

or exhaustion. You don't have to give up on your decision to learn self-defense, and you don't have to muscle through it by ignoring your need for breaks and support either.

### **Score Your Success**

Do the self-diagnostic = 100 points

Identify at least one feeling = 50 points

## **Overcoming the Past**

Self-defense isn't simple. It's complicated, and learning and practicing these techniques can bring up a lot of unexpected and sometimes painful memories. After a lesson on ground fighting, one of my students expressed her discomfort. "Last week's class really felt bad. I thought about not coming back after that," she said. "I wasn't sure why until last night, when I had a dream about what happened to me in high school. I didn't do any of this! It didn't even occur to me to yell or hit him or try to lie. I was just totally frozen. I feel terrible. I mean why couldn't I have tried something at least? It seems so simple now, and I didn't do anything. I don't think I can ever forgive myself for that."

First of all, she didn't deserve what happened to her in high school, and it wasn't her fault for not fighting back. There are many reasons that people are unable to defend themselves, and it takes a lot of time and help to overcome them. Some of the reasons that victims can't fight include the following: the freeze response, thinking that they'll be hurt worse, loving the person who's hurting them, or being dependent on them financially or emotionally, not knowing how to fight, not wanting to believe it's really happening, thinking it's their fault and being unable to get angry at the assailant, not thinking they're worth defending, having been assaulted in the past and re-experiencing that assault, or feeling ashamed or incapacitated by drug or alcohol use. Learning how to defend yourself *now* does *not* mean that you should have been able to defend yourself in the past. I told my student that she had nothing to forgive herself for. She did the right thing then, and I was glad she was here now.

## **OTHER GROUND FIGHTING CHOICES**

In addition to the Eye Strike, the Butt Strike, and the Wait And Kick techniques, you can negotiate, lie, pretend to acquiesce, or go to 0 percent to lull the assailant into a false sense of security before you fight or escape. Here are some examples of verbal techniques:

"OK sure, I just have to go to the bathroom first."

"Just let me go tell my friend not to wait for me."

"I'll do anything you want."

"These pants are tight. If you let go of my hands, I'll help you with that."

"I promise not to scream."

"Yes, I have money. It's in my purse on the table in the other room."

The goal of these verbal techniques is to get yourself into a position to fight back full force (or to run if safety and other people are very close). You may also choose to get into Side Thrust Kick position at any point—if you hear someone in your house at night, or if your date has been ignoring your verbal demands to stop. You don't have to wait to be pinned.

I'm not a fan of some of the verbal techniques with the goal of getting the rapist to change his mind. Some people suggest that you appeal to his sense of decency or his love for his mother or the fact that he'll be frightened if you have

your period or HIV. I suspect that most men who are willing to force others into unwanted sex have lost their empathy and their fear of consequences. But I've also heard legends of these techniques working. Trust your instincts. One woman, who successfully avoided rape by telling a group of men that she had her period, had this

to say about the technique: "They said they were going to rape me. I told them I was menstruating and it scared them off. I think nowadays it wouldn't be that big a deal, but, in the South in the forties, it was a big deal. People were more inhibited. You just didn't tell people you were menstruating" (Caignon and Groves, 1987).



**Misstep**

Holding your breath, closing your eyes, focusing on what the attacker is saying.

**Correction**

Breathe, open your eyes, and focus on your body. Threats and verbal abuse are used to frighten an intended victim and are less important than watching for your opening and going to 100 percent when it arrives.

## Battle in the Cemetery

In *Her Wits About Her*, Rashida describes using many of the defenses covered in step 7 when she was trapped in a car by multiple assailants. While Rashida was walking home at night, a group of five young men pulled up next to her and forced her into the backseat of their car. She describes her emotional process in the car, moving from extremely frightened to extremely angry and focused. She says, "I stopped struggling . . . I began to get angry . . . I sat quietly . . . my anger helped me to relax, slipping into a state I call my 'battle awareness' . . . when they stopped the car in the middle of the dark cemetery, I was ready." One of the men held her prone in the backseat, while a second started to climb in on top of her with his pants down. From her battle-ready state (being at 0), she exploded (going to 100). All in the same movement, she bit the arm holding her, hit the same perpetrator in the gut with her elbow, and kicked the one coming toward her. The man she bit released her, and the second perpetrator, also injured, backed out of the car in astonishment. She leapt from the car and ran. The men were so shocked only one chased her briefly. She heard the others call him off. She hid in the cemetery until they drove off, and then sought help nearby at a friend's house. The police captured one of the perpetrators later that same night when a man with a "severe human bite that required stitches" turned up in the emergency room.

Adapted from *Her Wits About Her*, edited by D. Caignon and G. Groves, 1987. New York: Perennial Library. Pages 182-184.

## Ground Fighting Drill 6. **Studying Success**

Answer the following questions in your Practice Journal about the Battle in the Cemetery success story. If you like, discuss the success story and your answers with a friend or study partner.

1. When did Rashida begin her self-defense?
2. How many kinds of self-defense did she use? List each one, including the use of awareness and verbal, emotional, and psychological techniques, not just physical ones.
3. What might you have done differently in the same situation? Why?
4. What surprised you about Rashida's experience?
5. What satisfied or empowered you most about her experience?

## SUCCESS SUMMARY

The core techniques of step 7, Fighting From the Ground, are emotional and psychological. You have already had some opportunity to practice these in your own life—staying focused on the present moment and aware of your body, maintaining hope when you need to wait for an opportunity, and going from 0 to 100 percent with all of your energy and commitment. Each

of these skills will deepen and improve your physical self-defense techniques. Consider ways in which you could continue to practice these core techniques in your current life. During the self-diagnostic drill you returned to the present moment, enhanced your body awareness, and chose your own next right action.

### *Before Taking the Next Step*

Before moving on to step 8, Avoiding Blows, take time to reflect on what you have learned to this point. Answer the following questions honestly.

1. Have you learned the four elements for overcoming the freeze response?
2. Have you identified at least two of these you have already used in your own life?
3. Have you drilled the Eye Strike from the ground position?
4. Have you drilled both the Butt Strike (facedown) and the Wait and Kick (faceup)?
5. Have you completed the self-diagnostic drill and shared your results with a friend or written about it in your Practice Journal?

If you answered yes to all five questions, you are ready to move on to step 8, Avoiding Blows.

## **Taking the Step Further. Homework Assignments**

Memorize the myth at the beginning of this step and write about it in your Practice Journal. Share some of your thoughts and feelings about the myth and fact with at least one other person. Why do you think blaming the victim is so prevalent when people talk about sexual assault in particular? How does victim blaming help rapists? If we cannot cause someone to sexually assault us, why is this myth so common?

Physical practice—Spend 5 to 20 minutes a day practicing the moves from step 7, Fighting

From the Ground, until you begin step 8, Avoiding Blows. Remember to incorporate your voice with each technique.

What are five possible obstacles that could stop you from studying *Self-Defense: Steps to Survival* at this point? Some students struggle with finding enough time, finding enough support, getting overwhelmed, trying to do too much, or needing help to understand the drills. What help could you get to overcome your obstacles?