

SECTION 4: SAFETY ON THE ROAD

PROTECT YOURSELF WITH SELF-DEFENSE SKILLS

GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING A SELF-DEFENSE COURSE

Sign up for a self-defense class in your area. Many health clubs, community colleges and martial arts studios offer these classes.

Self-defense is much more than learning how to physically attack someone; a good course covers critical thinking about defense strategies, assertiveness, powerful communication skills, and easy-to-remember physical techniques. The instructor should respect and respond to your fears and concerns. Essentially, a good course is based on intelligence and not muscle. It offers tools for enabling a person to connect with his or her own strength and power. Look for a class with a broad focus, which will include information on how to recognize dangerous individuals and situations, how to avoid them and how to react in an attack.

Here are steps you can take to find the best self-defense class for you:

- 1. Ask family, friends and colleagues if they have recommendations.** You'll be surprised how many people are taking or have taken a self-defense course. Ask around and see which classes or instructors they recommend. (You might also find out which programs to avoid.)
- 2. Make sure you are allowed to watch classes in progress before you sign up.** Be wary of any institution that only offers one-on-one, private instruction; it is difficult to gauge the progress you're making if you cannot see your classmates performing the same techniques. In addition, one of the most beneficial aspects of studying in a school is the variety of body types and skill levels of the other students with which you will be working.
- 3. Meet the instructors.** You will rely on these people for your knowledge. Watch to see if they appear genuinely concerned with students' progress. Also check their communication and teaching style to see if these will work for you.
- 4. Check for safety precautions.** When watching possible classes, look for a controlled environment and the use of padded safety equipment. Avoid any place that ascribes to the "no pain, no gain" theory.

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5. Look for programs that offer options, techniques, and a way of analyzing situations. Good self-defense programs do not tell an individual what he or she should or should not do. A program may point out what usually works best in most situations, but each situation is unique and the final decision rests with the person actually confronted by the situation.

6. Empowerment is the goal of a good self-defense program. The individual's right to make decisions about her participation must be respected. Pressure should not be brought to bear in any way to get someone to participate in an activity if she's hesitant or unwilling.

SELF-DEFENSE RESOURCES:

Ask Men.com: How to Defend Yourself in a Fight
www.askmen.com/fashion/how_to_150/180_how_to.html

American Success Institute: Master Self-Defense
www.success.org/SelfDefense/1.shtml

The American Women's Self-Defense Association (AWSDA)
www.awsda.org/

Chimera Self-Defense for Women
www.chimerainc.org

Robert Siciliano
www.realtysecurity.com

(Source: National Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Defend University)