AMERICAN MARTIAL ARTS FOUNDATION

Portland, Maine

Mastering the Art of Self Defense

Awareness, preparation and personal safety



Mark Hider
Founder and head instructor

EXPANDED EDITION

Practical examples, planning pages
and sources for further learning

americanmartialartsfoundation.com

PREFACE

From the Foundation

This guide comes from the American Martial Arts Foundation in Portland, Maine. Founded in 1985, the organization connects martial arts education with personal growth, respect, and community service. Its Chinese Goju tradition brings together Chinese and Okinawan influences.

Founder and head instructor Mark Hider is pictured on the cover in his karate uniform. The Foundation's background provides the context for a guide that welcomes readers with different ages, abilities, and experiences.

A practical approach to personal safety

The chapters focus on awareness, boundaries, planning, appropriate training, and finding help. They include examples and checklists you can adapt to your own circumstances, followed by personal planning pages and links to original sources.

Use this as general education alongside qualified instruction. It is not a substitute for individual medical or legal advice, and no technique or tool guarantees safety. Physical contact skills require supervision; the scenario images illustrate themes rather than complete techniques.

Continue learning through the Foundation's Self Defense Home Study Workout and the founder's book, 25 Years to Life: Justice American Style. The final page explains both and provides direct links.

Reference: Foundation background



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What self-defense is for

Self-defense begins before physical contact. Noticing a blocked exit, ending an uncomfortable conversation, asking someone to walk with you, or leaving a place can all be useful decisions. The aim is to protect your safety and reach help. Winning an argument or proving a technique works is a different goal.

No guide, rank, device, or training system can promise safety. Size, surprise, the surroundings, weapons, and other people affect what is possible. Preparation gives you more choices; it does not make an assault your fault if those choices disappear.

Start with your own life

Think about one ordinary journey: from home to work, school, a shop, or a regular appointment. Where could you ask for help? Which part becomes harder after dark? Is there an accessible alternative if a lift, gate, or usual entrance is unavailable?

Choose one manageable improvement. Save a useful number, move a key where you can reach it, arrange a check-in, or ask about a class. Small changes are easier to keep than a long list of rules you cannot realistically follow.

How to use this guide

Read the opening and training chapters first, then choose the sections that fit your circumstances. The later planning pages are meant to be filled in and revisited. The photographs illustrate situations and training themes; they are not step-by-step demonstrations of physical techniques.

If danger is immediate, put the book aside and seek a safer location and emergency help. In the United States, call 911 when it is safe to do so; learn the local emergency number when traveling.

Notice options and make a decision

Awareness means noticing enough to make a useful choice. It does not require watching everyone constantly or assuming unfamiliar people are dangerous. Look at behavior and circumstances: someone repeatedly following your changes of direction, blocking your movement, threatening you, or ignoring a clear boundary deserves attention.

Use a short mental check

- Notice what has changed. Is an exit blocked? Is a disagreement becoming physical? Has someone moved unusually close?
- Identify a realistic option. It might be an open business, a staffed desk, another route, or a person you can address directly.
- Act while the option is available. You do not need certainty about another person's intentions to leave a conversation or change your plans.

When words are useful, keep them brief: “I don't want trouble. I'm leaving.” You can set a boundary without explaining your history or persuading the other person to agree. A calm voice may help defuse tension, but their response is outside your control.

Try it on an ordinary day

At your next familiar destination, identify the normal exit and one alternative. Notice who works there and how you would ask for assistance. Then return your attention to what you came to do. The exercise should support daily life, not turn it into a threat search.

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Myths that can lead to poor decisions

A single move will solve the problem

A demonstration usually starts with a cooperative partner and a known attack. Real situations may involve surprise, uneven ground, restricted movement, or more than one person. A technique that works in practice is an option to develop, not a guarantee.

Size and strength do not matter

They can matter a great deal. Training can improve movement, judgment, and the ability to use an opportunity, but it cannot erase every physical disadvantage. Good instruction is honest about limits and adapts the task to the student.

Confidence will stop an attacker

Clear communication and purposeful movement may be useful, but there is no posture that makes someone immune to violence. Shyness, disability, clothing, or fear never makes a person responsible for being attacked.

Carrying a tool finishes the job

A tool may be inaccessible, prohibited, dropped, ineffective, or taken away. It can also create risk for the user and others. Ask what problem it solves, what training it requires, and what you would do if it failed.

A successful response must be physical

Leaving, attracting help, protecting a child, or giving up property may be the decision that preserves safety. Judge a practice scenario by whether you recognized an opening and used it, not by how dramatic the ending looked.

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More myths about danger and training

Dangerous people are easy to recognize

Appearance is a poor guide to intent. Someone familiar may cross a boundary, while an unfamiliar worker or passerby may provide help. Pay attention to conduct, access, and patterns rather than identity or stereotypes.

Freezing means you failed

Stress responses can happen automatically. Freezing or trying to appease someone is not consent and is not a character flaw. Training may help you rehearse choices, but nobody can promise how their body will respond during an assault. RAINN explains these survival responses in its support resources.

One class makes you ready for anything

An introductory session can teach a useful idea and show you what to practice. It cannot establish every skill under every condition. Look for instruction that allows repetition, questions, adjustment, and honest feedback.

Every unsettling encounter needs confrontation

You can step away, ask staff for help, or change your route without accusing someone. Sometimes speaking firmly is useful; sometimes silence and distance are safer. The right choice depends on the situation, not on a rule that you must always stand your ground.

A useful question after training

Ask, “What would make this response difficult for me?” Footwear, fatigue, pain, a crowded doorway, a child beside you, or a mobility device can change the answer. Discuss those conditions with the instructor before increasing the difficulty of a drill.

Reference: RAINN survival responses



Balance and protective posture

A useful starting position lets you communicate, move, and protect yourself without unnecessarily escalating a disagreement. It should feel stable for your body. There is no single stance that suits every person, chair, walking aid, or injury.

For standing practice, begin with comfortable foot spacing and soft rather than locked knees. Keep your head upright enough to notice the environment. If appropriate, hold open hands between yourself and the other person while speaking. Avoid a deep or rigid pose that makes leaving difficult.

A quiet movement drill

In a clear space, take a small step toward an imagined exit, pause, and check your balance. Repeat in another direction without rushing or crossing your feet awkwardly. If you use a mobility aid, practice with the equipment you normally use and advice appropriate to your needs.

The purpose is controlled movement, not speed. Stop if you feel pain, dizziness, or instability. A qualified instructor can help adjust the position; a photograph cannot show the corrections your body may need.

Bring the setting into practice

Ask how the movement changes near a wall, beside a table, or while carrying a bag. Use harmless markers and ample space. Do not add surprise pushes or slippery surfaces to make the exercise “realistic.”

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Strikes belong in supervised practice

Striking is one part of physical self-defense training. It carries a risk of injury to both people and can have serious legal consequences. The useful question is whether a physical action could create an opportunity to leave when that action is necessary and lawful.

A beginner should learn contact skills with a qualified instructor, suitable pads, and clear control of intensity. Practice against equipment rather than a partner's head, neck, joints, or other vulnerable areas. Remove jewelry and tell the instructor about injuries or limitations before starting.

What good pad work teaches

It should develop balance, a comfortable working distance, controlled contact, and the ability to stop on a signal. The instructor should explain how to avoid injuring your own hand or wrist and adjust the task when necessary.

Force is not the only measure of progress. Can you keep your balance, notice the exit, and move away after the drill? Can you stop immediately when asked? Can you perform the exercise without pain?

Keep terminology clear

A palm strike is a technique. Krav Maga is a training system, not a type of strike. Chinese Goju is the Foundation's martial arts tradition. Whatever the system, judge the instruction by its safety, clarity, and relevance to your circumstances.

Do not copy impact techniques from a still image. A teacher needs to observe the whole movement and provide feedback. Avoid unsupervised contact practice at home, especially with children.





Protection and movement

Blocks, covers, and parries are taught in different ways across martial arts. Their shared purpose in a self-defense setting is to reduce exposure while creating a chance to move away. They do not form an impenetrable shield, and trying to catch every incoming movement is unrealistic.

Begin with a partner who understands the exercise and can stop immediately. Agree on the starting position, the movement being practiced, the speed, and the stop signal. The instructor should demonstrate how contact is controlled before anyone increases resistance.

A safer progression

First learn the movement without impact. Then rehearse a predictable, slow approach with the instructor's supervision. Add one difficulty at a time only when both partners can stay in control. Protective equipment does not justify uncontrolled contact.

Pair protective movement with a destination. A student who remains in place trading techniques may miss an opportunity to leave. Use a clearly marked exit area in the training room and reset after reaching it.

Questions to ask

What happens if the movement misses? Where could my partner fall? Is there enough room for the drill? What should I do if I become overwhelmed or lose balance?

The answer to the last question should include stopping without embarrassment. A class that treats injury, fear, or a request for less contact as weakness is not providing a sound learning environment.

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Learning to escape unwanted holds

A grab can restrict movement and create panic. Escaping it is not simply a matter of memorizing a wrist twist. Grip, position, clothing, strength, and the surrounding space all affect the options. Some attempts to pull away can worsen an injury or leave a person off balance.

Work on releases with an instructor who can see the exact situation and adjust the exercise. Begin with light, agreed contact. There should be no surprise grabs, neck compression, forced joint movement, or pressure to endure pain.

Make the goal clear

The drill should finish with separation and movement toward help, not with a prolonged contest over the grip. Add words when appropriate: “Let go.” Rehearse asking a specific nearby person to call for help. A voice may draw attention, but it does not guarantee intervention.

If a hold involves the neck or interferes with breathing, the stakes are especially serious. Do not rehearse choking or strangulation from written instructions. Following actual neck compression, seek urgent medical assessment even if visible marks are absent.

Before agreeing to a partner exercise

Tell the instructor which contact is acceptable. Establish a verbal stop signal as well as any physical signal, since a hand may be occupied. Practice stopping once before beginning the drill.

The image shows a training setup, not a complete release sequence. Use it to prompt a conversation with an instructor, not as a stand-alone technique lesson.

Reference: NHS throat-injury guidance





If you fall or end up on the ground

The ground can limit movement and introduce hazards such as hard surfaces, traffic, broken glass, or another person's feet. Training should address protection, orientation, and returning to mobility when possible. It should not suggest that going to the ground is automatically a good choice.

A qualified instructor can teach appropriate falling and recovery skills on suitable mats. People with joint replacements, balance concerns, pain, pregnancy, or other relevant conditions may need different exercises or professional advice before practicing.

Begin without a resisting partner

Learn how to change position and get up in a way that suits your body. Use an instructor's guidance and support when needed. Do not practice throws, forced falls, pins, or neck pressure on a household floor.

When a partner is involved, agree on the position and contact before starting. Keep the drill short and predictable. Anyone must be able to stop it immediately; nobody should have to prove that they can tolerate being trapped.

Include the surroundings

An exercise can end at a marked safe area rather than at a submission or pin. Ask how a nearby wall, doorway, or mobility aid changes the task. If getting up quickly is not realistic, discuss ways to communicate and obtain help from the position you can use.

In an actual incident, there may be no ideal response. The purpose of practice is to develop options and judgment, not to create a standard by which survivors are later blamed.

Safety and boundaries for women

Women may face unwanted attention, sexual harassment, coercion, or violence in both public and private settings. Experiences differ with age, disability, race, sexuality, work, housing, and personal circumstances. Trans women are included in this chapter; gender and LGBTQ+ identity are not separate, mutually exclusive categories.

A safety plan should fit the person using it. Clothing, friendliness, drinking, dating, or being out alone never transfers responsibility for an assault to the person targeted.

Notice pressure rather than politeness

Repeatedly ignoring a refusal, controlling transport, taking a phone, blocking a doorway, or demanding secrecy can affect your options. You do not need to diagnose a person's motives before deciding to leave or contact someone you trust.

Try a short boundary that sounds natural to you: “I'm not comfortable with that.” “I am leaving now.” “Please give me space.” You can also leave without giving an explanation. If a direct refusal may increase danger, choose the response that seems safest in that moment.

When the person is someone you know

Advice about unfamiliar streets may not address a partner or acquaintance who knows your routine. A confidential advocate can help you consider housing, communications, children, money, and other practical issues. The National Domestic Violence Hotline offers personalized safety-planning resources.

Reference: The Hotline safety planning





Plan a way to leave

Before a meeting, date, shift, or evening out, consider how you would leave if your original plan changed. This is a convenience as well as a safety measure: a canceled ride or a flat phone battery can strand anyone.

Build in an alternative

Know another transport option and a place where you could wait with staff nearby. Keep essential medication, identification, keys, and a communication method accessible when practical. Arrange a check-in with someone you choose, including what they should do if they cannot reach you.

You do not need to broadcast your location to a group or share it continuously. Choose who gets the information and when sharing ends. If another person monitors your device or accounts, use specialist safety advice before changing settings in a way they might notice.

A realistic example

At a café, a date pressures you to go somewhere private after you have declined. You decide to end the meeting, approach the counter, and ask a member of staff for a place to wait while arranging transport. You do not need to settle the disagreement first.

The same plan can apply to a colleague, friend, or relative. Familiarity does not remove your right to change your mind.

Review afterward without blaming yourself

Ask which support or practical arrangement would be useful next time. Avoid turning hindsight into a rule that you “should have known.” Another person's misconduct remains their responsibility.

Training that supports your choices

An appropriate women's self-defense class should teach decision-making, communication, movement, and practical physical options. It should not rely on frightening stories or imply that a short course can overcome every difference in strength or size.

Before enrolling

Ask whether the class is open to trans women and whether you can observe first. Find out how instructors handle consent, trauma-related reactions, injuries, and access needs. Ask whether contact is optional and whether you can work with a partner of your choice.

Training should make room for your actual circumstances. Shoes, work clothing, a handbag, a child beside you, limited mobility, or fatigue can affect movement. The instructor can adapt exercises without reenacting a frightening event or using surprise contact.

What to practice

Start with clear boundaries, locating an exit, moving without losing balance, and asking for assistance. Where appropriate, add supervised pad work and carefully controlled escape drills. Work toward a usable response rather than collecting a large number of techniques.

If a drill becomes distressing, stop. You may observe, switch activities, take a break, or leave. An instructor should respect the decision without asking you to disclose personal experiences in front of the class.

Measure something meaningful

At the end of a session, name one choice you understand better and one skill that needs more instruction. Confidence is useful when it rests on clear knowledge of both possibilities and limits.





Put boundaries into practice

Rehearsing a few ordinary situations can make your words easier to find. Use a supportive partner and keep the exercise predictable. Nobody needs to act aggressively or imitate an assault.

The persistent invitation

A partner asks you to stay after you have decided to leave. Practice one short response, then move toward a marked exit. The partner accepts the boundary immediately. Later, discuss how you would obtain help if a real person blocked the way.

The uncomfortable approach

Rehearse creating comfortable space while saying, “Please step back.” You can adjust the wording, use a communication device, or choose a nonverbal exit. The exercise is about having an option that suits you, not about performing a forceful personality.

The request for assistance

Practice making a specific request: “Could I wait here while I call a ride?” or “Please contact security.” Specific words can be easier for another person to act on than a general expression of discomfort.

End with a practical choice

Check that your transport, contact details, and keys are available. Decide who could help if your plans changed. Review a boundary at work or in a recurring social setting, where a supervisor or organizer may be able to change the conditions.

Do not treat success in a calm exercise as a prediction of how you must respond under threat. These rehearsals are preparation, not a test of courage and not a way to assign responsibility after an incident.

Understanding Krav Maga

Krav Maga is one of several systems used to teach self-defense. Schools differ in their instructors, curriculum, emphasis, and approach to safety. The name alone does not tell you whether a particular class is appropriate for you.

This chapter introduces questions for evaluating that training. It does not present Krav Maga as the Foundation's own curriculum. The American Martial Arts Foundation describes its tradition as Chinese Goju. Readers can compare training approaches without assuming that one name guarantees better results.

Look at what the class actually does

Are students taught to notice opportunities to leave? Does the teacher distinguish a controlled exercise from an unpredictable confrontation? Are techniques adapted for different bodies and levels of experience?

Watch how beginners are treated. A student should receive clear instructions, an explanation of contact levels, and an immediate response to a stop signal. A tough atmosphere is not evidence of effective teaching.

Ask about the purpose of pressure

Some classes use progressively more demanding scenarios. Ask what skill is being tested, how intensity is limited, and what happens when someone becomes overwhelmed. Surprise, exhaustion, and pain should not replace instruction.

Consider the practical fit as well: travel time, class size, price, accessibility, and whether you can attend regularly. A respectful, well-run class that you can sustain is more useful than an impressive label attached to training you cannot safely use.





Comparing a class before committing

Observe a beginner session if the school permits it. Notice more than the instructor's demonstration. Students' control, the way partners communicate, and the teacher's response to mistakes tell you a great deal about the learning environment.

Questions worth asking

- How do you introduce physical contact to a new student?
- Can I decline a drill or request a different partner?
- What training and teaching experience do the instructors have?
- How do you adapt exercises for an injury, disability, or limited fitness?
- What are the fees, cancellation terms, and required equipment?

Claims such as “works on anyone” or “guaranteed protection” deserve skepticism. Ask for a concrete explanation of the limits of a technique. A thoughtful instructor should be able to describe situations in which it might fail.

After a trial lesson

Write down what you actually learned. Could you explain the objective of the drill? Were corrections understandable? Did you feel able to ask a question? If you were uncomfortable, was the issue addressed respectfully?

You are allowed to decide that a school is not a good fit without proving that it is a bad school. Compare another class, request a private introductory session, or begin with a different type of activity.

The same questions apply to Krav Maga, karate, and other martial arts. Good self-defense instruction should connect physical practice to awareness, safe training habits, and a realistic plan for obtaining help.

Principles that matter more than labels

A useful self-defense course connects recognition, action, and escape. It should teach students to notice when a situation is changing, choose a response that fits the circumstances, and reassess when an opportunity appears.

Keep the task understandable

In a beginner exercise, one clear objective is enough: reach the exit area, make a specific request, or move while maintaining balance. Adding several attacks and complicated choices at once can obscure what the student is learning.

Practice stopping as well as starting

Students need control. A drill should end when the agreed goal is reached or a stop signal is given. In a real incident, the justification for force may change when the threat ends. Training that rewards continued striking after separation teaches the wrong habit.

Use realism carefully

Ordinary shoes, a bag, or a confined but safe practice area may reveal useful limits. Real weapons, surprise attacks, restricted breathing, or uncontrolled contact introduce risks that a general community class should not normalize.

Debrief the decision

Ask what the student noticed, what option they chose, and what they would adjust. Avoid judging the exercise only by speed or impact. A deliberate decision to leave before contact can be the strongest result.

These principles can support many training traditions. They are criteria for evaluating instruction, not a claim that every school follows them.

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From demonstration to usable practice

Watching an instructor perform a technique is the beginning of learning. A useful lesson gives you time to understand the objective, practice with feedback, and connect the movement to a decision about leaving or seeking help.

A sensible lesson structure

Begin with a clear explanation and a no-contact rehearsal. Add appropriate equipment or a cooperative partner only after the movement is understood. Increase difficulty gradually under supervision, changing one condition at a time.

For a contact drill, agree on the starting position, permitted actions, intensity, and stop signal. Keep enough space between pairs. Never bring a live weapon into a practice scenario; weapon-related instruction requires specialist controls beyond this guide.

Ask what happens next

After a release or protective movement, where do you go? Who do you call? What if your usual route is blocked? Those questions keep a technique connected to safety rather than a rehearsed exchange of attacks.

Take home the right exercise

An instructor may assign non-contact movement, a route review, or a communication rehearsal. Do not reproduce a hazardous partner drill from memory at home. If you cannot explain the safety limits, ask before practicing it.

A still photograph cannot teach timing, pressure, or judgment. Use the images in this guide as illustrations of learning environments, and learn physical skills from someone qualified to observe and correct your practice.

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Make your home easier to secure

Begin with the ordinary ways people enter, leave, and ask for access. A useful home review looks at doors, windows, lighting, visibility, and communication. Expensive equipment is not always the first improvement to make.

Walk through the basics

- Check that exterior doors close and lock properly. Ask a landlord or qualified professional about defects.
- Keep entrance areas reasonably lit and routes free of trip hazards.
- Confirm who is at the door before opening it. Verify unexpected workers through a known contact method.
- Review who has keys, access codes, or permission to enter, especially after a household change.
- Test alarms according to their instructions and keep emergency information where household members can find it.

Security changes must preserve safe fire escape and meet applicable rules. Do not install a barrier that traps someone inside or prevents a person with limited mobility from leaving.

Cameras have limits

A camera may record an event without stopping it. Review account access, passwords, and where footage is stored. Consider neighbors' privacy and whether someone unsafe has access to a shared security account.

Choose one improvement

Write down the most useful repair or change, who will handle it, and when you will check it. A working lock or a reliable way to contact help may matter more than buying another device.

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Make a household emergency plan

Discuss the plan when everyone is calm. Include children, visitors who stay regularly, and anyone who may need assistance. Agree on how to leave, where to meet, and how to contact one another if separated.

The safest response depends on the emergency. A fire requires different decisions from a suspected intrusion. Do not turn one designated room into an instruction to stay inside regardless of smoke, fire, or other danger.

Agree on practical details

Identify usable exits and an outside meeting place. Keep routes clear. Decide how to assist a person who requests help without making assumptions about what they need. Know where essential medication and communication equipment are kept.

If leaving is unsafe, identify a location where you could put a locked barrier between yourself and the threat and contact emergency services. Consider whether the space has another exit and whether everyone can reach it. A local professional can help evaluate the specifics of your home.

Rehearse without frightening anyone

Walk the routes in daylight. Practice finding the address and giving it clearly to an imagined dispatcher. Do not stage a surprise break-in or ask children to confront an intruder.

Keep a brief written contact plan, including an out-of-area contact if useful. Ready.gov provides a household communication worksheet that can help organize this information. Store sensitive details thoughtfully rather than posting them publicly.

Reference: Ready.gov communication worksheet

Responding to a suspected intrusion

If you believe someone has entered your home unlawfully, do not search rooms to investigate or move toward the person to protect possessions. Create distance and contact emergency help when you can do so safely.

Choose the safer available option

Leave by a route that does not take you toward the suspected intruder if it is safe to use. If leaving would expose you to danger, move to a more secure location, use an available barrier, and call for help. Conditions can change, so keep reassessing rather than following a script blindly.

Give the dispatcher your location first, then what you know: what you heard or saw, who is with you, and whether anyone is injured. Distinguish observation from assumption. Follow the dispatcher's directions when possible.

When help arrives

Avoid sudden movements and follow responders' instructions. Do not go looking for a fleeing person or reenter a dangerous area to retrieve property. Tell responders if someone is missing or needs assistance.

Afterward

Have damaged access points repaired, review keys and account access, and consider support if the event has left you feeling unsettled. A household plan can be revised without blaming anyone for how they reacted.

The illustration shows people away from the entry door while seeking help. It is not a recommendation to choose a particular room without considering your home's exits and hazards.

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Personal safety as you get older

Age alone does not describe a person's strength, mobility, confidence, or experience. Start with what you do comfortably and what has changed. Pain, hearing, vision, balance, medication effects, or fatigue may affect a plan, but none should be assumed simply because someone is older.

Keep useful routines within reach

Choose routes and appointments that work for you. Know where you can rest or ask for assistance. Keep a phone or other contact method accessible without needing to empty a bag. If you use an alert service, understand where it works and how it is charged or maintained.

Let others know how to help

A trusted person can provide a check-in, transport, or company when you want it. Be clear about the help you prefer. Assistance should support your independence rather than make ordinary choices for you.

When considering a physical class, describe relevant limitations privately to the instructor. Ask about seated options, pace, rest breaks, and exercises that avoid falls or joint strain. Medical or rehabilitation advice may be appropriate before new activity if you have a condition that affects participation.

Look beyond street encounters

Pressure at the door, financial scams, or mistreatment by someone familiar may be more relevant to your circumstances. You can pause an unexpected request and verify it through a number you already trust. A deadline imposed by a caller is not a reason to surrender your usual checks.

Reference: FTC scam guidance

Adapt training to the person

An adaptation should make a skill more usable, not disguise a movement that still causes pain or instability. A good instructor asks what you want to achieve and works with your present abilities.

Start with low-impact goals

Practice locating an exit, making a clear request, turning comfortably, and moving toward a safe area. Add appropriate strength, balance, or mobility work within your capabilities. Progress can mean doing a familiar task with better control rather than doing it faster.

A seated version may be the best option for some exercises. For others, stable support or shorter practice periods may help. Use your normal aids and footwear when appropriate, and allow time to discuss the setup.

Avoid false shortcuts

Joint locks and pressure points are not effortless equalizers. They may fail, cause injury, or require positions that are unsuitable for you. Ask the instructor to explain the limits of any technique promoted as especially easy for older adults.

Review after each lesson

Was the pace comfortable? Did anything hurt during or after practice? Could you stop or modify an exercise without pressure? Share that information before the next session.

Training should leave room for enjoyment and social connection. A class does not need to be frightening to be useful, and you do not need to tolerate rough treatment to belong there.



A practical personal safety check

Use this list as a conversation starter, not as a scorecard. Choose the items that would make everyday life easier and safer for you. Revisit the list when your routines, health, household, or transport arrangements change.

Communication and travel

- Keep important contacts available in a format you can use, including a paper copy if helpful.
- Arrange a check-in for an unfamiliar journey if you want one. Agree on the response to a missed check-in.
- Identify accessible places to wait for transport or ask for assistance.

Home and visitors

- Check that you can operate your locks and leave without struggling with an unfamiliar device.
- Verify unexpected service calls through a known number before allowing access.
- Tell a trusted person or appropriate service if someone pressures, threatens, or mistreats you.

Money and information

Pause an unexpected demand for payment, secrecy, or personal details. Contact the organization independently rather than using the caller's link or number. The FTC explains common warning signs and reporting options.

One change this week

Write down a specific improvement and the help you want, if any. Review it after trying it. A plan that respects your choices is more useful than a long list of restrictions imposed by someone else.

Reference: FTC scam guidance



Teach children usable safety habits

Children need simple habits and adults who listen. Avoid teaching that danger can be identified by appearance or that every unfamiliar person is unsafe. Someone a child knows may behave inappropriately; an unfamiliar employee or other helpful adult may be the person they need when lost.

NCMEC's KidSmartz resources focus on checking with a trusted adult, staying with a buddy, setting boundaries, and telling an adult about concerning behavior. Adapt the language to the child's age, understanding, and communication needs.

Make the adults easy to name

Help a child identify several trusted adults they can approach. Explain that they can keep telling until someone helps. Do not make one unavailable person the only acceptable source of support.

Practice ordinary decisions

Rehearse what to do if a pickup plan changes, someone offers a ride, or a child becomes separated from you. At a familiar venue, identify staff and a place to ask for help. Follow the venue's arrangements rather than expecting a child to navigate an unfamiliar area alone.

Keep responsibility with adults

Listen calmly when a child describes something uncomfortable. Thank them for telling you. Do not promise secrecy that would prevent necessary help, and do not blame them for breaking a rule while trying to cope.

The goal is a child who can ask for help, not a child who is afraid of everyday contact with other people.

Reference: NCMEC child safety



Children's training should prioritize escape

A child's class should be age-appropriate, closely supervised, and built around attention, boundaries, getting away, and finding help. A child should never be expected to overpower an adult or handle a dangerous situation alone.

Begin with no-contact practice

Use a clearly marked safe area and rehearse moving to it when asked. Practice saying “Stop” or “I need help” in a way the child can manage. Include communication options for a child who does not speak or cannot shout.

Teach children that a training partner's stop signal matters immediately. Consent to one activity does not mean consent to every activity that follows. Instructors should explain touch before using it and offer an alternative when a child is uncomfortable.

What parents and caregivers should check

- Instructors explain safeguarding, supervision, and reporting procedures.
- Contact levels and behavior expectations are clear.
- Parents can understand what is being taught and why.
- No one uses surprise grabs, choking, humiliation, or pain as a lesson.

Do not practice dangerous targets, forced holds, or weapon techniques from a book with children. If physical escape skills are taught, they need appropriate instruction and controlled conditions.

Connect class to daily life

Ask the child to show you where they would seek help at school or an activity. Praise asking for assistance and respecting another person's boundary, not simply hitting harder or refusing to back down.

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Confidence without pressure

Children learn confidence through manageable challenges, repetition, and supportive feedback. A safety lesson should leave them with something they can do, rather than a vivid picture of everything that could go wrong.

Use brief role-play

Choose an ordinary situation such as asking a teacher for help or declining an unwanted game. Explain the exercise first. Let the child choose words, gestures, or a communication aid that suits them. End the exercise promptly and discuss what felt clear or difficult.

Praise the decision

“You told me you were uncomfortable” is more useful than “You were fearless.” Courage is not the absence of fear. A child who leaves, cries, freezes, or seeks an adult has not failed a character test.

When bullying is involved

Record what the child reports and work with the school or organization on a response. Ask who will supervise, how incidents will be reported, and when you will review the plan. Do not make a child responsible for fixing repeated harassment through fighting.

Build a reliable message

Tell the child they can come to you even if they broke a rule, accepted something, or did not say no. Let them know that another person's harmful behavior is not their fault.

Children's needs change as they gain independence. Revisit pickup arrangements, online contact, privacy, and trusted adults over time, using calm conversations rather than a single dramatic safety talk.

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Plan a run that fits the conditions

Think about the route, the conditions, and how you would get help if needed. A familiar loop may feel different after dark, during construction, or when a usual café or station is closed.

Before setting out

Check daylight, weather, route access, and the distance you expect to cover. Take an appropriate communication method and any essentials for your health and conditions. If you arrange a check-in, agree on when it is due and what a missed check-in means.

For a less familiar trail, review the route and its exits rather than relying on continuous mobile service. Decide whether company, a shorter route, or another time would suit the circumstances better. These are planning choices, not rules that blame a runner for someone else's behavior.

While moving

Leave enough attention for traffic, other path users, and the surface. If audio or a device makes it harder to notice what matters, adjust how you use it. Stop in a suitable place to read a map rather than trying to do it while crossing a road.

If something feels wrong

You can change direction, enter an open staffed place, join others, or contact help. Avoid leading someone who appears to be following you directly to your home. You do not need to confront the person to justify changing your plan.

The illustration shows a runner assessing a public trail entrance. It is a reminder to plan, not proof that a location is safe.

Traffic and route awareness

Personal safety while running includes ordinary road hazards. Use a sidewalk or designated path when available. NHTSA advises pedestrians without a sidewalk to face traffic and remain as far from it as possible; follow local rules and the conditions on the route.

At crossings

Pause when necessary, use appropriate crossings, and check for turning or reversing vehicles. Do not assume a driver has seen you because one vehicle stopped. Visibility and a predictable route matter more than maintaining an uninterrupted pace.

Plan for a changed route

Roadworks, a closed gate, flooding, or a dark path may remove an option you expected to use. Slow down and reassess. A detour should still give you a usable route back and a way to get help if needed.

Review your public running data

A shared route can reveal a home address, work schedule, or regular stopping point. Check your fitness app's visibility settings and consider posting after the run. Share live location only with people you choose and for a purpose you understand.

If someone has used your routes or devices to monitor you, ordinary privacy adjustments may not be enough. A stalking or domestic-abuse advocate can help you plan changes without overlooking the other person's access or likely response.

One useful habit

Name a place along your regular route where you could approach staff. Verify that it is open during the time you normally run, and identify an alternative for when it is not.

Reference: NHTSA pedestrian guidance



If an encounter interrupts your run

You are allowed to stop, turn back, or change your route. An exercise goal is not a reason to remain in an uncomfortable interaction. Notice whether you have space to leave and whether help is nearby.

Keep the response simple

If speaking seems useful, a short statement such as “I can't stop” or “Please give me space” may be enough. You do not owe an unknown person directions, conversation, or access to your phone. Avoid being drawn into an argument about your decision.

If someone persists or follows, move toward an available staffed or populated place when you can. Ask for specific help and call emergency services if there is immediate danger. Do not go somewhere isolated simply to test whether the person is following.

Protect your ability to move

A loose bag, an exhausted pace, or an injury may affect what you can do. Your plan should include stopping safely and obtaining help, not an assumption that you can always outrun another person.

After the encounter

Write down what you remember if there is a reason to report it. Separate observed behavior from guesses about intent. If the behavior repeats, treat the pattern seriously and consider specialist support rather than changing your life around it alone.

No response guarantees a safe outcome. Use the options available at the time, and avoid judging yourself afterward by an idealized scenario.

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Practice useful running decisions

Running fitness and self-defense skills are different. Speed can help in some circumstances, but it does not solve a blocked route, an injury, or an encounter in a confined area. Practice decisions that remain useful when you cannot simply sprint away.

A non-contact route drill

During an easy walk, identify a staffed place, an alternative turn, and a location where you could safely stop to call. Decide how you would describe your location without relying on a map loading instantly.

A communication drill

With a trusted partner, rehearse a brief request: “Please call for help. Someone is following me.” The partner responds normally and the exercise ends. Do not arrange for someone to chase or surprise you in public.

In a class

Ask an instructor to account for running shoes, fatigue, and common surfaces. Any physical drills should take place in a controlled area with appropriate supervision. Do not add exhaustion or unstable ground merely to increase intensity.

There is no universal zigzag escape rule. Choose a usable route toward safety based on the actual environment; avoid advice that substitutes a pattern of movement for assessing obstacles, traffic, and access to help.

Review the plan

After a few runs, ask whether the check-in, equipment, and route choices are practical. Adjust what you actually use rather than adding gear that becomes another obstacle.

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Learn how your campus works

A campus safety plan should fit your schedule and the places you actually use. An evening laboratory, residence hall, parking area, or off-campus job may have different access and support arrangements.

Find the practical information

Save the campus safety number and the local emergency number. Check whether the school offers escorts, late transport, emergency phones, or alerts. Verify operating hours and eligibility rather than assuming a service is always available.

Learn how to report a broken lock, poor lighting, harassment, or an access problem. A safety issue that affects several people may need a facilities or administrative response, not just individual workarounds.

Housing and shared spaces

Discuss guests, keys, and privacy with roommates. Do not prop open a secured entrance for convenience. If someone pressures you for access, contact staff rather than taking responsibility for enforcing the rule alone.

Before a social event

Make a transport plan and agree with friends about checking in. Each person can change their mind about staying or leaving. A buddy arrangement should support choice, not excuse a host or another person from respecting boundaries.

If something happens, support is still available even if alcohol, a rule violation, or a complicated relationship was involved. Ask a confidential advocate about options and the limits of confidentiality before sharing details you want to keep private.

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Practical skills for students

A useful campus class connects communication and movement to the places students use. Doorways, crowded rooms, stairwells, and transport queues present different choices from an open training mat.

Boundaries and exits

Practice ending a conversation, asking someone to move away from a doorway, and approaching staff for help. Use ordinary words rather than a speech you would not naturally say. Plan how to leave if another person refuses to cooperate.

Basic strikes and kicks

If these are included in your training, learn them under qualified supervision with appropriate equipment. Focus on balance, control, and creating a chance to leave. High kicks, elaborate combinations, or powerful demonstrations are not proof that a response will work in a crowded space.

Escapes and protection

Learn releases and protective movement only in controlled exercises with an agreed stop signal. A short campus workshop should not imply that a knife disarm or a response to several attackers is simple to learn.

A shared responsibility

Students can report unsafe conditions, accompany a friend when asked, and obtain help for someone being harassed. You do not need to fight or physically intervene to be useful.

After a class, choose one skill to practice safely and one campus resource to verify. Keep the exercise modest enough to repeat between study, work, and other commitments. Consistent practice is more useful than an intense session followed by months without review.



Build a campus support list

Campus services vary. Use your institution's official website and ask staff to confirm the details. Save the information somewhere you can reach without searching several menus during a stressful moment.

Know which service does what

- Emergency services respond to immediate danger or urgent medical needs.
- Campus security or public safety can explain local response, escorts, and incident reporting.
- A confidential counselor or advocate may help you explore options and support.
- The office handling sexual misconduct or discrimination can explain institutional procedures.
- Accessibility staff can address barriers in housing, routes, communications, and activities.

Before disclosing sensitive information, ask whether the person must report it, who would receive it, and what confidentiality means in that setting. Policies and legal requirements can differ; do not assume every employee offers the same privacy.

Make the list usable

Include hours, an after-hours alternative, and an accessible contact method. Note whether a service covers off-campus incidents. A friend's number can be useful alongside professional resources, but a friend should not have to manage a crisis alone.

If the first response is unhelpful

You can ask another appropriate service, bring a support person, or seek an off-campus advocate. RAINN's local-provider directory is one starting point for sexual-assault support in the United States.

Review the list each term, especially after moving residence or changing your schedule.

Reference: RAINN care and support



Safety with blindness or low vision

Blind and low-vision people use many different ways to navigate and gather information. Do not assume that everyone has the same hearing, mobility, residual vision, or experience. A plan should build on the person's own methods and preferences.

Start with access and orientation

Review familiar routes, entrance layouts, transport changes, and how to identify staff. An orientation and mobility professional may be useful when a route or technique needs specialist input. A self-defense instructor should collaborate with your existing skills rather than replace them with assumptions.

Make assistance specific

You might say, “Please tell me where the exit is,” or “I would like an arm to follow.” You can also decline help. Unrequested touching, moving a cane, or taking control of a guide dog's harness can interfere with your orientation.

In a training room

Ask for a description of the space and any equipment before the session. Agree on how the instructor announces movement and contact. Demonstrations should be available through clear verbal explanation or consensual tactile instruction where appropriate.

Awareness is not a claim that blindness produces heightened senses or an automatic ability to detect danger. The aim is usable information and choices. Eye contact is not a prerequisite for setting a boundary, asking for help, or participating confidently in class.



Practice awareness in a usable form

The information that helps you navigate may come from sound, touch, remaining vision, a cane, a guide dog, landmarks, or a device. Consider what is reliable in a particular setting and what changes when the environment is crowded or noisy.

Prepare for interruptions

Construction, a moved barrier, a closed entrance, or a sudden crowd can disrupt a familiar route. Decide how you would pause, obtain orientation, and ask for assistance. Do not feel obliged to continue just because someone is impatient behind you.

Keep communication direct

A clear request might be, “Please identify yourself,” “Tell me before you touch my arm,” or “I need directions to the staffed desk.” If speech is difficult or unavailable, plan another method that works for you.

Agree on check-ins

A chosen contact can help with an unfamiliar journey, but continuous location sharing is not required. Decide what information is useful and who controls access. Keep a backup method for situations where an app or mobile connection is unavailable.

Practice without artificial disadvantage

A sighted instructor should not assume that wearing a blindfold briefly reproduces your experience. Ask for exercises built around your real skills and the environments you use.

Review any proposed physical technique for its effect on balance and orientation. A movement that works only after abandoning essential equipment may be a poor option for your situation.



Accessible partner training

Before contact practice, agree on where each person is, how contact will begin, and how it will end. The instructor should describe changes instead of expecting you to infer them from a visual demonstration.

Consent comes first

Tactile instruction can be useful when you want it. It should be explained and requested, never assumed. Choose a verbal stop signal that everyone can hear, and test it before starting the exercise.

Build one skill at a time

Start with orientation and movement in a clear, consistent space. Add controlled partner contact only when you understand the purpose and setup. Changes in resistance, position, or speed should be announced and supervised.

Protect essential equipment

A cane is a mobility aid, and a guide dog is trained for disability-related tasks. Do not treat either as a default weapon or expect a guide dog to provide attack protection. Service-animal access rules are also specific to the jurisdiction; ADA.gov explains the U.S. framework.

Evaluate the lesson

Could you follow the explanations without guessing? Were you asked before being touched? Was the space kept predictable? Did the instructor accept feedback and adapt the task?

If the answer is no, discuss a change or look for another provider. Accessibility is part of competent instruction, not a favor that requires you to tolerate discomfort or reduced safety.

Reference: ADA service-animal guidance



LGBTQ+ safety and personal choice

Harassment or hostility related to identity can affect where people feel comfortable seeking help. Experiences differ, and the person facing the situation should have a say in what support, reporting, or disclosure feels appropriate.

Plan around your circumstances

Identify people and places where you expect respectful assistance. Consider transport, housing, work, school, and any concern about being outed. Sharing a safety plan should not require sharing your identity with everyone involved.

Watch behavior and access

Threats, repeated unwanted contact, pressure to disclose personal information, or attempts to control where you go deserve attention. These problems can involve acquaintances, partners, or community members as well as strangers.

If direct confrontation seems unsafe, leaving or seeking help is a valid choice. You do not have to debate your identity with someone who is threatening or harassing you.

Choose a class carefully

Ask about names and pronouns, changing facilities, partner choice, privacy, and how harassment is handled. An inclusive statement is useful only if the day-to-day behavior supports it.

Offer help without taking over

If supporting someone else, ask what they want. Do not post their story, contact their family, or identify them publicly without permission. Immediate danger may require urgent assistance, but unnecessary disclosure can create additional risks.

The aim is a plan that supports ordinary life and connection, not a demand that someone become less visible to deserve safety.

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Responding to harassment

An insult, a threat, and an attempt to block your movement are different situations. Notice what the person is doing, whether others are joining in, and what options you have for leaving or obtaining assistance.

Choose your response

You may ignore a comment, state a boundary, move toward staff, call a trusted person, or leave. No single response proves confidence. Avoid being drawn into a confrontation simply because someone demands an answer.

If you ask for help, make the request specific: “This person is preventing me from leaving. Please call security.” Another person may be more able to act when they understand the immediate problem.

Keep records when useful and safe

Afterward, note the time, place, exact words you remember, witnesses, and any messages. Preserve original material where possible. Do not remain in danger to obtain footage, and consider the privacy of everyone involved before sharing it.

If the behavior repeats

Repeated unwanted contact may require a broader plan rather than a series of individual responses. A victim advocate can help you consider reporting, documentation, housing, and communications. SPARC provides stalking information and planning resources.

Physical training can be one part of preparation, but it does not replace a response from employers, schools, venues, or authorities responsible for the setting. Ask what changes they can make rather than carrying the entire burden yourself.

Reference: SPARC stalking resources

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Build support that respects privacy

A support network can be small. The important questions are whether people are dependable, whether they respect your choices, and whether they understand what you are asking them to do.

Agree on a simple arrangement

Choose a contact method and a check-in time. Decide what a missed message means, how long to wait, and who to contact next. Avoid vague instructions such as “Do something if I disappear.”

Only share information needed for the plan. Location, identity, medical details, and relationship information should not be passed to others casually. Review access if a relationship changes or a device is shared.

Make community spaces more useful

An organizer can identify a staff contact, provide clear exit information, explain a harassment policy, and arrange accessible ways to ask for assistance. A welcoming poster cannot substitute for a workable response when someone reports a problem.

After an incident

Offer practical help: a ride, company while contacting a service, a quiet place to sit, or assistance recording details. Ask before touching, photographing, or speaking for someone. Avoid demanding a complete account before offering support.

Check the plan again

People move, work schedules change, and some relationships stop feeling safe. Update the arrangement rather than assuming an old group chat is still a reliable support system. A person should be able to leave a support arrangement without losing control of their own information.

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Build on your abilities and preferences

Disability is not one experience. Mobility, sensory processing, communication, pain, fatigue, and support needs differ between people and may vary from day to day. Begin with the person's priorities rather than a standard list of assumed limitations.

Review the environment

An accessible exit, reliable lift, clear path, or usable call system may be the most important part of a plan. Ask what happens if the usual route or support is unavailable. Identify who is responsible for resolving barriers in a workplace, residence, or public venue.

Decide how assistance should work

Tell trusted people what help you want and what they should avoid. Do not assume someone can be lifted, pushed, guided, or separated from equipment safely. A plan can include a short written or recorded explanation if that suits you.

Choose training that listens

Discuss the goal before the technique. Perhaps you want to manage an unwanted approach, improve confidence in transit, or practice calling for help. An instructor should adapt the exercise to that goal and consult appropriate professionals when needed.

No one should pressure you to reveal private medical information to an entire class. Share what is needed for safe participation with the appropriate person.

Review practical access

Consider transport to class, toilets, communication, rest breaks, and cost. If the training itself is inaccessible, the problem is not a lack of commitment by the student.

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Adapt the task rather than forcing it

An adaptive exercise starts with a useful objective and finds a way to practice it within your abilities. It does not begin by insisting that everyone reproduce the same movement.

A communication example

If shouting is not available to you, explore a communication device, an agreed gesture, an accessible alarm, or a prearranged contact method. Test whether it works in the environment where you expect to use it.

A movement example

If a drill requires a rapid turn, work with the instructor on a comfortable alternative and enough space. A wheelchair, walking aid, or prosthesis should be included thoughtfully, with your permission and attention to its function. Do not improvise changes to equipment or brakes during a drill.

A pacing example

Use shorter practice periods, predictable transitions, and rest breaks when needed. A session can be productive without pushing through pain or exhaustion. Record which adjustment helped so it can be repeated next time.

Test the plan, not the person's toughness

Ask whether the response is reachable, understandable, and usable under ordinary conditions. If it is not, change the plan. An inaccessible tool or an unrealistic escape route is not made useful by urging someone to try harder.

For physical techniques, seek an instructor with relevant experience and an appropriate willingness to collaborate. This guide can help frame questions, but it cannot assess individual medical or equipment needs.

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Find accessible support and instruction

Look for providers who can describe their actual access arrangements. “Everyone welcome” is a starting point, but you may need details about entrances, communication, bathrooms, transport, equipment, or how lessons are adapted.

Ask before traveling

Explain the access you need and request a specific answer. Can you visit the space first? Is there a quieter session? Can an interpreter or support person attend? What happens if the lift is unavailable? Confirm costs and booking arrangements too.

Useful starting points

In the United States, the Administration for Community Living lists Centers for Independent Living and other community resources. These organizations may help with local information and referrals; they are not automatically self-defense schools.

ADA.gov explains service-animal requirements and other U.S. disability-rights information. Use current official guidance for access questions, and seek advice about the rules that apply to your particular setting.

Evaluate the response

A provider may not have every answer immediately. What matters is whether staff listen, are honest about limitations, and work toward a feasible arrangement. Avoid a school that makes promises without checking the space or the exercise.

Keep a note of the arrangements that work. With your permission, that information can help a new instructor provide continuity. You should not have to repeatedly explain private history just to receive basic respectful instruction.

Reference: ACL independent-living resources

Reference: ADA service-animal guidance

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Build calm decisions rather than fearlessness

Fear can draw attention to a problem, but it can also make an ordinary task feel harder. The aim of preparation is not to eliminate every anxious feeling. It is to make a few useful choices easier to recognize and practice.

Keep the first task small

Notice where you are, identify a nearby option, and decide on one next action. That might be stepping away, asking a question, contacting someone, or leaving. You do not need a complete solution before taking a useful step.

Use a routine that works for you

Before a class or an unfamiliar journey, take a moment to check what you need. Some people find a comfortable, unforced breath or attention to the ground beneath them helpful. If an exercise makes you feel worse, stop and choose another approach.

Separate preparation from constant vigilance

Repeatedly imagining attacks can make daily life smaller without producing a practical plan. Limit a planning exercise to a defined task, such as checking an exit or saving a number, then return to your activity.

If anxiety or memories of an incident are interfering with life, a qualified mental-health professional or survivor-support service may help. Martial arts can be a chosen activity alongside support, but it is not a substitute for care.

You do not owe anyone a “warrior mindset.” A calm decision to seek help, rest, or leave a class can be a useful expression of judgment.

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Understand stress without judging it

People respond to threat in different ways. Freezing, trying to appease someone, or struggling to speak can be automatic responses. RAINN describes fight, flight, freeze, and fawn as survival responses rather than measures of strength or consent.

Rehearse one available action

In a calm setting, practice a short phrase, a call for assistance, or movement toward a marked exit. Use predictable exercises and increase difficulty only with your agreement and appropriate supervision.

Build a pause into training

Agree that you can stop, take a break, or observe. A partner should not interpret silence as permission to intensify contact. Instructors need to monitor the exercise and check in when a student seems uncertain or overwhelmed.

After a difficult session

Describe what happened in practical terms: “The pace was too fast,” “I could not hear the instruction,” or “That contact did not feel okay.” You do not have to disclose a personal history to justify a change.

After a real incident

Avoid using a training ideal to judge your response. Real events may remove choices that were available in the classroom. Support should begin with what you need now, not an argument about what you should have done.

If reactions persist or feel difficult to manage, consider professional support. Recovery is not a deadline, and practicing self-defense is an option rather than an obligation.

Reference: RAINN survival responses





Put preparation into everyday life

Useful preparation should be light enough to maintain. Choose a few habits that fit your routines instead of trying to follow dozens of rules every time you leave home.

Before a regular journey

Check essentials such as keys, medication, transport, and a usable communication method. If plans are unusual, arrange a check-in with a person you choose. The arrangement should say what happens if you are delayed.

At a destination

Notice the exit and the people who can help. Put belongings where you can manage them without obstructing movement. If a situation becomes uncomfortable, you can move or leave without waiting for a dramatic warning sign.

At home

Resolve a practical issue when you notice it: a poor lock, a dead battery, a blocked path, or an outdated contact. A small repair completed is more useful than a complicated plan left unfinished.

In conversation

Practice an ordinary boundary when the stakes are low. “That doesn't work for me” and “I need to go” can become easier to say through use. You do not need to apologize at length for a reasonable preference.

Review habits periodically, especially after a move, schedule change, injury, or new relationship. Keep what is useful and discard what only adds anxiety or inconvenience. Safety planning should help you participate in life, not become the main activity of the day.

Keep digital information in the plan

Phones, accounts, and connected devices can support a safety plan, but they can also reveal routines or give another person access. Review who can see your location, messages, shared calendars, photos, and security-camera accounts.

Make sharing deliberate

Check the audience before posting a route, home exterior, travel plan, or live location. Consider sharing after an event rather than during it. Ask before posting information that reveals where another person is staying or spending time.

Verify urgent requests

Unexpected demands for money, secrecy, passwords, or verification codes deserve a pause. Contact the person or organization using a method you already trust. The FTC's scam guidance explains common pressure tactics and independent verification.

If someone may be monitoring you

Do not assume deleting history or changing one password makes a device safe. An abusive person may notice changes or retain access elsewhere. Use a safer device if available and consult a specialist advocate about an appropriate sequence of steps.

Keep a fallback

A paper contact list or memorized important number can help if a phone is lost, locked, or flat. Store sensitive information where the people who need it can reach it without exposing it unnecessarily.

Digital safety is an ongoing review, not a one-time setting. Revisit access after a shared household, job, or relationship changes.

Reference: FTC scam guidance

Reference: The Hotline safety planning



Learn the law where you are

Self-defense law depends on the jurisdiction and the facts. A social-media explanation from another state or country may not apply to you. This guide provides general education, not advice about a particular incident.

Questions to research locally

What does the law require before force is justified? How does it distinguish levels of force? What rules apply to retreat, defense of another person, protection of property, and carrying a defensive device? Are there additional rules at work, school, or in transport?

Do not assume that a device being sold online makes it lawful to possess or use where you are. Equally, ownership of a home does not create unlimited permission to use force there.

A Maine starting point

Because the Foundation is based in Maine, readers can begin with Maine Revised Statutes, Title 17-A, section 108, concerning physical force in defense of a person. Its conditions and exceptions matter. The statute is an example of a jurisdiction-specific source, not a rule for every reader.

Verify rather than memorize slogans

Use current official sources and ask a qualified local lawyer about questions that affect your plan. Laws, interpretation, and institutional rules can change. A claim such as “you can always…” is rarely a useful substitute for checking the actual requirements.

The reference pages identify sources and their jurisdiction. Links are starting points for current information, not a guarantee that a summary covers every legal issue.

Reference: Maine statute on defense of a person



Use judgment as well as skill

Self-defense training should encourage restraint and respect for life. A physical skill is not permission to punish disrespect, win an argument, or pursue someone who is leaving.

Reassess when the situation changes

A response that seemed necessary at one moment may no longer be necessary after separation or the end of a threat. Practice ending a drill when the objective is reached instead of automatically continuing a sequence.

Keep property in perspective

A stolen item can be deeply disruptive, but pursuing a person may create a new confrontation. Consider the immediate risks to people and obtain help rather than treating recovery of property as a test of courage.

Think about everyone nearby

Physical actions, sprays, and other devices can affect bystanders. Crowds, traffic, hard surfaces, and confined spaces can change the consequences of a decision. There may be no risk-free option, but acknowledging those consequences supports better judgment.

Practice a useful ending

In a supervised scenario, include movement away, a request for assistance, and a check for injuries. Ask what changed when the threat stopped. Debrief the decision rather than celebrating damage inflicted.

Ethical judgment and legal justification are related but are not identical. Seek qualified advice about the law that applies to you. Avoid any instructor who treats revenge, humiliation, or unnecessary injury as the purpose of self-defense.



After an incident involving force

Once you can do so safely, move away from immediate danger and obtain emergency help for injuries or an ongoing threat. Tell the dispatcher where you are and what assistance is needed.

Give clear information

Describe what you directly observed and distinguish it from what you assume. If you do not know something, say so. Avoid filling gaps with guesses. Follow responders' safety instructions and tell them about urgent access or communication needs.

Preserve information without taking risks

When safe, note the time, location, witnesses, and details you remember. Keep original messages or recordings where possible. Do not alter evidence, return to danger to gather it, or post an account online that exposes other people or complicates the situation.

Get appropriate advice

An incident involving force can have criminal, civil, employment, or other consequences. A qualified lawyer in the relevant jurisdiction can advise you about your rights and obligations. A general guide cannot tell you what detailed statement to make in every circumstance.

An advocate may help with support services and reporting options. Ask what is confidential and what may have to be shared before disclosing sensitive details.

Keep care separate from blame

Medical and emotional support can be useful even if you are unsure about reporting or legal outcomes. There is no requirement to feel calm, certain, or proud of your response before asking for help. Keep practical records and follow up on the assistance you need.

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Personal alarms and pepper spray

These tools serve different purposes and have different limits. Consider the task you want help with before buying anything. A device should be lawful, accessible to you, maintained, and supported by appropriate instructions.

Personal alarms

An alarm may attract attention, but it cannot make a nearby person respond. Check how it activates, whether you can reach it, and how it is silenced and powered. Test it according to the instructions, away from ears and without startling people unnecessarily.

Pepper spray

Chemical sprays can cause injury and may affect the user or bystanders. They do not guarantee that a person will stop. Product design, conditions, access, and the user's ability to operate the device all matter.

Before purchase, check local law and the rules of places you enter. Read the manufacturer's warnings, storage requirements, and exposure instructions. Seek suitable training; an inert training unit may be available for practice. Never spray a training partner or test a live product indoors as a casual exercise.

Store any spray securely, especially where children are present. Replace or maintain it as directed rather than assuming an old canister remains dependable.

Keep a separate plan

Ask what you would do if the tool were unavailable or ineffective. Communication, movement, and obtaining help remain part of the plan. The pictured personal alarm illustrates one option, not an endorsement of a particular product.

Reference: Poison Control pepper-spray information





TASER devices and contact stun devices

Electrical defensive devices are not interchangeable. Some models use probes, while others require contact. Capabilities, warnings, restrictions, and training requirements depend on the exact product. Do not rely on a dramatic demonstration or a generic online description.

Understand the potential harm

“Less-lethal” does not mean harmless. Axon's civilian energy-weapon warnings describe risks that can include serious injury or death, falls, and other complications. Electrical devices should never be described as guaranteed to cause only temporary effects.

Before considering a purchase

Read the current manual and warnings for that exact model. Check possession, carrying, and use rules where you live and travel. Find out whether suitable training is available and whether you can operate, store, and maintain the device as instructed.

Do not test an electrical device on yourself, a friend, or a classmate. Do not assume that a contact device produces the same effect as a probe-based model. A failure to stop someone must be part of any realistic discussion of the tool.

Ask about the whole decision

What situation is the device intended for? How would you avoid unauthorized access? Could carrying it create problems at work, school, an event, or a border? What are the risks to people nearby?

The image represents a conversation about equipment. It is not a product demonstration or instruction for use. Product-specific training and current legal advice are more appropriate than a technique inferred from a photograph.

Reference: Axon civilian device warnings

Choose tools for a specific purpose

Begin with everyday needs: seeing a dark path, contacting someone, attracting attention, or keeping essential information available. The simplest useful item may be a flashlight, a charged phone, a personal alarm, or a paper contact card.

Compare practical questions

- Can I legally carry it in the places I use?
- Can I reach and operate it with my usual clothing, movement, and communication needs?
- What training, charging, inspection, or replacement does it require?
- Can I store it securely and prevent unauthorized use?
- What is my plan if it is unavailable or fails?

Do not confuse a product's aggressive appearance with usefulness. Concealed blades, sharp keychains, and similar items can cause injuries, create legal problems, and escalate a confrontation. They are not routine recommendations for children or a substitute for training.

Try the ordinary task

Check whether you can find your light or contact number without emptying a bag. Adjust placement so that it is useful while preserving secure storage. Practice only in a way allowed by the product's instructions and appropriate for the tool.

Buy less when appropriate

If a product solves no clear problem or creates more complications than it removes, leave it out. A manageable kit and a realistic plan are more useful than carrying equipment you do not understand.





Choose an instructor you can question

An instructor should be able to explain what you are learning, why the exercise is appropriate, and how risks are controlled. Rank and experience matter, but neither replaces clear teaching and respectful conduct.

Look for observable qualities

Students know the stop signal. Contact is explained. Beginners receive corrections without humiliation. The instructor adapts the task rather than pressuring someone through pain. Questions about limits receive direct answers.

Ask about qualifications, teaching experience, first-aid arrangements, safeguarding where children attend, and how concerns are reported. Verify claimed credentials through the relevant organization when that information matters to your decision.

Understand the commitment

Review fees, contract terms, grading costs, equipment requirements, and cancellation policies before paying. A trial lesson or observation can help you decide whether the atmosphere and pace suit you.

Notice warning signs

Guaranteed outcomes, secret techniques that cannot be questioned, pressure to accept unwanted contact, and punishment for raising safety concerns are reasons to reconsider. A school should not demand trust by preventing you from evaluating it.

After the first month

Ask whether you understand more, can practice safely, and feel able to speak up. Improvement may be modest and specific. You should not need to pretend you are ready for every threat to feel that the training is worthwhile.

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Progress through clear learning stages

Progress should reflect control and judgment rather than a calendar alone. An instructor can help identify a suitable next step and the conditions under which it is safe to practice.

Beginning

Learn the training rules, stop signals, comfortable movement, a short boundary, and how to locate an exit. Contact drills remain predictable and closely supervised. The goal is understanding and participation without pain or confusion.

Developing

Repeat a small set of skills with feedback. Add one change at a time, such as a different starting distance or a choice between two exits. Continue to control contact and stop promptly. Ask what the change is intended to teach.

More experienced

Work on judgment, adaptation, and recognizing limits. Carefully designed scenarios may involve more choices, but increased complexity should not mean uncontrolled risk. Experienced students still need consent, correction, and the option to stop.

Review before moving on

Can you explain the exercise, perform it within the agreed limits, and recognize when it is not suitable? If not, more repetition or a different explanation may be more useful than greater intensity.

Fitness, rank, and self-defense judgment are related but distinct. Someone may be athletic yet new to boundary-setting, or experienced in a martial art yet unfamiliar with a particular environment. Training should address the actual learning need.





Use online learning thoughtfully

An online lesson can introduce vocabulary, show a training environment, or help you prepare questions. It cannot observe your balance, correct your contact, or judge whether a drill is suitable for your body and surroundings.

Check the source

Look for an identifiable instructor, clear qualifications, an explanation of safety limits, and a realistic account of what the lesson can teach. Be cautious about edited clips that show only successful attempts or claims that a technique works regardless of size, strength, or circumstances.

Choose safe home practice

Non-contact movement, route planning, communication rehearsal, and reviewing emergency information may be appropriate. Do not attempt choking, forced joint movement, disarming, throws, or live-weapon drills from a video without qualified supervision and proper controls.

Keep notes rather than collecting tricks

Write one question for your instructor and one point you want to understand better. If two videos disagree, do not assume the most confident presenter is correct. The context and the limits of the demonstration may explain the difference.

Protect privacy in communities

Do not post another student's image, an account of someone's assault, or identifying location information without permission. An online discussion is not necessarily confidential.

The Foundation's workout and current resource page are introduced on the following page. Use them as part of learning, with the same attention to physical limits and safe practice that you would bring to any other material.

Learn with the Foundation's resources

The American Martial Arts Foundation offers a Self Defense Home Study Workout through its website. Its video material includes vintage footage of founder Mark Hider. Use the current resource page for the program details and availability.

Watch with a purpose

Begin by identifying the topic of the segment and the objective of the exercise. Notice the space, equipment, partner cooperation, and physical demands. Those conditions may differ from your home and your own abilities.

Pause when something is unclear. Write down the question rather than guessing at a contact technique. Ask a qualified instructor how the movement should be learned and whether it is appropriate for you.

Turn viewing into a useful lesson

Choose one safe, non-contact idea to discuss or rehearse. That could be a boundary phrase, an exit decision, or a question about balance. Do not equate finishing a video with demonstrating competence in the skills shown.

Historical footage also reflects the period in which it was made. Check present-day safety guidance, equipment instructions, and local law rather than treating a video's age or tradition as proof that every detail still applies.

Continue beyond the screen

The Foundation's About page describes its Chinese Goju background and community mission. Contact the organization directly for current instruction and program information. This guide does not promise a particular class schedule or a personal assessment from the founder.

The final page includes direct links to the workout preview and Mark Hider's book.

Reference: Foundation workout resources

Reference: Foundation background





Make public places easier to navigate

In a shop, station, car park, or public building, start with ordinary orientation. Know how to leave and where to find staff. Pay attention to changes that affect movement, such as a closing gate, an argument, or a crowd forming near an exit.

When someone approaches

You can keep a comfortable distance, decline a request, or continue moving. You do not need to hand over your phone or follow someone to a different location to be polite. If assistance is needed, staff may be better placed to provide it.

If you need help

Approach a staffed point where available and describe the specific problem. “Someone has followed me through the last two shops” gives more information than a vague statement that you feel uneasy. You may still ask for help before you are certain what is happening.

Around vehicles

Have your route and essential items organized before entering a busy traffic area. If someone is close to your vehicle in a way that concerns you, remain at a safer location and seek assistance rather than approaching simply because you intended to leave.

If you witness harassment

Consider getting staff or emergency help, checking on the person from a safe distance, or offering a way to leave. Do not make a confrontation larger by insulting the aggressor or filming for an audience.

Your role is to improve the person's options, not to turn the incident into a performance of bravery.

Boundaries in social settings

Pressure often arrives as a request to be agreeable: stay longer, have another drink, go somewhere private, lend a phone, or accept a ride. You can change your mind even if you previously agreed.

Keep an exit available

Know how you would leave and where you could wait. If you came with friends, agree that someone can go home without having to persuade the whole group. A host should respect that choice.

Consent is specific

Agreement to one activity is not agreement to another. Silence, uncertainty, or inability to make a free decision should not be treated as permission. Respect another person's hesitation or refusal without negotiation.

Help a friend without taking control

Ask, “Would you like to leave?” or “Do you want me to stay with you?” Offer a practical option and listen to the answer. If someone appears seriously unwell or in immediate danger, obtain urgent help.

If pressure continues

Move toward a place where assistance is available when possible. You do not need to finish an argument before leaving. If the person is someone you know, consider whether a broader boundary or support plan is needed afterward.

Avoid assigning blame based on clothing, alcohol, dating history, or a decision to attend an event. The responsibility for coercive or violent behavior belongs to the person who chooses it.

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When the risk is immediate

A weapon, several aggressors, a blocked exit, or an escalating assault can sharply reduce your options. No written formula can guarantee the right response. Prioritize survival and use the safest available opportunity to move away and obtain help.

Avoid promises about disarming

Weapon disarms and techniques against multiple attackers are exceptionally uncertain. Do not assume that a short demonstration makes them dependable. This guide does not provide a step-by-step method for those situations.

If property is demanded, consider the risks to your life and other people rather than treating possessions as something you must defend physically. Even compliance does not guarantee safety; reassess the situation as opportunities change.

Keep decisions connected to the environment

A visible doorway may be locked. A crowd may obstruct movement. A nearby person may or may not help. Act on what is available rather than on a memorized ideal sequence.

Once separated

Move to a safer place, contact emergency services when possible, and seek care for injuries. Do not pursue someone or return to a dangerous location to recover an item or obtain evidence.

In training

Any discussion of high-risk situations should emphasize limits, decision-making, and appropriate specialist instruction. Instructors should not stage uncontrolled attacks to prove realism. A student's refusal to participate in a frightening drill is not evidence that they lack the will to survive.

Prepare for independent travel

Before an unfamiliar trip, learn how to arrive, reach your accommodation, and obtain help. Save important details offline so a lost connection does not remove the whole plan.

Before departure

Check official destination information, entry requirements, transport arrangements, and emergency contacts. U.S. travelers can use State Department destination guidance and consider the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program for relevant updates. Other travelers should consult their own government's services.

On arrival

Verify transport through the operator's official process. If an arrangement changes unexpectedly, pause in a staffed place while checking it. You do not need to follow someone who says they have been sent for you without confirmation.

Share selectively

Give a chosen contact the itinerary information they need, and agree on a check-in. Avoid publicly broadcasting your room number, exact live location, or an empty home. Continuous tracking is a choice, not a universal requirement.

Keep essentials available

Plan access to medication, identification, a payment alternative, and communication. Store copies and backups securely rather than putting everything in one easily lost place. What you need depends on the trip and your circumstances.

Research is most useful when it produces a few practical decisions. Identify your first destination, a backup transport option, and the number to call in an emergency before you need them.

Reference: State Department travel help





Accommodation and transport routines

At a hotel or other accommodation, locate exits and check how your door locks. Report a defect rather than assuming it is normal. Security arrangements should never block a necessary fire escape.

Protect room and booking details

Share your room number only when needed. Verify unexpected visitors or service requests through the front desk or official host contact. If something feels wrong with the arrangement, seek assistance from a staffed or otherwise reliable location.

Plan the return journey

Know how late transport runs, where you will wait, and what happens if the last service is missed. Check the route before a phone battery becomes low. An alternative may involve staying somewhere staffed while arranging help.

Keep decisions private when appropriate

You can be friendly without disclosing that you are alone, where you are staying, or your next destination. A simple “I have plans” may be enough to end an unwanted invitation.

If plans change

Update the person expecting your check-in and explain the new time or route. If you cannot make contact, follow the fallback you agreed in advance rather than assuming they will know what happened.

Travel rarely follows a perfect script. A useful plan leaves room for delays, access barriers, and fatigue without making you feel obliged to continue an arrangement that no longer works.

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Take familiar skills into unfamiliar places

Travel changes the setting more than the basic purpose of self-defense. Notice options, preserve your ability to move, communicate a boundary when useful, and seek help. Avoid adding an unfamiliar weapon or complicated technique simply because you are away from home.

Rehearse practical words

Learn how to ask for help, say no, identify an emergency, and request the police or medical assistance in the local language when useful. Keep key phrases in an accessible form. A translation app can help, but should not be the only method.

Practice with ordinary travel conditions

Before departure, notice how luggage, footwear, or a mobility aid affects movement. Keep essential items reachable without setting everything down. Ask an instructor about relevant adaptations rather than improvising contact drills in a hotel room.

Check equipment rules

An item lawful at home may be prohibited by a carrier, venue, or destination. Verify current official rules for every relevant part of the journey before packing a defensive tool. Do not assume that a checked-baggage rule also permits carrying an item after arrival.

Know who can help

Accommodation staff, transport staff, local emergency services, and your embassy or consulate have different roles. Save appropriate contact details and understand the limits of consular assistance. Official travel guidance is a better starting point than a stranger's assurance that everything will be fine.

Reference: State Department travel help



Respect local context without surrendering boundaries

Customs about personal space, eye contact, dress, and conversation differ. Learn enough to communicate respectfully, but do not assume that every uncomfortable encounter is merely a cultural misunderstanding.

Use calm, simple communication

A brief refusal and movement away may be more useful than a long explanation. If language is a barrier, approach an appropriate staff member or another reliable source of assistance. Be careful about following someone to an isolated place for “help.”

Separate custom from law

Social expectations do not tell you the legal rules about force, recording, carrying devices, or reporting an incident. Verify those through official sources and qualified local advice when needed.

Account for your own circumstances

Disability access, gender expression, sexuality, medication, and nationality may affect travel planning. Consult relevant official destination information and choose arrangements that work for you. A general guide cannot judge every destination or personal risk.

Ask without stereotyping

Focus on practical questions: Which transport service is official? Where is the staffed entrance? What number reaches emergency help? Broad claims about an entire culture are less useful than clear local information.

If you experience an incident abroad, seek immediate local help for urgent needs and contact your consular service for the assistance it can provide. Keep expectations realistic: a consulate is not a replacement for local emergency responders, medical services, or legal representation.

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The first priorities after an attack

Get to a safer place if you can and seek emergency help for immediate danger or serious injury. You do not have to decide every next step at once. Begin with the care and support you need now.

Medical needs may not be visible

After pressure to the neck or throat, seek urgent medical assessment even if there are no obvious marks. Symptoms and internal injuries may not be immediately apparent. Breathing difficulty, weakness, confusion, or other serious symptoms require emergency help.

Following sexual assault, a suitable clinician or specialist service can explain medical care and available examination options. Some care is time-sensitive. RAINN can help locate services in the United States. Ask about options even if time has passed or you have already washed or changed.

Choose a support person

You may want someone to accompany you, help make a call, or simply remain nearby. You do not owe them a complete account before receiving support. Ask staff about confidentiality, reporting requirements, and who can be present.

Take the next step only

Practical needs may include transport, medication, a safe place to stay, or care for a child or pet. An advocate can help identify options.

The responsibility for the attack belongs to the person who committed it. Your response during the event does not determine whether you deserve care.

Reference: NHS throat-injury guidance

Reference: RAINN care and support

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Find the right kind of support

Different services address different needs. A martial arts instructor may help with a return to training, but is not automatically qualified to provide trauma therapy, legal advice, or medical treatment.

Match the service to the need

For injuries or urgent symptoms, seek medical care. For ongoing emotional distress, consider a qualified mental-health professional. An advocate may help with practical support and reporting options. A lawyer can advise about legal issues in the relevant jurisdiction.

RAINN's local-provider directory can help locate sexual-assault support in the United States. The National Domestic Violence Hotline offers resources for abuse involving a partner or other relevant relationship. Use a safer device if someone may monitor your access.

Ask about the process

What does the service provide? What is confidential? Is there a cost or waiting list? Can you request an interpreter, accessible format, or a support person? What happens after the first conversation?

A first contact can be brief

You can say, “Something happened and I want to understand my options.” You do not need perfect language or a complete timeline. If a service is not a good fit, ask for another referral.

Support is not reserved for a particular kind of reaction or a particular point in time. A person who appears calm, waited to disclose, or continued an ordinary routine may still want and benefit from assistance.

Reference: RAINN care and support

Reference: The Hotline safety planning

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Support someone without taking over

Begin by listening and asking what would help. Do not interrogate, demand proof, or argue about the person's decisions during the incident. Their immediate needs may be practical and may change over time.

Offer specific choices

You might offer a ride, company while contacting a service, help with a meal, or a quiet place to sit. Give the person room to accept one option and decline another. Ask before physical contact, including a hug.

Respect information

Do not post about the incident, contact other people, or share details without permission unless an applicable duty or immediate emergency requires action. If you have a reporting obligation, be honest about it rather than promising absolute secrecy.

Avoid pressure to recover on schedule

Do not insist that someone return to training, report, forgive, confront another person, or “be strong.” Explain available options and support their decisions where possible. Professional advice may help with complex safety or care needs.

Keep your role realistic

You can care deeply without becoming the person's only source of support. Encourage appropriate services and get help yourself if the responsibility feels overwhelming, while protecting their privacy.

A useful follow-up is simple: “Would it be okay if I checked in tomorrow?” Consistency and respect often matter more than finding an impressive thing to say.



Return to activity on your terms

Some people find martial arts, movement, or self-defense classes helpful after an incident. Others do not want that experience, or do not want it yet. Participation is a choice, not a requirement for recovery.

Begin with control over the setting

You may prefer to observe, attend with a trusted person, take a short private introduction, or start with non-contact movement. Ask about the space and class structure before attending.

Set clear agreements

Discuss partner choice, touch, stop signals, and the ability to step outside. You do not have to describe an assault to justify those preferences. An instructor should accept limits without turning the conversation into a test of trust.

Notice what the activity gives you

Perhaps it offers routine, enjoyable movement, social connection, or a specific skill. Those are worthwhile outcomes. Do not measure recovery by willingness to fight, tolerate contact, or reenact an event.

Change the plan when needed

A useful activity one week may feel difficult the next. You can reduce intensity, pause, or choose something else. If symptoms or distress interfere with life, appropriate professional support can sit alongside any activity you choose.

Healing does not require becoming a different person. The aim is room to make choices and participate in life, with support that respects your pace and circumstances.



Review what has actually improved

Progress is easier to see when the questions are concrete. Instead of asking whether you feel ready for anything, ask what you understand or can do better than before.

A brief review

- Can I identify help and exits in places I regularly use?
- Do I have a boundary phrase or communication method that suits me?
- Have I checked a practical part of my home or travel plan?
- Do I understand the limits and safety rules of the skills I practice?
- Do I know where to obtain qualified support or advice?

Record one example

Describe an ordinary moment when you used a habit: you changed a transport plan, asked a clear question, declined unwanted contact, or reported an access problem. There does not need to have been danger for the decision to be useful.

Identify the next learning need

Choose something specific enough to discuss with an instructor or support person. “I lose balance during this movement” is more useful than “I need to be tougher.”

Keep the review realistic. A confident mood after a lesson is not proof of competence, and an anxious day does not erase what you learned. Use feedback and repetition to understand the difference between familiarity, demonstrated skill, and judgment in a changing situation.



Keep skills useful over time

Skills and plans need occasional review. Routes change, equipment wears out, and a movement may need adjustment after an injury or a change in fitness. Continuing education should address those changes rather than simply adding harder techniques.

Repeat with a purpose

Choose a small set of skills with your instructor. Practice them within agreed safety limits and ask for feedback on control, balance, communication, and the decision to leave. More intensity is not always the next useful step.

Test one change

In a supervised setting, a different starting position or a new exit choice may reveal a gap. Change one condition at a time so you can understand what affected the result.

Review everyday arrangements

Check contact details, batteries, access codes, transport options, and the availability of support. Replace a plan that depends on a closed business or a person who is no longer available.

Keep limits visible

No level of practice makes outcomes certain, particularly when weapons, surprise, or several people are involved. A responsible instructor helps you understand those limits without making ordinary life feel impossible.

The planning pages that follow offer a manageable way to continue. Use them as a starting point, adapt them to your circumstances, and revisit the parts that have practical value.

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Share what helps without overstating it

You can support other people by sharing reliable resources, modeling respectful boundaries, and helping make a setting safer. You do not need to present yourself as an expert to contribute.

Stay within what you know

Recommend a qualified instructor or explain how you found a useful service. Do not teach contact techniques to friends or children simply because you once attended a class. A partial memory of a drill can omit the controls that made it safe.

Ask before helping

Offer company, information, or assistance with a practical task. Let the person choose. Avoid assuming that age, disability, identity, or a past experience tells you what they need.

Improve the environment

Report broken lighting, blocked exits, inaccessible routes, or repeated harassment to the responsible organization. Ask for a clear response and follow up when appropriate. Personal preparation and institutional responsibility should work together.

Share sources carefully

Use the reference links to point someone toward current information. Explain which sources concern U.S. services or Maine law, and encourage local verification elsewhere. Do not turn general guidance into a promise about a particular outcome.

The Foundation's emphasis on discipline, respect, and community service provides a useful context for this work. Learning is most valuable when it increases your choices and helps you respect the choices of others.



Your personal safety plan

Complete the parts that fit your life. Keep this page private if it contains sensitive details. Review it after a move, schedule change, or change in the people who support you.

People and communication

My chosen contact and a backup: _____

My check-in method and time: _____

What we will do if a check-in is missed: _____

Places and practical needs

A place where I can ask for help: _____

My usual way home and an alternative: _____

Access, medication, equipment, or assistance I need: _____

One action to complete

The change I will make: _____

Who can help, if I want assistance: _____

Review date: _____

If someone unsafe could find this plan, choose a different way to store it with advice from a suitable advocate. Do not fill in details simply because a blank asks for them.

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A four-week practice plan

This optional plan organizes low-risk preparation. Adjust the pace to your circumstances. Physical contact skills belong with a qualified instructor, not in unsupervised homework.

Week one — know your options

Review one regular route and identify a staffed place where you could ask for help. Save a useful contact and an offline backup. Check one household issue, such as a lock, light, or blocked path.

Week two — use your words

Choose two short boundaries and a request for assistance. Practice with a supportive person who knows the exercise and respects the stop signal. Use speech, gestures, or a communication aid that suits you.

Week three — evaluate instruction

Contact a suitable school or instructor. Ask about consent, access, pace, fees, and how beginner contact is controlled. Observe or try a session if it is appropriate. Record one question and one useful lesson.

Week four — review and maintain

Complete or update the personal plan on the previous page. Check that the people named agree to their role. Choose a manageable practice routine and a date to review it.

Keep a brief record

What worked for me: _____

What I want to change: _____

My next step: _____

There is no pass or fail. If a task is inaccessible or distressing, adapt it or seek appropriate support rather than forcing completion.



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Repeated contact and unwanted monitoring

Repeated messages, unwanted appearances, threats, or monitoring can form a pattern that deserves attention even when individual events seem easy to dismiss. SPARC explains stalking in terms of a pattern associated with fear or substantial emotional distress; legal definitions vary.

Plan with support

A suitable advocate can help you consider the person's access to your home, work, contacts, accounts, and routines. There is no single instruction to block, confront, leave, or change every account that fits all situations. Actions can affect the pattern, so plan around your circumstances.

Keep a factual record if safe

Note dates, times, locations, what occurred, and any witnesses. Preserve messages and original files where possible. Store records somewhere the other person cannot readily access. Do not put yourself in danger to collect evidence.

Account for technology

A shared account, device, vehicle, or home system may reveal information. If monitoring is possible, consider using a safer device to contact support. Ask for help before changes that could alert the person or remove information you may need.

Decide who needs to know

A workplace, school, building manager, or trusted contact may be able to help with access and response arrangements. Share only what is needed and agree on the next action if the person appears or contacts them.

For immediate danger, contact emergency services when safe. For ongoing planning, use SPARC's resources and the National Domestic Violence Hotline where relevant.

Reference: SPARC stalking resources

Reference: The Hotline safety planning

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Sources and reference links

Use the linked titles to open the original sources. Sources reviewed September 20, 2026. Check current guidance and local rules before relying on a legal, travel, or product detail.

American Martial Arts Foundation — About
Organization background and Chinese Goju tradition.

American Martial Arts Foundation — Resources
Current home study workout information and availability.

NCMEC — KidSmartz
U.S. child-safety education for families and educators.

NHTSA — Pedestrian Safety
U.S. pedestrian and road-safety guidance.

Ready.gov — Family Communication Plan
U.S. household communication worksheet; downloadable PDF.

Federal Trade Commission — How to Avoid a Scam
U.S. consumer guidance on pressure, verification, and reporting.

Maine Legislature — Title 17-A, section 108
Maine law only; conditions and exceptions require careful review.

Axon — Civilian Energy Weapon Warnings
Manufacturer warnings dated October 3, 2024; check current model documents.



Care access and specialist support

Use the linked titles to open the original sources. Sources reviewed September 20, 2026. Check current guidance and local rules before relying on a legal, travel, or product detail.

Poison Control — How Dangerous Is Pepper Spray?
U.S. poison-center information on exposure and health effects.

RAINN — Fight, Flight, Freeze, and Fawn
Explanation of automatic responses to threat and trauma.

RAINN — Finding Care and Local Support
U.S. care navigation. Local-provider directory: centers.rainn.org.

Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS — Injury to the Throat
UK clinical patient information; use local emergency services elsewhere.

National Domestic Violence Hotline — Safety Planning
U.S. domestic-abuse support and individualized planning resources.

SPARC — Stalking Definition and FAQs
U.S. stalking education; legal definitions differ by jurisdiction.

Administration for Community Living — Independent Living
U.S. Centers for Independent Living and local information.

U.S. Department of Justice — Service Animals
U.S. ADA requirements; other jurisdictions have different rules.

U.S. Department of State — Crisis Response Abroad
Planning and assistance for U.S. travelers abroad.



Continue learning

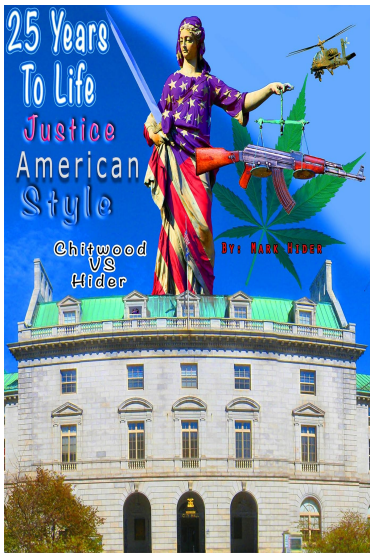
Self Defense Home Study Workout

Explore the Foundation’s workout resources and video preview featuring vintage footage of Mark Hider. Learn contact skills with qualified supervision, and adapt practice to your abilities.

Watch the workout video preview

Visit the Foundation’s resource page

A book by founder Mark Hider



25 Years to Life
Justice American Style

A separate work by the Foundation’s founder, offering his account of a Maine county jail experience and perspective on the American war on drugs. It is a personal justice narrative rather than a self-defense technique manual.

View the book on Amazon

About this edition

Organization information, flag logo, and original founder photograph: American Martial Arts Foundation. The founder photograph was restored from the supplied image. Book cover: Amazon. Other scenario images are AI-generated illustrations and do not depict Foundation staff or students. Reference titles link to independent sources; inclusion does not imply their endorsement of this guide.