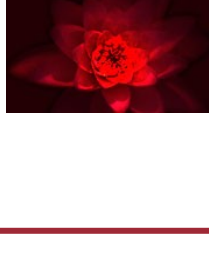


Safe Journey

The Women's Personal Defense Center Newsletter



In This Issue

- **Getting Physical: What Your Body Language is Saying**
- **The Natural Order: Why Defense Techniques Work (or Fail When You Need Them Most).**
- **The Language of Assault –Part 4, Promises, Promises. What he may be saying when he makes assurances you haven't asked for.**

In the Coming Issue

Getting the Message: Understanding of a would-be assailant's body language.

Attitude & Posture: The hidden relationship between mind and body.

The Language of Assault, Part 5—The Devil is in the Details. Is there a reason why he offers up so much information?

Upcoming Events

Women's Personal Defense Workshop Level 1—
Saturday, June 26th, 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Women's Personal Defense Workshop Level 2—
Saturday, September 25th, from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Register on line at:
www.womenspersonaldefense.com

Questions or Comments?

Got a story to tell or some advice to give? Write us about it. We may include it in future publications.

Stuck in a situation you don't know how to get out of? Let us know. We may be able to help.

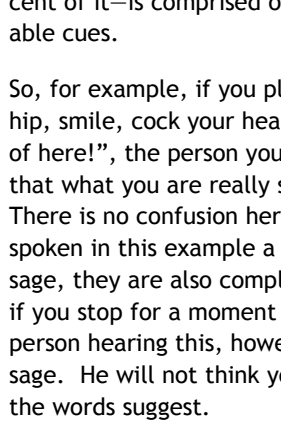
For questions or comments, you may Email us directly at info@womenspersonaldefense.com or Call us at 915-856-6560.

Did you know?

- According to one study, only 15% of women who attempt to flee when faced with an assault by a sexual predator are actually raped.¹
- This same study found that, although many strategies are successful by themselves, combinations such as yelling and fighting or yelling fighting and fleeing further increased the chances of avoiding rape.²
- There is a reluctance of academics to advocate the use of physical force in self-protection. Perhaps this is because of a limited (but evolving) academic research base. Studies on the effectiveness of self defense strategies typically appear in criminology and law enforcement journals, where they may easily be overlooked by health educators.³
- The fear of assault affects women who have not themselves been raped⁴, inhibiting many women from engaging in activities such as jogging or taking classes at night. Fear of crime in public places limits womens' ability to participate effectively in public life.⁵

Getting Physical: What Your Body Language is Saying.

Over the course of the last couple of years, every single personal defense class I have taught has included information on the language of the body. In my view, it is critical for a woman to understand the messages she may be sending to a would-be assailant.



Communication can be both verbal and non-verbal. In fact, communication experts tell us that only approximately 5% - 10% of communication—that is, the actual message an individual sends to another or others—is comprised of the oral, spoken word. Another 5% - 10% is comprised of tone of voice.

And the remainder of the message—a good 80 to 85 percent of it—is comprised of non-verbal, physically observable cues.

So, for example, if you place your hand playfully on your hip, smile, cock your head to one side and say, "Get out of here!", the person you are speaking with understands that what you are really saying is "You're kidding me!" There is no confusion here, and not only are the words spoken in this example a very small fraction of the message, they are also completely at odds with the message if you stop for a moment and look at them literally. The person hearing this, however, will not confuse the message. He will not think you are asking him to leave, as the words suggest.

On the other hand, if you tighten your facial muscles, point to the door, and yell, "Get out of here!", the person you are addressing understands unequivocally that you want him to get gone.

As you can see, the words do not change from the first example to the second, but the messages are utterly different.

I believe that having an awareness of and being able to decode body language are entirely understated arts. To a martial artist, movement is synonymous with life, and a cognitive understanding of body movement, whether subtle or gross, is a vital component of our training.

The good news is that you, and most people for that matter, already instinctively recognize non-verbal cues. The point is, then, to gain a cognitive understanding (rather than just an instinctive one) of these cues so that you can catapult your survival potential exponentially.

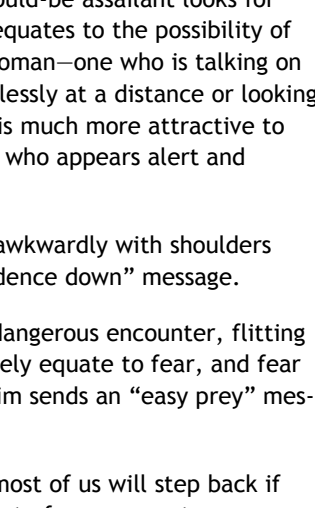
Although it is good to have a working knowledge of the full-on messages others may be sending you (coming in our next issue of this newsletter), I want to first make you aware of what you may prospectively be saying to someone who wishes to cause you harm.

So, let's take this in steps:

First, let's say that you are approached by someone you don't know or don't know well who wants to sell you something. You politely reply that you're not interested, but this person becomes insistent and perhaps a little agitated. Your warning signal goes off, but since you are not completely alarmed, your first attempt is to diffuse the situation.

Normally, you diffuse with elbows bent, hands at waist level and palms facing down. To have the palms facing down is a non-aggressive posture. It's the same posture you would use instinctively, for instance, when trying to calm an irate co-worker or quiet a child. This posture is non-offensive and non-challenging, and can be very effective. If nothing more is amiss, it may be all you need.

Having the elbows bent at waist level is necessary for the palms down hand posture, and also makes good sense if your efforts to diffuse the situation should fail and you have to switch to defensive movements: it takes much longer to raise the hands when they are resting at your sides than it takes to raise them when they are at waist level. Granted, the time-difference may be measured in micro-seconds, but those micro-seconds can mean a lifetime if what appears to be a regular encounter turns into a dangerous one.



Next, bear in mind that a would-be assailant looks for certain body language that equates to the possibility of easy prey. A preoccupied woman—one who is talking on her cell phone, glancing aimlessly at a distance or looking at the ground as she walks—is much more attractive to the purse-snatcher than one who appears alert and aware.

Likewise, a woman walking awkwardly with shoulders slouched is sending a "confidence down" message.

In the face of a potentially dangerous encounter, flitting eye movements most definitely equate to fear, and fear in the eye of a selected victim sends an "easy prey" message.

Along this same line, while most of us will step back if something or someone in front of us appears to pose a danger, continuously stepping back during a face-down will assuredly send the message that you are afraid. Backed into a step or two back is natural, avoid being "backed into a wall" (metaphorically speaking) when talking your way out of a situation that is making you uncomfortable. If the person in front of you continues to approach against your wishes, you can side-step the danger of sending an "I am afraid" message by literally side-stepping the one approaching, i.e., rather than continue to step back, step sideways. Always flee if you can, but if you can't, be prepared to defend. Pleas and rationale are not effective defensive measures.

In a world where hidden dangers appear to be rife, there are no fail-safe methods for staying safe. But a woman can certainly tip the scales toward physical, mental and emotional safety through gaining a cognitive grasp of the otherwise unconscious messages she sends. While nothing may be more attractive to a potential male suitor than confidence, generally speaking, the opposite holds true for the prospective attacker. Bright, cognizant awareness tells him your watchful and perhaps more trouble than you're worth. A relaxed but confident walk conveys a degree of personal control which may be very discouraging to him. While it may not guarantee that you won't be attacked, it certainly changes his perspective...and YOURS!

Stay safe!

The Natural Order: Why Defense Techniques Work (or Fail) When You Need Them Most.

In seeking to learn the art of personal defense, a woman can easily fall prey to unrealistic expectations. Since techniques are easier to perform in sterile, non-threatening environments, acquiring a false sense of confidence is not uncommon. This, and other factors, can lead to impractical ideas and habits that can turn a woman's confidence upside down with relatively little trouble in the face of a real-life threat.

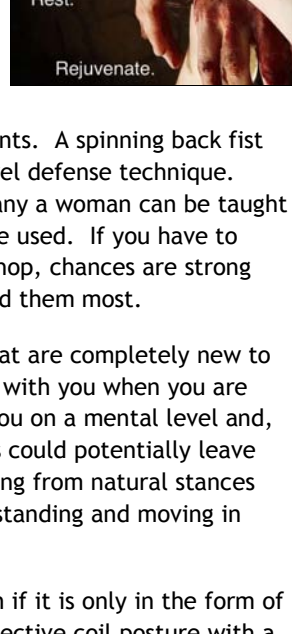
The truth of the matter is that a defense of self, on a hand-to-hand level, and whether or not a weapon is involved, is a downright dirty business. As a woman, you are likely to completely underestimate an attacker's sheer commitment to personal violence. Yet for him, there are no rules of engagement. Nothing is off-limits, and no holds are barred. Furthermore, he doesn't care one iota that you have a bad back, a university degree underway or a young child waiting for you at home. As personal as an assault feels to you, to the assailant, you are a non-person.

These are sobering facts, and strong contributing factors to why, in the field of personal safety, self defense workshops abound. While many of these workshops are fabulous and well worth the investment of your time and money, some fall short of the mark—not because the techniques are bad, for quite often, the techniques are sound, but because the presentations of these techniques are poorly founded and the universal principles which govern their workability are ignored.

It is common practice, for instance, to begin a self defense class with the exercise of technique. As a woman, myself, I strongly believe this is a mistake. Although techniques should absolutely be taught, a woman's first line of defense involves awareness and prevention. In the field of personal defense, the most acceptable statistic is the one you can't count—it is the woman who has nothing to report because, using preventive skills, she avoided an assault. While she is very capable of being a warrior, she should choose her battles well. After all, there is no heroism lost in the fight she never fought.

This having been said, I can tell you that when learning defense techniques there are a few principles you should be aware of that should govern both how you train and how you apply them. These principles follow:

1. **Master a few techniques very well.** Trying to learn many techniques at once muddles your ability to use them. It is best to know three or four very well than to know twenty poorly. In the heat of an encounter, there may not be a single one you know well enough to apply. So, learning a bundle of techniques just for the sake of it is a bad idea.
2. **Learning joint-locks and body-throws are ill-advised in preliminary training.** Locks and throws are not basic techniques and, in some cases, require fine motor skills to execute. Fine motor skills are quickly compromised with the increase in heart rate that results from a dangerous confrontation. Although these are good techniques, they are advanced techniques and have no place in beginning classes.
3. **Learn to come out of a flinch fighting.** Flinching or coiling is a natural response to a surprise attack. We all do it—even those of us with extensive defense training. To expect not to flinch or coil because you are so well trained in defense techniques is unrealistic. Instead, learn how to quickly recover from either and come out fighting. A surprise attacker counts on your psychological defeat with the first strike or grab. A rapid recovery can be life-saving.
4. **Techniques must be easy to remember and easy to execute.** Although a trained martial artist may be able to fly through the air and kick to head, no one expects you to. Most of us trained martial artists don't want to be in the air during a real attack anyway. There is just too much to consider, like terrain, location, balance, etc. Don't let anyone "wow" you with techniques that are impractical.
5. **Always attack your attacker.** This is as much a mental practice as a physical one. Your best defense is an aggressive offense. Learn "rotary strikes with forward pressure" and hold a mindset that either makes the attacker fear for himself, causes him to consider you to be "too much trouble," or both. Avoid reasoning or pleading with your attacker. Statistics do NOT pan out this strategy. Even though you may "luck out" and find yourself in the company of an predator with a heart, the chances are slim. When you're life is on the line, I wouldn't bank on luck.
6. **Understand the viable targets for your counter attack and learn to strike those.** Viable targets are few in number: the eyes, the ears, the throat, the groin (on both male or female attackers), and the shins.
7. **Have a mental end-goal to your defense.** Years of teaching women the art of personal defense has taught me that, in the melee of a perilous encounter, the resultant mental fog makes it difficult for a woman to determine her end-goal. She knows she wants to survive the assault, but this does not translate to "RUN!" once she is able to flee. I have all too often seen a woman "survive" an intense and real-life, parallel encounter only to have her stand and stare at the assailant once she has disabled him. This changes if we give her an end-goal that coincides with her survival instinct: "FIGHT TO ESCAPE!" "FIGHT TO THE DOOR!"



Techniques should work parallel to basic and natural body movements. A spinning back fist to the side of the head may look impressive, but is not an entry level defense technique. Even upper level techniques are founded on the basic ones, and many a woman can be taught to mount an effective defense when simple-to-execute methods are used. If you have to learn five ways to get out of arm grab in your initial training workshop, chances are strong that not a one of those techniques will stay with you when you need them most.

If you are having to learn finger and hand placements or stances that are completely new to you, you're asking for trouble if you think these concepts will stick with you when you are attacked. They won't. The first one that fails will spell doom to you on a mental level and, considering that mindset and attitude are 90% of your defense, this could potentially leave you defenseless. Understand that techniques work best when coming from natural stances and movement. You should not have to learn a whole new way of standing and moving in order to defend yourself.

And finally, it is important to remember that practice matters even if it is only in the form of visualization. The more you practice coming out of a flinch or protective coil posture with a strike or rip of the ears, for instance, the more hard-wired these responses will be. Once "wired into" your system, there is no thought required in their delivery, and you're all the safer for having done so. Make it a point to attend some form of personal defense training at least twice a year. To do so increases your confidence and, through body language and posture, sends a silent message to any would-be attacker that you're not a good candidate for assault.

When well-trained in personal defense, an excellent gauge of your ability is not how well you fight but, rather, the fact that you have not had to fight at all.

Here's wishing you a safe journey through life!

The Language of Assault—Part 4 Promises, Promises

In our day-to-day lives, a promise is an assurance of a commitment that is to be fulfilled in the future. In close, interpersonal relationships we find promises comforting when made by someone we know and trust and aggravating when broken, but rarely, do we consider them a portent of danger. Nevertheless, that is exactly what they are in the language of assault.

To be clear, as much as we like them, hate them or avoid them, promises are not guarantees. Guarantees are the language of ad campaigns or sales catalogues and should be considered impersonal. Your favorite supermarket, for example, is apt to cough up a guarantee, but even it will be limited. Therefore, it is of no surprise that in personal relationships, as complex and multifarious as they can be, there is little to keep you 100% secure.

When dealing with the language of an impending assault, a promise is not an assurance of security. It is a warning sign, especially if it is unsolicited. In fact, it is a *huge* warning sign.

In his much acclaimed book, *The Gift of Fear*, author Gavin de Becker, the nation's leading expert on predicting violent behavior, says this about the unsolicited promise:

"A guarantee is a promise that offers some things don't if the speaker fails to deliver; he commits to make it all right again if compensation isn't go as he says they would. But promises offer no such collateral. They are the very hollowest instruments of speech, showing nothing more than the speaker's desire to convince you of something."⁶

Consider then that if you have someone you don't know, or barely know, offering you a promise as an assurance you have not asked for, the chances are strong he is trying to convince you to do something that is already giving you pause for concern. For example, let's say you're on a first date with a man you recently met and know very little about. He wants to have a nightcap or a cup of coffee in your apartment before going on his way, and you appear to be hesitant (read *doubtful*) about letting him in. So he says, "Ah, c'mon...one cup and I promise...I'll leave."

Why is this of concern? It's of concern because, obviously, you have doubts you should heed. Sensing these, of course, a promising suitor opts to make a promise you have not asked for, and though this seems harmless enough, in reality he is being insistent. You should understand that an unsolicited promise is an effort to convince you to do something you are already uncomfortable with. And the fact of the matter is that nothing about this scenario is promising. It is of unequivocal concern and should be.

I know of a woman who was abducted by a man who assured her that all he wanted was her ATM card and the pin number for it. Because she had managed to keep herself alive for a couple of days by giving her abductor wrong pin numbers, he promised her that if she gave him the right number, he would release her as soon as he withdrew some money. This is an extreme example, but the number and how that, according to her abductor, in her desperation to go free, she gave him the number and allowed herself to be tied to tree until he returned.

In other words, in her mind, they made a deal, but sadly for her, it was a deal poorly founded.

As he later detailed to law enforcement, upon his return, she told him that she had begun to think he wasn't coming back for her. Because she had kept up her part of the bargain, she seemed to believe that he would keep his. As it turns out, however (but not surprisingly), she was wrong. Shortly after his return, he decapitated her.

Should promises or assurances you have not asked for raise a red flag? Resoundingly, YES! Always treat them with suspicion and take evasive action. You don't need to be a ninja in order to spare yourself from the devastating effects of an assault you have unknowingly cooperated with. You just have to recognize that deception and persuasion are the every day tools of the calculating predator whose smiles, charm and promises are weapons equally as dangerous as guns and knives they carry.

In the world of personal relationships, promises can be playful or poignant, heartening or disheartening, but on the norm, we find them predictable. So too in the world of the criminal mind where they are predictably dangerous. Stay vigilant and you will not be easily fooled, and remember that you cannot count on the pinky promises your potential abductor makes. In a case like this, the consequence is not a mere disappointment. It is possible death.

Safe journey!

(Look for Part 5 of *The Language of Assault* series in our next newsletter.)

References:

1. Bart and O'Brien, 1985.
2. Id.
3. Kleck and Sayles, 1990.
4. Henderson and Bialeschki, 1993.
5. Gardner, 1990
6. De Becker, *The Gift of Fear*, p. 61.

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