WOMEN'S SELF-DEFENSE · A FREE GUIDE

Safe & Steady

A gentle introduction to women's self-defense



Hi, I'm Makayla, a certified Women Empowered self-defense instructor and an EFT coach since 2015. I'm so glad you're here.

Whether you're curious about self-defense, already training, or thinking about bringing a workshop to your group, this guide is a taste of what I teach: awareness, your voice, and tools to stay steady in your body. You don't have to be tougher to protect yourself. You can be soft and strong at the same time.

Take what's helpful and go at your own pace. Some of this material can stir things up, and that's a completely normal part of the process.

With so much warmth, Makayla

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01 Grounding practice + a quick check-in

02 The 4 phases of a stranger attack

03 The 4 phases of a non-stranger attack

04 Setting a verbal boundary

05 Tools to keep with you

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01 · START HERE

Grounding first

Before the phases and strategies, a moment for your body. Everything else lands better from here.

Guided Grounding Practice

A short, guided practice to help your nervous system settle. Use it before training, after a hard day, or any time you'd like to feel more here.

Watch the grounding practice →

Quick 4-Part Check-In

A way to take your own pulse in under a minute. There are no right answers, only noticing.

Breath

Where is my breath right now? Fast or slow, shallow or deep? Can I let the exhale be a little longer?

Mind

What's my mind doing? Racing, replaying, planning, quiet? I can name it without needing to change it.

Heart

What am I feeling? Nervous, tender, proud, tired, a little of everything? All of it is welcome.

Body

What sensations do I notice? Tight shoulders, warm hands, feet on the floor? What would feel good right now?

> *You are allowed to pause, step away, and come back. Taking care of your nervous system is part of the training, not a break from it.*

With a stranger

At each phase, the attacker has a goal. Knowing it shows us what our goal is, by contrast.

1 Phase 1: Identify an unsuspecting target

THEIR GOAL
Sneak up on us, catch us off guard, and get past our defenses undetected.

OUR GOAL
Become more "suspicious," especially when an attack could more easily go unnoticed, or when something feels off. (Hello, intuition!)

This is also where practicing verbal boundaries is so powerful. A clear boundary helps reveal the intentions of the people around us.

2 Phase 2: Subdue and isolate the target

THEIR GOAL
Move us from one location to another, quickly and quietly.

OUR GOAL
Get really loud and slow things down. Even if we're still connected to the attacker, if we aren't going with them, we're winning at this phase.

3 Phase 3: Control and exhaust the target

Here, the attacker has achieved some level of isolation, or the attack began once we were already isolated.

THEIR GOAL
Physically and psychologically exhaust us.

OUR GOAL
Conserve energy and wait for an opportunity to escape, either by breaking away to safety or by incapacitating the attacker and ending the fight.

4 Phase 4: Carry out the assault

Even here, we still have options. Feigning compliance can create an opening to use one of our techniques to escape or end the fight. This is called the **false surrender principle**.

OUR GOAL
Survival. Whatever you need to do in the moment to survive is what's best. Sometimes compliance is the best option for survival. Most important to remember: you are worth defending, and your survival is the goal.

> *Use your awareness, intuition, and training to assess each situation and respond as you see fit. Everything you learn in workshops is simply more tools for your toolkit. It doesn't negate anything you've done in the past, or anything you choose to do in the future that's different from what was taught.*

With someone we know

With a non-stranger, the phases are quieter, and verbal boundaries become our strongest tool.

1

Phase 1: Intrusion

Intrusive behavior like comments or touch. It often lives in a gray zone that's easy to minimize or play off: *"I was just joking,"* or *"I do this with everyone."*

2

Phase 2: Desensitization

Repeated intrusive behavior, plus justification of it. The behavior gets normalized as "okay," without giving you a chance to question it or have boundaries around it.

OUR STRATEGY FOR PHASES 1 + 2

Verbal boundary setting. Setting boundaries early is best, but it is **NEVER** too late to set a boundary. (See the 3-part framework on the next page.)

3

Phase 3: Isolation

This applies to physical isolation as well as psychological: the feeling that we can't tell anyone, or that we have to keep a secret. That sense of isolation works as a form of control.

OUR STRATEGY

Boundaries are huge here. If you notice someone trying to get you alone (in a room, walking you to your car), you can purposefully bring other people with you. If the isolation is psychological, reach out for support from others, including a neutral third party if that helps. Having the support of other people is never a threat to something healthy.

4

Phase 4: Carry out the assault

Unlike with strangers, the level of violence here is often just enough to gain compliance. The psychological threat, through power dynamics and isolation, tends to be greater. An attack may begin when you're alone with someone, perhaps someone you trusted and wanted to be alone with.

OUR STRATEGY

Consent can be revoked at any time, and healthy people respect your boundaries. If someone doesn't, you have every right to reinforce them by removing yourself, and if that isn't possible, to use your techniques to escape or end the fight.

> *The first two phases are very common, and they don't always lead to an assault. It's still fully within your rights to set boundaries and address the behavior, whatever the other person's ultimate goal.*

Setting a verbal boundary

A simple 3-part framework to come back to, especially with people you know.

1
State the behavior
"You keep commenting on my appearance at work."

2
State how it makes you feel
"It makes me uncomfortable."

3
State what you'd like to happen
"I want you to stop."

If it's been going on for a long time

Add an opening line, then continue with the three parts:

"I don't know when you thought it was okay to..."

"I realize I haven't said anything in the past, but I really don't like it when..."

You don't have to share how you feel

You can state the behavior and what you want to happen, and leave out the feeling:

"You keep commenting on my appearance. I want you to stop."

This can be especially valuable with people who are tricky or manipulative, where you'd rather not be vulnerable at all.

If someone may have good intentions and simply poor boundaries, letting them know how their behavior impacts you can help them recalibrate. You get to choose.

> *Verbal boundary setting is our first line of defense. It's also what helps reveal the intentions of everyone in our lives. This is nuanced, tender work, and it gets easier with practice, out loud, with support.*



Tools to keep with you

Self-defense training can stir up a lot. These are small ways to support yourself through it.

Tap + Breathe

A simple tapping round you can do anywhere. No words needed, only breath and gentle touch.

1. Take a breath and notice how you're feeling, on a scale of 0 to 10.
2. With two fingers, gently tap each point about 5 to 7 times, breathing slowly: eyebrow, side of the eye, under the eye, under the nose, chin, collarbone, under the arm, top of the head.
3. Take a long exhale. Check in again. Repeat as many rounds as feels good.

Watch my tapping video →

Affirmations for your capability

I am worth defending.

Right here, right now, in this body, I am capable.

My voice matters.

My boundaries matter.

It's never too late for me to set a boundary.

I choose to be a good friend to myself on this journey.

Being a good friend to yourself as you learn

Learning something new can bring up frustration, nerves, old memories, or the urge to quit. None of that means you're doing it wrong. Try talking to yourself the way you'd talk to a friend in your shoes:

- Celebrate small wins, like showing up, saying the words out loud, trying again.
- Notice when you're being hard on yourself, and soften your tone.
- Rest when you need to. Integration happens between classes, too.
- Reach out. You don't have to process any of this alone.

06 · NEXT STEPS

Where to go from here

Bring a workshop to your group

Hands-on, women-only workshops for teams, clubs, brokerages, and communities. No athletic ability needed. I'd love to hear about your group.

Get in touch →

Start training near you

Women Empowered, a self-defense program for women, is taught at Gracie Jiu-Jitsu training centers around the world. Use the Gracie University directory to find a school near you, and ask about women's classes.

Find a school →

1:1 Coaching with Makayla

Support for the feelings self-defense training stirs up, using EFT tapping and mind-body tools, live on Zoom.

Learn more →

Free videos on YouTube

Grounding practices, tapping, and tools for what training stirs up.

Watch →

Questions? Reply to any of my emails, or write me at makayla@coachingwithmakayla.com. I'd love to hear from you.

