

The Big 10

General rules for staying aware and prepared for any situation!

by Susan Bartelstone

1. AVOID DANGER. Use common sense and learn what actions and behaviors make you vulnerable to crime by reading safety information from as many sources as you can find.

2. RECOGNIZE EARLY WARNING SIGNS. Be relaxed but aware of your surroundings. Practice “people-reading” and always listen to your instincts. Take action immediately if you sense danger.

3. DON'T “LOOK” LIKE A VICTIM. Adopt a confident, “non-victim” presence (head up, shoulders back, a brisk walk and a casual alertness) that will discourage assailants.

4. MENTALLY PREPARE. Identify at least five safety problems in your personal life (e.g., coming home late at night, riding the subways, frequent business travel, a robber breaking into your home when you are there). Formulate a safety plan for each problem and rehearse it so you can act quickly and safely escape if something should happen.

5. DEFUSE CONFRONTATIONS. Respond with a “non-victim” attitude and act assertively. Don't beg, plead, cry or argue. Make direct eye contact unless the person is high, drunk, acting crazy or enraged. Practice assertive verbal phrases that can be used to stall for time until you can attract attention or set up an opportunity to take action.

6. YELL! Don't hesitate to draw attention to yourself or make a scene if you're in a dangerous situation. Attackers are often scared away by noise. Yelling also initiates breathing, which will circulate oxygen into your blood to fuel muscles for a quick getaway.

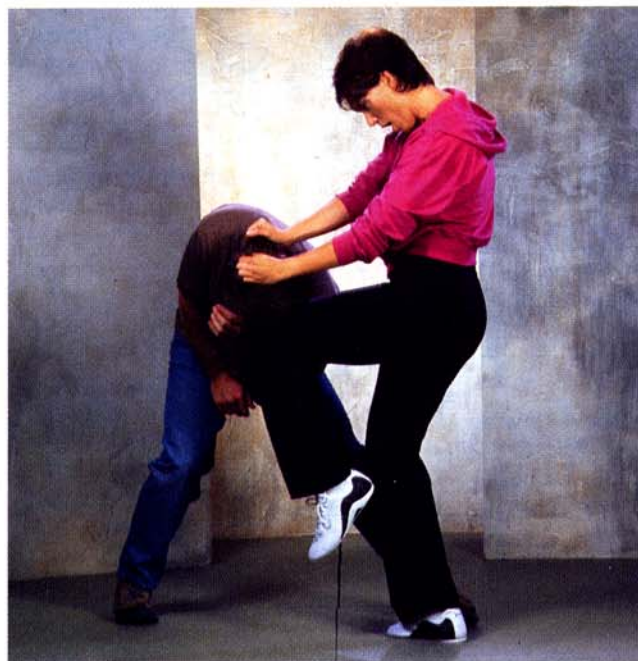
7. USE THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE. Keep pepper spray or a small two-pound fire extinguisher by your bed, in your car, at work or wherever you feel vulnerable. Many attackers don't expect much of an effective retaliation, so be prepared to demonstrate your willingness and action to protect yourself using whatever deterrents and weapons necessary. Do what you need to do and then get away!

8. FIGHT TO WIN! If you have no other choice but to fight, strike at the most vulnerable targets: eyes, ears, nose, throat, groin, knees, shin and instep. These targets take the least amount of strength or ability to hurt. Get angry, yell and fight as dirty as you can to open up that essential window of opportunity for escape.

9. USE COMMON OBJECTS AS WEAPONS. Many weapons can be found in your immediate environment. Hot or caustic liquid like coffee, cleaning fluid or hairspray can be thrown in the eyes; sharp objects can be jabbed in the eyes, ears or throat; pillows, cushions or packages can be used as shields or thrown into an assailant's face.

10. TAKE A RAPE-PREVENTION OR SELF-DEFENSE COURSE. Such classes inspire confidence, teach technique and accuracy, as well as (and perhaps most importantly) help you break through the mental barriers that may prevent you from hurting someone—even in self-defense. **Remember:** No one has the right to assault, rape or abuse you—ever!

Susan Bartelstone is a personal safety specialist who's been teaching for more than 14 years. She has extensive crime prevention training from such groups as the FBI, the New York State Department of Justice and the Long Island Association of Crime Prevention Officers, as well as 17 years combined training in close-quarters combat, defensive tactics and martial arts. Visit her at Web site at www.fightsafe.com for more information.



Taking a self-defense course will teach techniques for fighting back, what vital points to attack and how to create escape opportunities. (For illustration, Meredith Gold is shown kneeling an assailant in the nose.)