting angry or walking away.

## Going away/don't engage while angry

A lot of the time, if you have to resist going to the *second* location, you'd rather not stay in the first one, either. If you're uncomfortable, go away. If you're in the street, go into a store. If you're in a bar, go to another bar, or go home. If you have to run, run!

Even if nothing has happened yet, if you feel sketched out, it's ok to leave. Just go away from the situation. If someone is angry, including you, **walking away can be a very useful tool**. What's the best way to win a fight? Don't be there!

Although it may not feel like it, walking away is almost always an option. If this is someone you care to continue a dialog with, come back when everyone has calmed down.



## Creating and Maintaining Distance

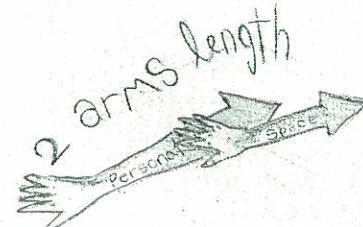
I rode my bike to a friend's house one night. When I got there, it was dark and the block was deserted except for this guy, who approached me. He stumbled toward me in a drunken fashion, mumbling something inaudibly, getting uncomfortably close. So I took a step back, put my bike in between us, and politely, yet confidently and without fear in my voice, said, "What was that?" With slurred speech, he stated an address. "Oh, it's that way." And he stumbled away.

Maybe that guy was *really* drunk and *really* lost and I *really* helped him find his way to wherever he was going. Or maybe he was *acting* drunk as an excuse to get *really* close to me and pickpocket me or assault me in some way. I don't know, but I didn't wait around to find out.

One of the things I didn't do was touch him. Since my goal is always to avoid the fight, I don't want to be the one to start making physical contact. Once I've touched you, now touching is allowed, it's like I broke a barrier.

If someone is making me feel uncomfortable, I keep my distance. If my personal space is being invaded, I move away. If I can go away altogether, I'll do that. If I have to run, I'd rather run away than fight. Remember, in two out of three possible outcomes of a fight, I end up hurt.

But if I can't get away for some reason, I need to create and then maintain distance, at least 2-arms-length distance, ideally with a barrier of some kind between us. If we can't reach each other, it's not a fight yet.



So the next question I usually get is *what* to shout. If you wanted to communicate a message with your shouting, which words would you choose? Here's one of my favorite self-defense stories:

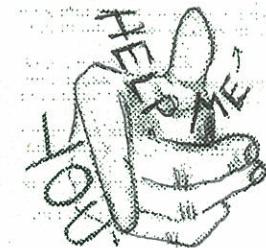
An old friend of mine was walking home from martial arts class one night, alone. When she turned the corner onto a dark, empty block, she realized there was a car following her. At first she denied it, telling herself she was being paranoid but the car didn't pass her, it just crept about half a block behind her, varying with her speed. Finally she slowed her speed walk to a stop and turned around. The car stopped, too. As the door opened and a leg stepped out, she screamed at the top of her lungs:

**"IF YOU STEP ONE MORE FOOT OUT OF THAT CAR, I WILL FEED YOU YOUR BALLS!!"**

And the leg slowly stepped back into the car and they drove away.

A few other thoughts I have about *what* to yell:

- "I don't know this person!" – People are reluctant to get involved at best. And if they think you're fighting with your boyfriend or something, they're even less likely. Make it known that this is a stranger, (even if you're lying!)
- "YOU! Help me!" – If you want help, pick out a specific person and talk directly to them, make eye contact, use that clear, commanding voice. Not just "Help me", "YOU! Help me!" (They say that in CPR training as well: "YOU! Call 911!")
- [gibberish] – Go nuts, convulse, be a crazy person; people don't fuck with a crazy person!





Try this exercise to practice making an intimidating yell:

- Do 15 crunches and feel which muscles flex. These include the diaphragm muscles.
- Now stand up and flex those same muscles while pushing air out in short, sharp bursts.
- Put your hand on your lower ribs and make it move each time you exhale.
- Now make noise with each exhale.
- Get louder and louder.
- Try saying words:
  - "Hey! Hey! Hey!"
  - "No, no, no, no"
  - "Aahhhhhh!!" (with fury, not fear)

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## Shouting

I can create distance by moving back, but I can't move back forever. If they continue to pursue me, I'll need to make *them* want to move away from *me*. How can you make someone want to move away from you without touching them? Use your voice! **Your voice is your second most powerful and far-reaching self-defense weapon.** If the situation calls for it, you can start by talking. (See the de-escalation section to follow.) But depending on the situation, shouting may be the best tool.

**Shouting is a useful tool for a number of reasons:**

- Shouting is a good knee-jerk reaction. If someone attacks you, you're probably going to be scared. When people are scared, they freeze up. Making a sound can help you unfreeze. Once unfrozen, you can get away, or strike, or both. Once you've done something, now you can do other things. (Because doing nothing, never works.)
- Shouting forces you to exhale, even if you've forgotten to because you're scared. Why is exhaling important? If you don't exhale you can't inhale again, which means you're not breathing. Breathing is really important.
- Shouting is startling. If you're loud enough, you may create that moment to strike back or get away. (Have you ever stepped on a cat's tail? It makes this loud, terrifying screech and you jump like 3 feet back. In the meantime, the cat has disappeared under the couch.)
- Shouting has psychological effects on both people:
  - The person being shouted at feels intimidated and concerned about the attention you're drawing. (No one likes to be seen acting like an asshole.)
  - The person shouting seems and feels stronger, more powerful, and more confident. It gives you a bigger presence. There's a difference between the edges of your body and the size of your presence. Shouting makes your presence bigger, which is intimidating!

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- Shouting is a form of fighting back and an attacker is looking for a victim, not a fight.
- A loud, commanding voice can control someone. This is a principle that the police use. I'm not encouraging anyone to act like a cop, but we can use their tactics to our benefit. People will submit to a strong presence. Clear commands can produce great compliance. So, not a polite 'excuse me, you're in my space.' Instead: 'Back up! Get away from me!'
- Hopefully you won't have to hit anyone, but if you do, exhaling and/or shouting while you do it will actually make your technique stronger! Try it out:
  - Do 2 push-ups while holding breath
  - Do 2 push-ups while exhaling hard on the way up
  - Do 2 push-ups while yelling on the way up
 Which one was easiest?
- Finally, shouting *may* bring you help. (But I wouldn't count on it, especially in NYC.)

Lots of people, especially women, tell me they don't like shouting. When I ask them to practice doing it with me, they feel awkward and shy and tell me, "I just don't like raising my voice." I hear that, but I think it's important to be able to.

If it's a conversation I'm looking for, I try not to raise my voice. But shouting is the tool to use when the communication is only one-way – when it's *not* a dialog; when it's not up for debate.

Sexual assault is a good example here. Use that assertive, commanding voice: 'Stay out of my space.' 'Leave.' 'I'm leaving.' 'I'm trying to leave and you're not letting me.' Sometimes when we call out behavior like that, it's embarrassing enough to make them stop at least long enough for you to go away from the situation. (But, fyi, it's usually not enough to change behavior in the long run.)

So how do we shout? That may seem like a silly question, but even if shouting comes naturally to you *when you're angry*, it may not be so easy *when you're scared*.

*[Trigger warning – domestic violence]*

*I once heard a woman describe being beaten by her husband. She said she was on the ground and he was punching her, and she was screaming... so loud... in her head... but when she listened, no sound was coming out. I think that's because she wasn't breathing. One of the things we do when we're scared is gasp in disbelief and then forget to exhale again, rendering our screams silent.*

So how do we shout?

**Step one, exhale!**

**Step two, keep your distance.** Don't be afraid to shout if it's the right tool for the situation, but don't get 'all up in their face', even if you're mad.

**Step three, be intimidating!** Don't scream; you're not a damsel in distress. You're a confident, capable, powerful person. Be scary! Shouting comes from your diaphragm, not your throat. The diaphragm is a sheet of internal skeletal muscle that extends across the bottom of the rib cage.

