

# Fighting From the Ground

Step 7 includes more techniques available to you during ground fighting, including some for assaults that begin with the defender in a seated position or lying down. The majority of sexual assaults begin from or progress to a prone position. These assailants attempt to surround an intended victim and get him or her to the ground

as quickly as possible. In addition to the physical techniques you will use in ground fighting, step 7 addresses the necessary mental skills. These include awareness, psychological and emotional preparedness, and your own natural will to defend yourself. Step 7 helps you connect to and activate that willpower.

**Myth** People who are sexually assaulted must have wanted it to happen: if she was on a date with him, dressed provocatively, and was willing to go to his apartment . . . if he was gay, hanging out in that park, flirting at the bar . . . they must have brought it on themselves. Some people are just asking for it.

**Fact** No one causes, invites, enjoys, asks for, or deserves being sexually assaulted. It is *always* the rapist's fault. It is *never* the victim's fault. Never.

Sexual assault is sexual contact without the consent of the victim. Consent is an unequivocal agreement between two people to have sex. True consent never exists in the face of physical force, verbal coercion, or intimidation. For someone to give consent, she or he must be free to revoke consent at any point, for any reason or for no reason at all. The answer *yes* is completely meaningless if someone is too scared, too drunk, too weak, or too young to feel free to say *no*. Submission does not equal consent.

Children are incapable of consenting to sex with adults. They do not have the social power

or skills to understand fully what they are consenting to. Age of consent laws, which permit adults to “have sex” with children legally in some states, do not change this fact. There are no exceptions. “Even if a 16-year-old girl walks into her living room naked and throws herself on her father, he is still not justified in touching her sexually. A responsible father would say, ‘There seems to be a problem here.’ He would tell her to put her clothes on; he’d discuss it with her, get professional help if necessary. Regardless of age or circumstance, there is never an excuse for sexual abuse” (Bass and Davis, 1994).

## OVERCOMING THE FREEZE RESPONSE

The first thing to know about defense that begins on the ground is that you will freeze. It's normal, it's natural, and it's not a problem. Whether you freeze for half a second, a minute, 5 minutes, or longer, you can come out of your frozen state and defend yourself. This natural response is not a sign that you have done anything wrong, nor is it a sign of weakness. It's merely a sign that you are human and that your body has a physiological response to fear.

Almost everyone has already experienced this at some point. Perhaps you are terrified of heights and got surprised on a hike or at the top of a tall building by your inability to back away from the edge. Maybe you've struggled with a terror of public speaking and had to battle the sweaty palms and stuttering that arise just before a presentation at work. Maybe you were assaulted previously and, when you tried to scream, you found you had no voice. Please don't criticize yourself or your body for its humanity. You didn't do anything wrong. You are not still frozen. If you're reading this book, you didn't stay stuck on the mountain, on the stage, or in the experience of being assaulted. You and your body found a way to move forward and to learn more. You can do this.

The basic psychology of how to rebound from a freeze response includes the following four elements:

1. **Focus on the present.** You can do this by opening your eyes, breathing, wiggling your

toes, or noting the color or shape of something right in front of you. Fear has a way of sweeping you into the past or the future. Your self-defense happens in the present.

2. **Watch for an opening.** Know that there will always be an opening. Assailants are troubled, distracted, and frightened humans. They will close their eyes, let go of your arm, get confused, loosen their grip, or turn their backs. You don't have to despair. There will always be an opening for you to defend yourself. Watch for it.

3. **Pay attention to your body.** Pay more attention to your body than to your brain. Your brain is frequently operating in the past ("Why did I accept a ride from him?") or the future ("Oh no, where is he taking me now?"). The body is always in the present. Breathe. What parts of your body do you have free? Where are your hands and feet? You don't have to stop your brain, but you don't have to get stuck there either.

4. **Go from 0 to 100 percent in a moment.** When you have an opening, use the element of surprise, act decisively, and employ 100 percent of your physical power and your loudest *no* shout all at once. Being at 0 percent might look like compliance or weakness, but it makes going to 100 percent even more powerful. Avoid wasting your energy or broadcasting your intention to fight by struggling or tensing when you are at 0 percent.

### Being at Zero

"This is the scariest thing we've learned so far. I hate being at zero. It was really, really awful to practice lying there and waiting. Just my worst nightmare. But it helped a lot to watch the other women in the class. There were some really tiny women. I loved watching how fierce and determined they were; it helped me to realize that, if they could do it, I could do it too. I could cheer for them, watch for their openings, and it looked so strong when they just went for it! I can hardly remember my fight, but I remember some of theirs!"

It isn't unusual to feel uncomfortable at zero. Staying at zero, breathing, and waiting for an opening takes commitment and practice. If you want realistic practice with the freeze response and going from 0 to 100 percent, I suggest taking an IMPACT class. Look for a class in your area that allows for a lot of physical practice and offers an emotionally safe environment that encourages students to have and to express feelings.