

## The Threat of Violence by Colin Wee

How should you face and deal with an aggressive, physically threatening person? The same way you deal with a friendly, unassuming stranger! Unconsciously doing the wrong thing in front of a potentially violent aggressor can get you into more trouble than was initially coming your way.

### Introduction

Most of you would remember a book from the late 80s entitled Body Language that talked about the idea of how we relate to people and who we let into our 'zones'; social zones where acquaintances are allowed, personal zones where friends are allowed in, and intimate zones where only a select can traverse. Inappropriate distancing, perhaps by a person from a different culture can cause you discomfort and emotional distress.

Marc MacYoung talks about a similar concept but refers to a larger topography using terms 'personal' and 'shared' space, the idea of "boundaries" separating the two, and the concept that "boundaries work both ways" (MacYoung <http://nononsenseselfdefense.com>). MacYoung says, "boundaries ... are very real and tangible, like the fence that runs along your property. Others are inside you, determining what you do, what you don't do and what you will tolerate others doing to you."

The concept also gives you the understanding that while you seek to preserve your comfort zone and personal space by not letting 'intruders' in, everyone else (including the aggressor) is unthinkingly doing the same.

Like tangible and intangible boundaries, intrusion into your space can be beyond the physical: raised voices, finger pointing, agitated body language, intimidating looks, and even coarse language can cause similar distress as with inappropriate physical distancing. So how should you react to this?

### Facing Violence

We aren't talking about a person who's not interested in trouble. We're talking about the physically aggressive and potentially violent person (who can either be anyone you don't know or anyone who is historically violent).

Like you, these people have the same innate boundaries that can be intruded upon. But unlike you, a physically aggressive and violent person is looking for any trigger to justify hitting you.

So while you are being shouted at, it isn't to your benefit to choose the extremes of being passive aggressive and not responding, or worst still, shouting back. "If you are verbally aggressive with a would-be assailant, you've just crossed HIS personal boundaries" (MacYoung). However, take note that either ends of that spectrum can actually make you appear as a threat at an unconscious level.

### On Learning to Recognize Aggression ...

Most beginners in the martial arts are clueless to the fact that their faces reflect their inner thoughts. When you exert yourself, you grit your teeth, and your face naturally shows strain. Not many are taught to hide inner turmoil. But advanced fighters know the benefit of reading these 'telegraphed' thoughts so adopt a poker face and become adept at picking out subtle cues off their opponents. The opponent is after all human, and it is within our ability to read these cues and trick them into believing what we choose to portray.

### Putting on the Show

So what do you do in spite of having your personal space intruded upon, breaking out into a cold sweat, and dealing with the fear of being hit? You get to know the person!

An attacker, an irate customer, or a mugger is more likely to hit a nameless, taunting (whether consciously or not), hapless stranger than someone with a name and who's empathizing with their needs.

You start this humanizing process by saying "My name is \_\_\_\_\_, how can I help you? I work in ~." Or something similar that allows the aggressor to understand how you got into that particular situation. The Do's and Don'ts included below also suggest you take an active interest in understanding his situation. Reiterate simple messages that make the aggressor understand you are *bewildered* at how this situation got this bad.

### When Facing a Potentially Violent Person

#### DO ...

1. Breathe normally and speak at a moderate speed.
2. Talk consistently about your feelings and your empathy for the person's situation.
3. Have your arms hang relaxed by your sides, or spread them out low, fingers down with palms out.
4. Deal with the aggressor directly as an individual.
5. Invite him to sit down and talk about it.

#### DON'T ...

1. Shout, or exhale forcefully.
2. Sneer or talk down to the would-be assailant.
3. Have your arms higher than waist high or in the hold up position or crossed over your chest.
4. Make any jerky movements or sudden facial changes.
5. Look away and scan the crowd or surroundings.

The key is not to replicate any physical cues suggestive of a person who's going to launch a physical retaliation. Physically, this means no sudden moves. Mentally it means no moves to distance yourself from dealing with the situation; you must maintain the show that you are attempting to connect at a social level.

Keep persisting even if the aggressor is shouting. A person intent on shouting is less intent on hitting you. A person intent on hitting you is less intent on shouting (MacYoung).

### What Happens if it Gets Bad?

Things are getting worse. You notice that the aggressor has broken eye contact to scan the surroundings, shifting and repositioning his body, and entering a 'controlled rage'. This is the time to abandon the above strategy and then go into the 'please don't hurt me' stance, raising both hands palm out at face level, dropping your chin, and shifting your stance to present a smaller target to the aggressor.

Once here and if you can't run, you proceed with our verbal defence checklist (see The Flight or Fight Affirmation Exercise). Insist on your rights, insist that the person back down, and mention the official consequences. This is then *immediately* followed through with your self-defence strategy.

### About Colin Wee

Colin is the Founder of the Hikaru Ryu martial arts school currently situated in Western Australia. He has been involved in the martial arts since 1983.

### Bibliography

MacYoung, M. "No Nonsense Self Defense" at <http://www.nononsenseselfdefense.com>.

### References

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