

- ◆ Be aware of your surroundings and your feelings.
- ◆ Trust your instincts — everyone has innate skills (physiological reactions) to help identify and deal with threat, danger, or coercion.
- ◆ Be assertive (verbally and non-verbally) to protect your rights.
- ◆ Take a deep breath to help you relax and remain calm and in control.
- ◆ Assess the situation and decide on a course of action.
- ◆ Think about acting, bluffing, or faking compliance to buy time.
- ◆ Use your voice to distract the perpetrator and draw attention to you (yell or talk loudly).
- ◆ Use a calm, low voice for de-escalation
- ◆ Use fingers, fists, palms, elbows, knees, and feet as your weapons.
- ◆ Use the element of surprise and react quickly to ESCAPE.
- ◆ If unable to escape, do what you need to do to survive.
- ◆ Respect and believe in yourself.

## W On the Job W

- ◆ Tune in to your surroundings and be aware of what safety threats are possible.
- ◆ Use confident body language and verbal skills.
- ◆ Know the location of all safety aids and systems.
- ◆ Avoid using impolite behavior. Be calm, courteous and gracious. Listen more than talk.
- ◆ Identify and avoid dangerous or precarious locations and situations, if possible.
- ◆ Dress sensibly at work to allow for comfort and ease of movement.
- ◆ Anticipate how you would respond to various events and stay alert.
- ◆ Attend training on conflict resolution, personal safety, team work and stress reduction.
- ◆ Know the job's safety plans, grievance procedures, harassment policies, employee rights.
- ◆ Know predictors of imminent violence (abusive language, threats, body telegraphing, client history or record) and that violence rarely strikes without warning.
- ◆ Establish an employee "safe-room," and use a "buddy system" or "tag-team."
- ◆ Keep your distance (safe space) from strangers and be aware of boundaries with clients.
- ◆ Avoid discussing plans and personal information in earshot of others that you don't know.
- ◆ Assess possible weapons (books, scissors, clip board, keys, pen, umbrella) you may have at your disposal, or that could be used against you (always a possibility with weapons).
- ◆ Ask peers to share their odd or threatening job experiences and seek peer support.
- ◆ Have good post incident protocols to aid victims and witnesses of workplace violence.

## W In the Car W

- ◆ Make certain your car has gas, water, a spare with jack, a working horn, spare change, a flashlight, jumper cables, a first aid kit.
- ◆ Ask to see identification of anyone stopping to assist you (police too!).
- ◆ If you have a flat tire at night try to keep going along the shoulder to a gas station.
- ◆ Use extra caution in parking garages. Scan the garage as you enter it.
- ◆ Have your car keys in your hand as you approach your car assuredly.
- ◆ If stranded and you accept assistance, pretend that someone else will soon be arriving and stay alert and prepared to not be victim of a "Good Samaritan" ploy.
- ◆ If someone is in your car forcing you to drive, turn on the flashers, press the horn, stop suddenly, get out and run or cause an accident with other cars (with your seat belt on).
- ◆ If someone approaches your car to force entry, lay on the horn and drive off quickly.
- ◆ If you have your windows open be aware of what's going on around you.

- ◆ Keep car doors locked while in or away from your vehicle.
- ◆ Scan the area as you approach the car and check the floor/back seat.
- ◆ If being forced into your car, throw away the keys (distracting the attacker) and run.
- ◆ Be careful about what you leave on your seats or dashboard--valuables and items with your name, address, phone number, or e-mail address on them (e.g., mail, cell phone).

## W In Your Client's Home W

- ◆ Make sure you understand that you are on *their turf* – a natural safety dilemma.
- ◆ When you schedule a visit, let them know when to expect you. Let them advise you about any safety concerns in their area. Ask them to watch for you as you leave your car upon arrival. Have them watch you go to your car as you leave.
- ◆ Step back and observe the home. Look to see its hiding places, vulnerable points, blocked exits, and escapes routes.
- ◆ Listen at the door before knocking and stand to the side when the door is opened.
- ◆ As you enter the home, notice the general interior layout, exits, and phones. Position yourself for an easy exit, if necessary.
- ◆ Wear clothes you can move in and comfortable shoes.
- ◆ Keep your purse locked in the trunk. Keep keys, a little money, and phone in pockets or waist pack (on your person).
- ◆ Play *what if* games to mentally prepare for various situations (e.g., threats by a client, suggestive comments, stranger threat, and out-of-control family members or neighbors).
- ◆ Look around and think of what objects could be used as weapons.
- ◆ If anything looks out of the ordinary in or around the dwelling, or you feel uneasy about the situation you are in, leave and call the police.
- ◆ Travel with a cell phone. Keep it on and preprogrammed to Call 911 for assistance in any emergency or threatening situation.
- ◆ Take a “buddy” or law enforcement with you on potentially dangerous home visits.
- ◆ Most importantly, know your client. Be aware of what they may be capable of based on size, gender, mental health status, medications, legal status, history, etc.

## W Two Common Myths About Self Defense W

- ◆ ***It takes years of training to defend yourself.*** False! The vital preparedness skills can be taught in just a few classes. Undoubtedly, practice is essential. But, by adding self-defense skills to your own daily activities, workouts, and common situations, you can work to gain confidence to be proactive in your own defense.
- ◆ ***You have to be physically strong in order to deflect an attacker.*** False! Using mental and verbal techniques to avoid/escape a situation requires no strength whatsoever and is your first main weapons. Your ability to escape an attack involves submission holds or impact techniques that are aimed at vulnerable areas--ears, eyes, nose, throat, groin, knees, feet, or pressure points--that are not layered under muscles and are usually easy to reach. When used with conviction and the added adrenaline you become quicker, stronger, and more effective. Additional physical techniques utilize leverage, not strength, and are very effective. Remember also that awareness can go a long way in preventing attacks and physical techniques are your back up to be used in emergency situations only. Likewise, calmness coupled with quick-thinking and quick-acting responses can thwart most situations lessening the demand for physical strength. Staying healthy and in shape helps since an able body is better able to defend itself.

**A study by NASW (March 2006) reports that 55% of licensed social workers face safety issues. A similar study in *Social Work* (May 1998) states that school social workers found “low-level aggressive” acts the most common reported. Clients, their family or friends, bullying bosses or co-workers, as well as criminals may all require you to protect yourself. Your ability to stay cool, use your head, and deal in the “here and now” will assist you in your ultimate goal--escaping without harm. The underlying principle in self-defense is to avoid danger and physical confrontation. The use of *Everyday Self Defense* skills adds the dimension of learning to protect and defend, verbally, mentally, and physically, against attacks upon you in common situations. Stay alert and stay safe!**