

Self Defense: A New Definition

Self defense is like defensive driving. When do we think about our safety when driving down the highway? All the time. There are specific things we do to maintain that safety such as putting on our seat belt, checking mirrors, maintaining safe distances, turning on headlights and using turn signals. We can consider good car maintenance and awareness of traffic laws as things we do in preparation to reduce our risks while driving. We adjust our awareness and behavior when driving in bad weather, in a construction zone, or in heavy traffic based upon the increased level of risk.

Self defense on the job can be approached like defensive driving: Paying attention all the time and increasing awareness as risks go up. As in the specific things we do in defensive driving, there are things we can do to maintain safety on the job. Among these are:

- **Trusting your instincts.** The funny feeling you get when something doesn't seem right is your intuition telling you that you are at risk and need to pay attention. If you can quickly figure out what the challenge is and take action, great. If you cannot figure it out quickly, then figure it out from father away. The best self defense strategy is don't be where the danger is.
- **Paying attention to your surroundings.** It is easy to be distracted or to not pay attention, particularly in places you go often. How many of us drive from work to home and don't remember the trip? Know where nearby safe places are when going into neighborhoods.
- **Paying attention to the behavior of others.** Clients often telegraph what's going on for themselves through body language, words and voice without realizing it. You can know what's going on for a client before they themselves do, giving you more options in deescalating or leaving before things get out of control.
- **Recognizing the emotional state a client is in and deescalate accordingly.** It's not one size fits all for deescalation.
 - When frustrated, clients need support in accomplishing their goals.
 - When frightened, clients seek safety and comfort.
 - When angry, clients need you to understand that the underlying emotions driving their anger are valid.
- **Paying attention to the larger picture.** Often workers will become so focused on the client they ignore what's going on in the environment or with others around them.

In short being aware and trusting your instincts are key.

