

The Science & Psychology  
of  
**SELF DEFENCE**  
Strategies for Staying Safe





# The Science & Psychology *of* **SELF DEFENCE** Strategies for Staying Safe

## *Table of Contents:*

1. <i>The need for Self defence</i>	1
2. <i>Why Humans Attack</i>	2
3. <i>What makes a victim</i>	3
4. <i>Understanding the Gift of Fear</i>	4
5. <i>When the threat becomes reality - the stages of an attack</i>	5
6. <i>Preventing and Attack</i>	6
7. <i>Fighting back</i>	7
8. <i>Take responsibility for your Safety</i>	8

# The Science & Psychology of SELF DEFENCE

Strategies for Staying Safe

## 1. The need for Self defence

Today's world seems to get more dangerous by the year. The number of muggings on the street rise steadily, fuelled by a foundering economy and the increase of pocket-sized personal valuables such as mobiles, iPods and other handheld electronics. In addition, the number of attacks on private citizens by teens is up, making the streets a dangerous place for everyday normal people.

A 2006 study led by Professor Trevor Bennett of the Centre for Criminology, University of Glamorgan interviewed detainees in prisons and young offenders' institutions. In reply to questions asked by Bennett and his team, those interviewed revealed that the five main motives for street robbery were:

- good times/partying
- keeping up appearances/flash cash
- buzz/excitement
- anger/desire to fight
- informal justice/righting wrongs



A drugs connection was a factor in 60% of all robberies discussed with the offenders, who admitted to four main kinds of drugs-related motive:

- to fund dependent drug use
- to pay for recreational drugs for partying
- being under the influence of drugs
- informal justice



# The Science & Psychology of **SELF DEFENCE** Strategies for Staying Safe

According to those interviewed, some offenders went out alone with the intention to rob an easy target in order to buy drugs. Some robbed in groups or gangs for excitement, while others stole from individuals as a form of retaliation, whether for real or perceived wrongs triggered by drugs use. <sup>1</sup>

So what is the answer? Carrying a weapon? Going about armed illegal, and studies show that the run of the mill civilian is more likely to have his weapon taken from him by an attacker and used to his own harm. The reason for this is that most of us have a natural hesitance to harm our fellow man - a reluctance that is almost certainly not shared by an attacker, who is already committed to violence. <sup>2</sup>

Living in fear and never leaving one's home is likewise not an option. The true answer is learning how to avoid bad situations, and how to handle yourself should you be unfortunate enough to end up in a position where you can neither walk away nor talk a would be attacker out of their intent. In every situation, there is a moment when you can change everything by making the right or wrong choice. This booklet is designed to show you the right choices.

Tip: Look at the things you carry on your person that might tempt someone to attack you with theft as a motive. Figure out ways to keep valuables out of sight - using a Bluetooth with a mobile, for instance, or wearing a shirt or sweater long enough to conceal an iPod clipped to your belt.

# The Science & Psychology of **SELF DEFENCE** Strategies for Staying Safe

## 2. *Why Humans Attack*

A look at the history of species through time shows a definable pattern; predator vs. prey, fight vs. flight. Avoiding conflict is common among animals - non-lethal alternatives are often used to determine superiority and the submissive 'loser' leaves without serious injury. 3

A show of aggression is more common than a lethal display of force, with obvious exceptions being linked to basic needs. These circumstances would include fighting over food or shelter in time of dire need. Fights may also take place for the right to mate and perpetuate the species, but played out roles of posturing and submission are still more likely in the case of the latter.



Why do humans attack each other? The answer generally lies in unmet needs as opposed to animal instinct, according to an extensive study conducted by twenty of the world's leading scientists who concluded that:

“(1) It is scientifically incorrect to say that we have inherited a tendency to make war from our animal ancestors;

(2) it is scientifically incorrect to say that war or any other violent behaviour is genetically programmed into our human nature;



# The Science & Psychology of SELF DEFENCE

Strategies for Staying Safe

- (3) it is scientifically incorrect to say that in the course of human evolution there has been a selection for aggressive behaviour more than for other kinds of behaviour;
- (4) it is scientifically incorrect to say that humans have a 'violent brain'; and
- (5) it is scientifically incorrect to say that war is caused by 'instinct' or any single motivation." 4

In simpler terms, deliberate violence is not genetically or instinctively driven. It is a response to a perception (real or imagined) that a need is being unmet. Maslow's hierarchy of needs lists basic human needs in the following order:

- Physiological needs (food, water, shelter)
- Safety needs (safety and security)
- Belongingness needs (love, affection)
- Esteem needs (self-esteem, approval from others, respect)
- Personal fulfilment (happiness, contentment) 5

When the most basic needs are unmet, violence can be triggered. For most of the others, attack is generally not the response - however, when warped needs cause an imbalance, normal behaviour may become warped as well. The need for drugs to sooth an addiction is an example of a warped situation in which violence may be an acceptable option to the person addicted. The need to act 'tough' or perform acts of violence to gain respect is another.

Dissatisfaction with one's life or circumstances can misguidedly lead a person to attack another in the belief that they are somehow to blame, or because the aggressor feels 'owed' something (or denied something available to their victim, such as money, possessions, a job or social status). However, not all aggressive behaviour is precursor to an actual attack. Discerning the difference between

a true attack and an incidence of posturing is an important part of self defence, and will be covered later in this booklet.

Tip: Be aware of people around you who may be seeking to meet warped needs by attacking you. Awareness is a huge step towards keeping yourself out of situations where you might become a target.

# The Science & Psychology of SELF DEFENCE

Strategies for Staying Safe

## 3. What makes a victim

Various factors may contribute to an individual being identified as a possible victim by a would-be predator. Many of these are things the victim is utterly unaware they are presenting; actions and reactions that make them look weak and vulnerable.

A study conducted in New York in 1981 consisted of 60 random individuals walking down the street being videotaped in black and white without audio. The tapes were shown to prisoners sentenced for violent assault, who were asked to select individuals they felt would be easy targets.

A pattern emerged as offender singled out many of the same individuals as potential victims. Analysis revealed that the way these individuals



walked and carried themselves made them look timid and unsure. Non verbal communication has since emerged as one of the primary ways predators select their victims. 6

Additional factors that can contribute to marking you as a victim are timidity of speech or demeanour and cowering in the face of belligerence or aggression. Signs of fear or anxiety encourage a would-be predator, who will attack expecting you to curl up in a submissive ball when threatened.

Victims are also more commonly attacked when they are alone or in the company of someone who appears vulnerable (Example - man alone, man with friend but both drunk, man accompanied by wife or child). Predators will attempt to isolate potential victims from the groups also, creating their own opportunity. You could also be targeted if you inadvertently put yourself in a vulnerable position - deciding to step into an alley alone for a smoke, flashing cash or valuables, or drinking to excess

Tip: Deliberately taking action to avoid fitting the 'victim profile' is one of the most effective things you can do to keep from being victimized. Walk confidently; stay with a group in dangerous or unfamiliar territory; and make clear eye contact while speaking loudly and confidently if approached.

# The Science & Psychology of SELF DEFENCE

Strategies for Staying Safe

## 4. Understanding the Gift of Fear

Fear can be your best friend in a dangerous situation. Gavin de Becker, author of *The Gift of Fear*, says, "You have the gift of a brilliant internal guardian that stands ready to warn you of hazards and guide you through risky situations." 7

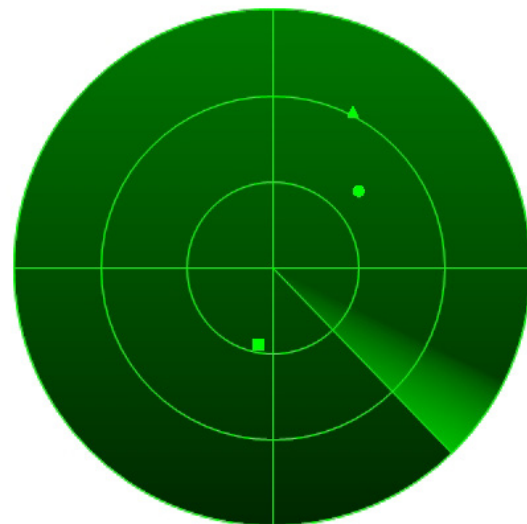
In the right context, fear is healthy. It warns you of danger and prompts you towards self preservation. Unfortunately, many individuals shut down fear as irrational or ignore it until too late, concentrating instead on their worry over what others will think of them.

This behaviour can kill you. Ignoring fear because you are worried about 'being rude' can allow someone to talk you into a bad situation, manoeuvre you into a bad location, invade your personal space and get close enough to incapacitate you before you have a chance to react. Fear is supposed to make you react before you get to that point.

Listening to your instincts can keep you out of trouble. If you feel unsure about following a stranger away from the group, don't do it. If you hear a cry for help from a dark alley and hesitate, perhaps it is for a reason. If you get a prickling in the back of your neck while walking down a street alone at night, take a hard look at your surroundings and prepare yourself.

This is not intended to cause you to constantly live in a state of fear or be looking over your shoulder each time you venture out in public. The goal is simply to encourage you to pay attention to those antennae that goes up when danger looms.

Fear has another use. It activates the amygdala and can spike your adrenalin, increasing response time and physical strength. 8 This can literally save your life, if you can channel that fear into positive action - by either running away or defending yourself. Don't let fear paralyse you, and don't ignore it - fear is your friend.



Tip: Make a list of times you 'knew' something was wrong, and either ignored or paid attention to your fear - and the outcome of your action or inaction.

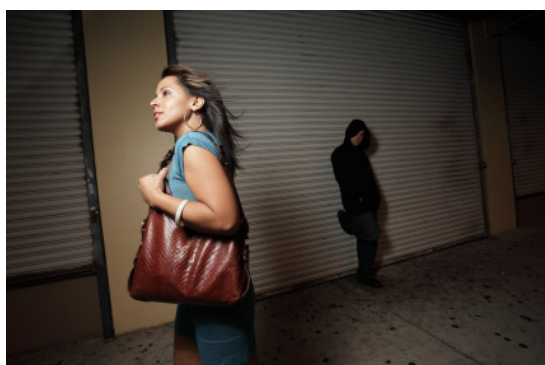


# The Science & Psychology of **SELF DEFENCE** Strategies for Staying Safe

## 5. *When the threat becomes reality - the stages of an attack*

There are four main stages to an attack. Each stage represents an opportunity for you to break the cycle and regain control. Knowing what the stages are enables you to recognize and deal with them appropriately and in a timely manner.

**Stage one is planning.** The would be attacker builds himself up, and decides to make an attack based on whatever his motive (unmet/warped need) may be - money, drugs, power, respect, etc. This stage includes victim selection, deciding on a location setting up the crime, laying in wait and stalking. Opportunistic attacks may seem unplanned and impulsive, but they do still include this stage; just accelerated or with some of the steps missing.



**Stage two is initiation.** The would be attacker makes the first move, feeling out whether or not their choice of victim was a wise one. They may approach you directly, attempt to manoeuvre you into isolation, engage you in conversation or draw your attention to something to distract you, or invade your personal space. If the second stage goes smoothly, the third stage follows swiftly.

**Stage three is escalation.** This is the point at which aggression makes its appearance, but has not yet reached a level of physical violence. Verbal threats, intimidation, posturing and aggressive feints accompany this stage. A typical attacker will have a healthy sense of self preservation themselves, and will attempt to force you into submissiveness from the beginning then keep you submissive with threats, lessening the danger to themselves.





**Stage four is violence.** The first three stages have gone without a hitch for the attacker, and he can do whatever he wants, now. If you've let matters get this far, you are in serious trouble - that doesn't mean you have to give up, it just means you missed a lot of opportunities to shut the attack down.

Each of the four stages has weaknesses that can be exploited to derail an attack and give you the opportunity to get away. Recognizing these opportunities and taking full advantage of them can keep the situation from escalating to full blown violence.

Tip: If you've ever been unfortunate enough to have been attacked, think back and attempt to divide the incident into the four stages listed above. If not, there is almost certainly a film or television programme you can remember watching and shaking your fist at the screen as it became increasingly apparent an attack was in the offing.

# The Science & Psychology of **SELF DEFENCE** Strategies for Staying Safe

## 6. Preventing and Attack

If you can recognize the early stages of an attack, you can often avoid interaction with a predator altogether. This is where real self defence training starts - not with hand to hand combat moves, but with a defined and deliberate attempt to trigger your own natural defences at the first sign of trouble.

Take pre-emptive steps to escape an impending attack and protect yourself from violence. This can be easily achieved by recognizing the stages of an attack and taking appropriate action at the appropriate time.

### **Avoidance in the planning stage:**

You can often avoid conflict completely simply by avoiding locations and/or behaviour that make you fit the victim profile. Make yourself an unattractive target by concealing valuables, moving and speaking with confidence, avoiding isolated areas and refraining from drinking to excess and making yourself vulnerable.



### **Evasion in the initiation stage:**

Listen to your fear if someone makes you uncomfortable. Forget about being polite, or not wanting to hurt someone's feelings. Ask someone crowding you to step off in no uncertain terms. Distance yourself and refuse to be drawn into conversation if something feels off. Don't let anyone talk you into separating yourself from a group or allowing them private access to you, even if they scoff at or ridicule you, or pretend to understand your hesitation but still try to convince you things are all right.

### **Deflection in the escalation stage:**

In the event that the situation is escalating before you realize what is happening, you still have time to deflect an attack. If you can distract the aggressor long enough to escape, do it. Make eye contact, speak in a loud but calm voice and ask what they want. If they are after your cash or a valuable item, throw it past them and run.



# The Science & Psychology of **SELF DEFENCE** Strategies for Staying Safe

Assertive verbalisation (screaming) and making noise to attract attention will cause many would be attackers to back off. A study conducted in 1985 included interviews with violent offenders in US prisons. The interviews revealed that many would be attackers back off in the face of screaming and other active resistance to attempted assault. 10 Acting absolutely crazy (spitting, screeching and gibbering maniacally) works well, too!



**Reacting in the violence stage:** Your reaction here will depend on a variety of factors, and will be covered more in depth in the next section. The main thing to remember is that you should be focused on survival. Your goal is not to 'win' or to 'defeat the enemy'. Your goal is to escape, and you.

must never lose sight of that goal. You only fight when you can't run, and you only fight until you can get away safely.

Tip: Run different scenarios in you mind and practice talking loudly, saying 'No!' and 'Get back!'. By 'practicing' you can ready yourself in case the day ever comes that you need to get out of a bad situation. The last thing you want to do is freeze and let the chance to stop the attack pass by you unnoticed.



# The Science & Psychology of **SELF DEFENCE** Strategies for Staying Safe

## 7. *Fighting back*

When all attempts at defusing or deflecting the situation fail and you find yourself cornered, you may have to resort to violence in self defence. Again, the goal is not to win the fight. You win by getting away. Therefore, your goal is to distract and disable your attacker enough to enable you to escape. A few points to remember:

Your attacker expects you to cower. Surprise is on your side, and if you can inflict an extreme amount of pain in one move, you will have a good chance of being able to incapacitate your assailant long enough to get away.



Fighting Fair can get you killed. If your attacker is bigger and stronger than you are (and if he picked you as a victim, he probably is) then fighting fair will get you pounded into the dirt.

You have to drop your inhibitions. The fact that you have compunction about hurting another person may be what makes you a better person than your opponent, but moral high ground will do you no favours here. This means you have to recognise that your assailant just gave up the right to be treated as a 'person'. They have become a monster. Your goal now is to escape the monster by whatever means necessary.

This may sound harsh, but it is almost a guarantee that your attacker has zero compunction over hurting you, so feeling sorry for them is a mistake. The difference between you and them is that if you hurt them enough to get away, you will leave. If they have decided to hurt you, there may be no such stopping point.

# The Science & Psychology of SELF DEFENCE

Strategies for Staying Safe

As much as possible strike at the these vulnerable areas

- Eyes
- Ears
- Shin
- Groin
- Fingers
- Feet

You should be using everything at your disposal to fight back and cause the maximum amount of pain in a minimum amount of time. Open hand strikes, knee or elbow jabs and thumbs in the eyes are all good ways to quickly incapacitate an assailant.

The nose is especially vulnerable and bleeds easily; if you can manage a hard strike to the nose with the palm of your hand, you can often break an attacker's hold. Scram and shout, call for help constantly. Never believe promises of not hurting you. Remember they have the option of not fighting, you don't.

The most important thing is to fight back and do everything possible to escape, remember they wanted a victim not a fight, when you take a stand in your own defence you are showing them it won't be easy.

Fighting deprives the attacker of time, once they attack, they have committed a crime, the longer you delay them, chances are their own need not caught can kick in and they will run away.

Tip: All of this sounds harsh, and you may not be able to imagine doing it to another human being, but you have to remember the alternative - staying passive and allowing them to hurt and possibly kill you. This is why it is important to decide to everything you can to get away

# The Science & Psychology of SELF DEFENCE

Strategies for Staying Safe

## 8. Take responsibility for your Safety

Krav Maga is the most comprehensive, realistic and effective self defence system in the world. Unlike many martial arts, which have become more of an art than a realistic self defence option, Krav Maga was designed specifically for hand to hand combat.

Take responsibility for your Safer ,by taking a Self Defence course with [www.kravmagaireland.com](http://www.kravmagaireland.com)



It is the self defence system of Israeli army and is deigned to teach every day normal people how to protect themselves as quickly as possible,

It was brought to Ireland by Patrick Cumiskey, who has trained over 10,000 people how to protect themselves.

The psychology behind Krav Maga is the concept of turning fear into an asset instead of a hindrance. Shifting from unreasoning, paralysing fear to awareness and a commitment to self preservation lies at the foundation of the skill, and the moves are based on instinct.



The basic concepts of Krav Maga are simple - Don't get hurt. Don't be a victim! Krav Maga teaches you to listen to your instincts, how to avoid, evade and deflect trouble, and when necessary how to defend yourself quickly and effectively so you can escape.

Krav Maga Techniques are all based on the bodies instinctive reactions, the moves the body automatically makes when something happens. This unique approach means that men and women can learn these life saving skills very quickle.

Tip: Take Krav Maga Ireland Self Defence Course.

The course is desgnd to teach every day normal people how to protect themselves as quickly as possible.

You can find our more about our course at [www.KravMagalreland.com](http://www.KravMagalreland.com)