

TEEN

20 Experts Sound Off on What Adolescents Need to Know to Protect Themselves

by Sara Fogan

No doubt you've noticed that the older you get, the more complicated—and dangerous—life becomes. You spend more time away from your family doing riskier things, and you probably stay out later while you do them. The good news is that with age comes life experience and increased awareness, which hopefully will make you less vulnerable than

SAFE

you were when you were 5. Couple that with a bigger and stronger body that can run faster and hit harder, and sprinkle in a little wisdom from self-protection experts, and you should be infinitely safer than you were as a tyke.

In an effort to serve up some of that wisdom, *Black Belt* asked 20 self-defense authorities to identify the best ways for teens like you to protect themselves. All the people we consulted offered extensive advice, but their comments have been condensed for the sake of brevity and to avoid repetition.

Ron Van Clief

No matter what your age or physical ability, get some martial arts training, says Ron Van Clief, the New York-based founder of Chinese *goju*. That's because formal training teaches not only self-defense but also self-confidence.

"It gives you a sense of well-being, a sense of 'Yes, I can do something if a bad thing happens,'" he says.



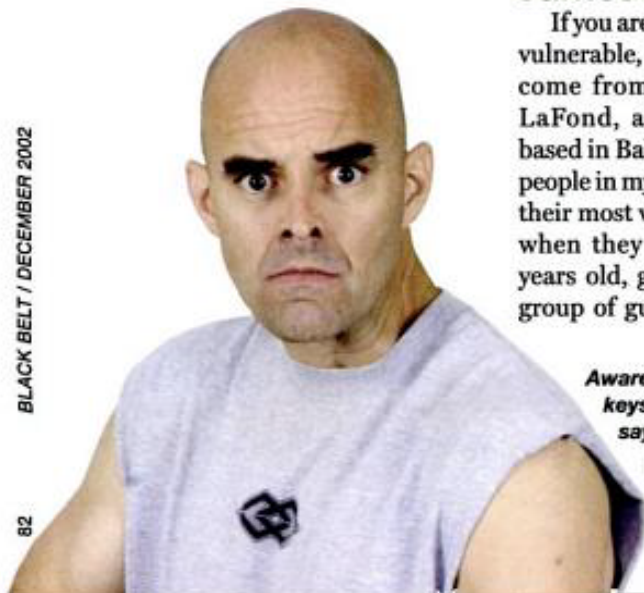


Ron Van Clief says martial arts training is the best thing teens can do to improve their survivability.

PHOTO BY SARA FOGAN

Jeff Clancy

To stay safe, you must remain aware of your environment at all times, says Jeff Clancy, a Southern California law-enforcement officer. And you should rehearse in your mind what you will do in an emergency. "You have to understand that there are certain situations that might occur, and each situation might call for a little bit different response," he explains.



Awareness and planning are the keys to avoiding trouble, says Jeff Clancy.

PHOTO BY RICK HUSTEAD

Peyton Quinn

You also need to understand how assailants select their victims, says reality-fighting expert Peyton Quinn, who operates the Rocky Mountain Combat Application Training Center in Lake George, Colorado. "In general, an aggressive predator will not attack until he is reasonably sure there is no danger to himself—either from the victim resisting physically or from the possible legal consequences of being caught."

It is rare that a criminal will attack without conducting some form of "interview," or verbal exchange intended to determine the vulnerability of his prospective victim, he adds.

Lito Angeles

Don't be a "rubber-necker," advises Lito Angeles, a law-enforcement officer based in Los Angeles. If you see something suspicious happening—even if it seems far away, don't hang around to see what develops. "Trust your instinct and run," he says. "Don't wait until the bad guys are one foot away to get out of there."

Melissa Soalt

If you are a girl under the age of 18, you are at the highest risk of being abducted and sexually assaulted, warns *Self Defense for Women* columnist Melissa Soalt. Therefore, it is imperative that you remain visible to and within earshot of other people. "Never go out alone, and always tell someone where you are," says the Amherst, Massachusetts-based self-defense instructor.

James LaFond

If you are a teen-age boy, you are also vulnerable, but your greatest risk may come from other boys, says James LaFond, a self-defense researcher based in Baltimore, Maryland. "A lot of people in my crime survey reported that their most violent experience occurred when they were between 10 and 15 years old, getting gang-stomped by a group of guys. The guys were usually

not aware of the personal situation they were in. They just didn't have any appreciation of the group dynamics."

To avoid trouble, LaFond says, you need to learn how to deal with your peers before trouble develops. You also need to be able to recognize and avoid group violence, and learn how to run away as soon as you get a chance, he adds.

Erin O'Toole

If you are assaulted, you must tell someone you trust about the incident right away, says Erin O'Toole, a personal-safety expert based in Orange, California. This applies whether you were able to flee the scene or had to use a physical technique to stun your assailant before escaping, she says.

Whom you tell—your parents, a teacher, the school principal or the police—depends on where the incident occurred, says O'Toole, who is the editor of *Self Defense for Women*.

Herb Perez

Be conscious of what is going on around you, and then make an effort to avoid hanging out in bad neighborhoods, says 1992 Olympic *taekwondo* gold-medalist Herb Perez. However, if you do find yourself in a dangerous situation, make a lot of noise and run toward a populated area to get help, the San Francisco, California-based *Black Belt* Hall of Fame member advises.

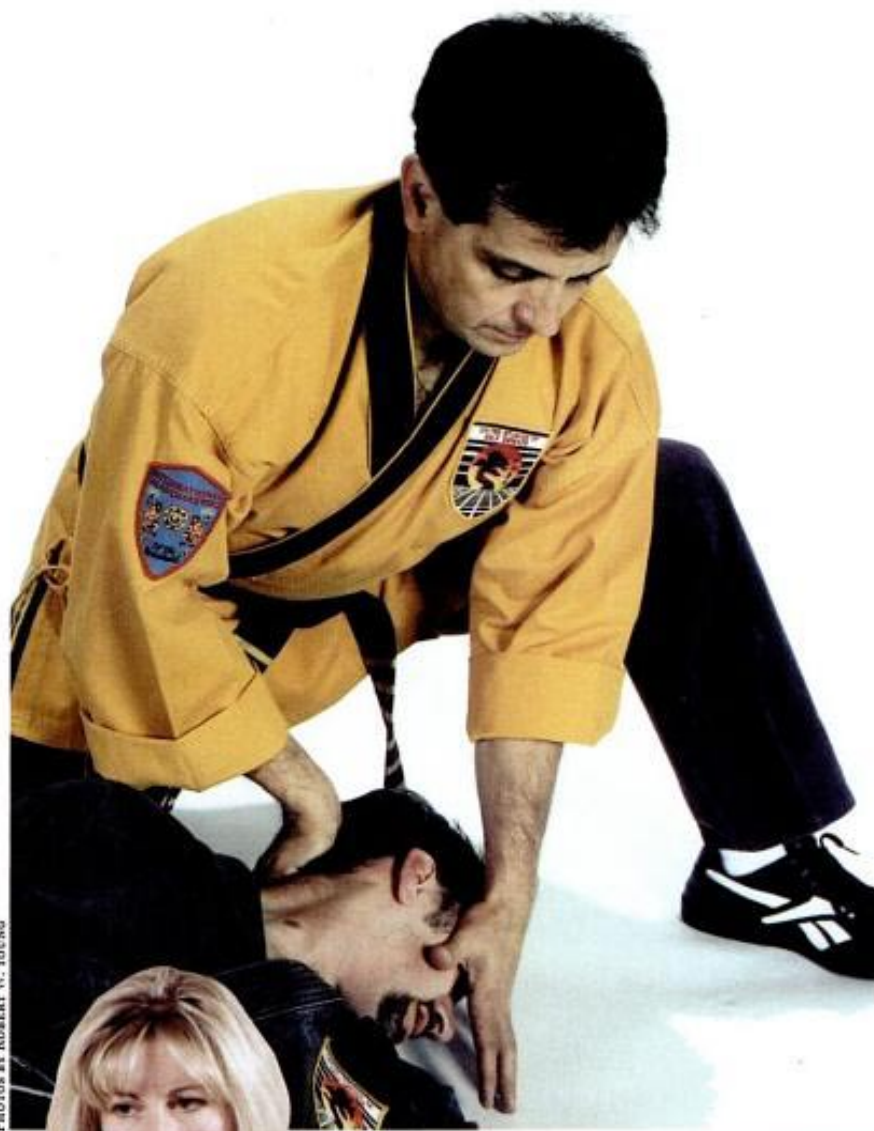
If necessary, you could throw a textbook and break a window to attract attention, he suggests. "Someone would have to come out and get you for what you did, which would cause the attacker to run away."

Sammy Franco

Street-fighting expert Sammy Franco says the best thing you can do to enhance your safety is get involved in reality-based self-defense. Instructors who teach those skills rely on realistic scenarios that involve the same dialog and tactics that criminals use on the street. That will make you more aware of safety and self-defense, the Gaithersburg, Maryland-based instructor says.

"A lot of the traditional martial arts won't prepare you for an abduction," he says, "but the reality-based people are

PHOTOS BY ROBERT W. YOUNG



Steve DeMasco advises all young martial artists to aim for an assailant's vital areas but be realistic about the amount of damage the strike will inflict.

the type-B attacker, who never kills his victim. "Nobody can tell the difference, so you have to treat them all like a type-A," he says.

You should never let an attacker take you out of an area where other people are because you can't be sure that he isn't going to kill you there, says the Tarzana, California-based karate expert. "Your best chance is to immediately scream, punch, kick, bite, go nuts and try to get away from him. You have to assume that he is going to kill you, and you have to decide if you want to die fighting or not."

William Cheung

Black Belt Hall of Fame member William Cheung suggests that whenever you are forced to deal with teenage bullies, you should first try to be nice to the aggressors or even apologize to them. If the conflict escalates and one of them grabs you, use your hand to check his elbow, push it away from you and run, he says.

"If someone grabs you from the front or behind in a bear hug, get as close to him as possible because the closer you are, the less chance you'll get seriously



If all your precautions fail and you are assaulted, immediately tell a responsible adult, says Erin O'Toole.

The Unexpected Benefits of Sport

Self-preservation expert Demi Barbitto advocates getting involved in sports as a means to develop your athletic ability and endurance because those attributes could save your life in a violent confrontation. It doesn't matter which sport you do, he says. Team sports, tennis and ice-skating are all beneficial because they force you to focus your attention and develop your physical skills, he claims.

Sports also increase your self-confidence and improve your ability to solve problems. "Any type of physical attribute that can be developed through sports—whether it is speed, power or determination to win—can assist you when you are being assaulted," the Paso Robles, California, resident says.

—S.F.

more geared to doing that."

Bob Wall

There are two types of assailants you need to worry about, says *Enter the Dragon* co-star Bob Wall: the type-A attacker, who always kills his victim, and

hurt," the Melbourne, Australia-based *wing chun* kung fu expert explains.

Richard Bustillo

The most important thing to do during an assault is fight back and make a lot of noise to attract attention—even

if the abductor has injured you, says *jeet kune do* expert Richard Bustillo. Those who don't resist usually find themselves in greater danger, the Tarzana, California-based *Black Belt* Hall of Fame member adds.

Richard Norton

Always think about what you would do, how you would escape and where you would run if someone tried to kidnap you, says *goju-ryu* karate expert Richard Norton. "You have to have a game plan, and the worst time to work that out is when the actual attack happens."

Norton, who lives in Reseda, California, says your best defense is to learn a few simple gross-motor moves, then rehearse and pressure-test them hundreds of times. "Even two or three basic techniques will give you confidence," he says. "Then, if there's a problem,

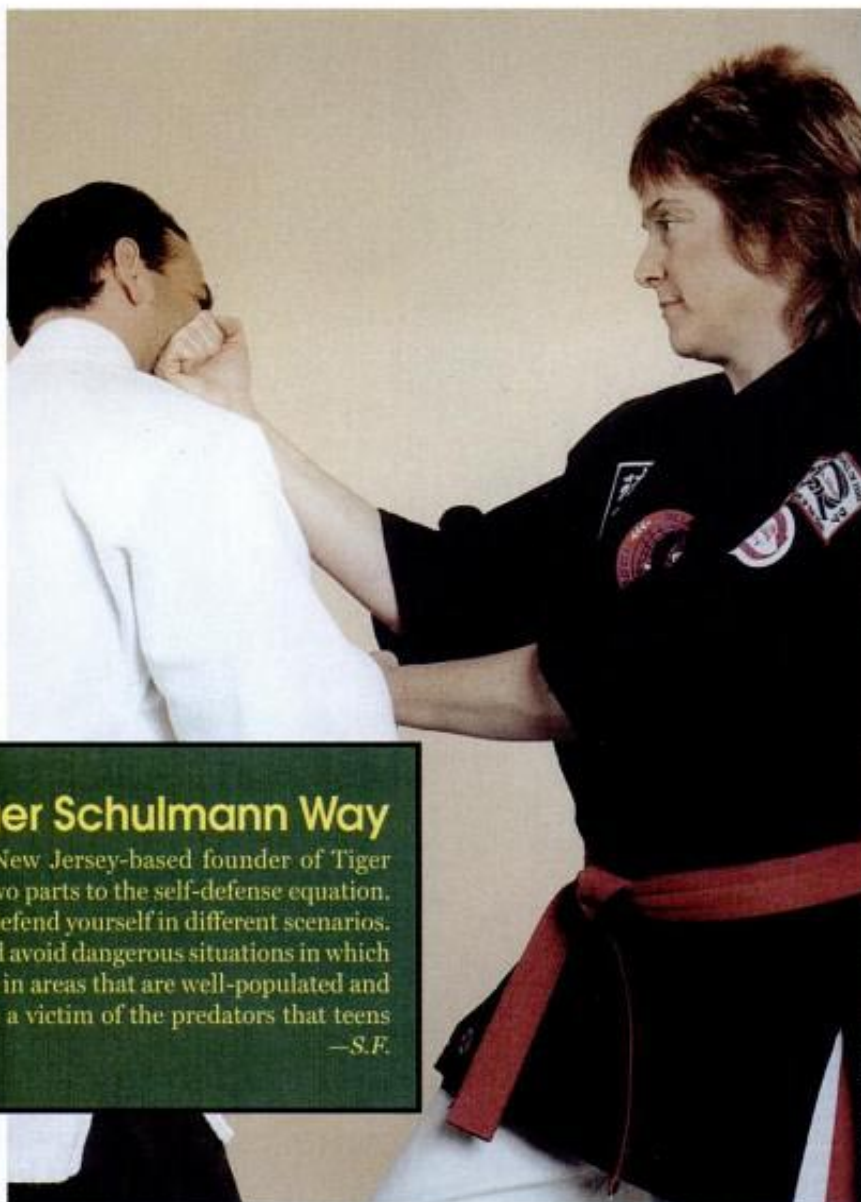


PHOTO BY SARA FOGAK

Staying Safe, the Tiger Schulmann Way

Tiger Schulmann, the Paramus, New Jersey-based founder of Tiger Schulmann Karate, insists there are two parts to the self-defense equation. The first is to learn how to physically defend yourself in different scenarios. The second is to use common sense and avoid dangerous situations in which you are alone. "If you stay in groups or in areas that are well-populated and well-lit, you are much less likely to be a victim of the predators that teens face today," he advises.

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strike your attacker's eyes or whatever to give yourself a chance to escape."

Steve DeMasco

Try to hit your assailant in the knees, nose, groin or throat, advises *Black Belt* Hall of Fame member Steve DeMasco. Even if you don't do any serious damage, the pain may create an opening for escape. Since adults can be up to three times heavier than the average 10- to 13-year-old, you need to be realistic about what will work in a self-defense situation, says the Syosset, New York-based *Shaolin kempo* instructor.

Kim Dillman

Finger locks are a good way to make an attacker release you, says pressure-point expert Kim Dillman. They are easy to learn and execute, and a twisted or broken digit can in-

Finger locks are an excellent form of self-defense for teen-agers because they are easy to learn and very effective, says Kim Dillman.

flict enough pain to momentarily thwart the plans of most thugs. "You can get out of just about any situation using finger locks," the Reading, Pennsylvania resident concludes.

Meredith Gold

If someone tries to kidnap you, throw a palm-heel strike into his face or slam a knee into his groin to distract him while you make your getaway, says *Black Belt* contributing editor Meredith Gold. An elbow to the face or slap to the groin can be effective if you are grabbed from behind, she adds.

"At certain ages, you will be a little self-conscious," the Glendale, Califor-

nia-based self-defense instructor explains. "You might not want to make a fuss. But if you're old enough to be able to put your hands up and say, 'You're too close to me; get away!' he will probably move on."

Gary Alexander

Because of the size differential between you and the average adult criminal, you should consider using a weapon to defend yourself, says *Black Belt* Hall of Fame member Gary Alexander. Although you probably can't carry a pocketknife to school, there's nothing stopping you from learning how to use a variety of objects

"You have to understand that there are certain situations that might occur, and each situation might call for a little bit different response."

as makeshift weapons, the Edison, New Jersey resident suggests.

"If you aren't armed but are carrying a book bag, you can swing it at the attacker's head," he says. "That should really slow him down."

Richard Ryan

Contrary to what many people are taught, fear is an ally—not an enemy, says Richard Ryan, creator of the Dynamic Combat self-defense system. The primal emotion prepares you to fight when you are in danger.

"Use your fear as a psychological trigger to make your move," says the

Phoenix, Arizona-based instructor. "It makes you think about what you can do, what action you can take in this circumstance and how you can escape." In other words, with the right attitude and training, fear can sharpen your ability to use the best weapon of all: your brain.

About the author: Sara Fogan is the managing editor of Black Belt. To order part one of this series, "Kid Safe: 20 Experts Sound Off on What You Need to Know to Protect Your Children," call (201) 559-0091 and ask for the November 2002 issue of Black Belt.

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BLACK BELT / DECEMBER 2002

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