



Position Statement: Self Defense

DARCC is often approached by individuals and companies interested in partnering to teach women self-defense techniques in order to prevent sexual assault. While such strategies may be worthy on their own merit as self-defense, they do not get to the root cause of rape. The key to preventing sexual violence *before* it happens is addressing root causes.

This does not mean that knowing how to use self-defense techniques is useless; being prepared to secure your own personal safety is a very worthwhile task. Although we would not ever recommend any individual *not* engage in self-defense training, it is important to understand that the concept of using self-defense techniques to protect oneself assumes that an assault is going to happen, rather than addressing the core values and rape myths that contribute to the existence of a society in which sexual assault is possible, and often all too normal.

Some survivors report that learning self-defense is an empowering experience and an important tool in their healing process. Learning how to use the strength of one's body against the weakness of an assailant's body can be restorative, and help to rebuild confidence. In this context, we fully support any and all individuals in their pursuit of empowerment. However, considered in a broader societal context, focusing on self-defense places responsibility on the victim to defuse an attack rather than on society as a whole to prevent it.

Risk reduction strategies (such as self-defense classes) are most useful when utilized in a broader context of prevention, while emphasizing comprehensive social change. It is misleading to say that people get raped simply because they do not know how to defend themselves. If over relied upon, expecting women to know how to protect themselves can contribute to a false sense of security and victim blaming. As a normal function of the human brain, we find comfort in believing that if we can just manage to "do everything right" (not walking alone, watching our drink, avoiding dressing "provocatively" in revealing clothing) then we will not be sexually assaulted. But the unfortunate reality is that all different kinds of people, who dress and act in all different kinds of ways, are sexually assaulted every day, in a variety of circumstances. Moreover, most sexual assaults are committed by someone the victim knows; indeed, someone she is acquainted with. In such a circumstance, often the perpetrator knows exactly what to say to shame or intimidate the victim into remaining silent, and *not* fighting back.

Sexual assault is a symptom of larger societal problems. Our goal is to shift attention from teaching people how to avoid becoming victims to creating safe communities through social change.

"Violence against women [is] about a culture that views women as objects to be acted upon rather than fully realized human beings." Jennifer Siebel-Newsome (Miss Representation)