

Assault Prevention

Prevention

- Awareness

Pay attention to your surroundings and listen to your instincts. Tune in to anything unusual in your environment and evaluate what's going on using peripheral vision or a quick glance. Be mindful of when you do and *do not* use headphones or look at your smartphone. It will not only make you safer but will also enhance your appreciation of the people and things around you.

- Plan ahead

Consider future conditions. For example, when leaving a party, will that previously busy street on your way to the subway be dark and empty when you return? On the trip home from work do you always follow a predictable route? Traveling alone always increases one's vulnerability. Who can you call at any time of day or night to help bring you home safely?

- Appearances

Criminals prefer easy, high-yield targets, so consider your overall appearance. This includes everything from a confident posture and purposeful walk to how much jewelry or high-end goods you're displaying. Consciously weigh your desire to express yourself outwardly (by standing out *or* blending in) against the risk of attracting unwanted attention.

Evasion

If you feel uncomfortable or hesitant about a situation, just leave. Better yet, stop *beforehand* and choose another option: cross the street, take a different elevator, find a populated area, or seek help from a bystander. If you suspect a crime is about to happen, or witness one in progress, call 911 immediately, without hesitation. Do not undersell the situation when you call; if anything, exaggerate in order to improve response times. Regular citizens, on the other hand, are more willing to assist if they think their own safety is not at risk. To solicit help or get yourself into a safer location, consider saying, "I'm trying to get away from my ex-boyfriend" instead of "I'm being followed by a man with a gun." Finally, if you suspect you're being singled out, think about making yourself an undesirable target, for example, by acting deranged, spitting, vomiting or any crude behavior that will make an assailant reconsider attacking you.

- Deception or Diffusion

Acting or lying can be effective strategies to get out of a dangerous situation. Pretend to have "friends" nearby, or take control of the conversation by making the potential attacker laugh or confused by an unexpected reply. Think ahead of time about useful "lines" or how a scenario might play out to your advantage. For example, "I'm waiting for my boyfriend, so I'll take the next elevator, thanks." Or, "I know you, you're Joey's friend...." Cultivate the ability to *act* like you're confident and self-assured, even if you're afraid. Deception can also be used to defeat a physically stronger assailant. Feigning cooperation, exhaustion, unconsciousness or even death may lead an assailant to let down his guard and provide an opportunity to escape or to attack a vulnerable

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target. Finally, distance yourself from the assailant without turning your back. If the assailant is armed, place yourself with some physical barrier – no matter how flimsy – between you.

- Use your voice

If you are confronted, use your voice. This is perhaps the most effective means to take a stand against the assailant and gain the attention of bystanders. A loud, firm voice is better than a pleading or hysterical one. A specific demand, repeated with increasing focus, is most effective: “What do you want?” “Get off me. I said, get off of me NOW!” Or, “Put the knife down. I need you to put the knife down NOW.” Use your voice the moment you sense a potential attack and keep repeating your demands until the threat passes or help arrives.

Last Resorts

- All or nothing

Hanshi has described assault prevention as follows: first, avoid/prevent; second, use your karate training (or any self-defense training you may have); third, do whatever extreme measures it takes to ensure your survival (no rules). The “no rules” concept includes using any and all weapons at your disposal to maim, dismember or even kill the assailant. It requires you to suspend concerns about legal, physical and psychological consequences in order to survive. And to keep fighting, even if hurt. As Hanshi says, “In a fight for your life, ‘Die with a mouthful of flesh’”; in other words, to save your life do NOT hold back! This is difficult and disturbing to consider, but it’s important to acknowledge and take stock of ahead of time.

Practice with various impromptu weapons, such as a pen, knife, or mace, against inanimate objects and visualize their effectiveness. Striking to a vulnerable target and following through with full commitment are essential. Leverage the reflexes from your karate training by practicing basic blocks and punches with a sharp object in hand. Do not brandish or threaten with a weapon. You lose the element of surprise, and YOU may be perceived as the assailant by others. There’s also a risk that the weapon could be taken from and used against you, so only carry or reveal a weapon if you’re prepared to use it. It’s just a question of when: a second, a minute, or (with great luck) not at all, depending on what the assailant does or doesn’t do. Any weapon is only as effective as the skill and determination of the person wielding it. Address this ahead of time, knowing that the more prepared you are, the less likely you’ll be singled out for attack. And, if attacked, you will not hesitate to defend yourself.

- Moving forward (Karate ni sente nashi)

Develop resiliency, positive thinking, and self-sufficiency in your day-to-day life. The dojo is a great place to practice this. Regularly prioritize what you truly value, and what you’re willing to live or die for. Your wallet? Your ego or pride? This will help you to make informed split second decisions in a crisis. And, more importantly, it will reinforce that preventing violence ahead of time, as opposed to reacting to it after the fact, is the far more humane and effective strategy.