



Choosing an effective self-defense course for domestic violence survivors¹

- 1. Do instructors demonstrate sensitivity to people who have experienced violence?**
Do instructors project calmness and centeredness, offer clear instructions and guidelines, use positive and non-judgmental language, project compassion for each person, demonstrate patience and competence, project confidence in the participants and a commitment to their success?
- 2. Is a supportive and emotionally safe environment created for the participants?**
Do instructors establish ground rules for expected behavior in the class (e.g. treating others with respect)? Do instructors give participants a chance to introduce themselves? Are calming and centering techniques taught? Are limits placed and maintained on who can come into the class (e.g. are minimum age limits established)?
- 3. Is a physically safe environment created for the participants?**
Are participants asked to identify injured or vulnerable areas to reduce chance of re-injury? Are participants given guidelines in how to use their bodies safely and powerfully? Do instructors guide participants through warm-up exercises? Do instructors pay attention to creating a safe physical space, such as free from obstruction, safe distance between participants when practicing, access to water and bathrooms, privacy from onlookers, monitored entrance so that an abuser cannot enter the building?
- 4. Do the instructors have a clear pedagogical approach and well-organized class plan?**
For instance, do the instructors set a beginning and ending time with an opening and closing to the class? Do they have a plan for teaching whereby one thing builds on another? Do instructors demonstrate tools and skills slowly so that participants can see what is happening, use clear and measured language and body movement to teach tools and skills, give participants an opportunity to practice and receive constructive feedback? Do instructors create the opportunity for questions?
- 5. Do participants learn and practice more than physical techniques?**
For instance, do instructors offer a big picture of domestic violence and self-defense and teach self and environmental awareness, assessment skills, verbal boundary setting, de-escalation, and physical tools?
- 6. Do instructors demonstrate an understanding of the challenges faced by domestic violence survivors?**
For instance, do instructors offer recommendations that are consistent with self-defense laws and with advice by advocacy groups and service providers, such as a safety plan and not carrying weapons? Do instructors use language that emphasizes getting to safety rather than expressing revenge or hatred?
- 7. Are instructors certified women's self-defense instructors?**
Are the instructors certified by a nationally recognized women's self-defense organization, such as the National Women's Martial Arts Federation Self-Defense Group www.nwmaf.org or IMPACT International www.impactselfdefense.org? Do the instructors have professional knowledge concerning violence against women and/or professional experience in working with survivors of violence?

¹ Developed by Martha Thompson, Director and Instructor, IMPACT Chicago with input from Jennifer Caruso and Elizabeth Vitell, Rogers Park Community Council. For recommended philosophical underpinnings and FAQs about women's self-defense, refer to the National Coalition Against Sexual Assault Guidelines for Choosing a Self-Defense course <http://www.magicstream.org/selfdef2.htm>