



Thousand Waves
Martial Arts & Self-Defense Center, NFP

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What to look for in a Self-Defense Program

Thousand Waves—and our colleagues who teach empowerment-based Self-Defense—know that all classes are not alike. But it can be difficult to know what to look for and how to assess a class. Here are some guidelines to help you choose a good Self-Defense class.

Increases empowerment, lessens fear. The class should result in increased confidence, better ability to assess situations, and more options for handling conflict and violence. It should share success stories to counter the stories of assault most often covered in the media.

Multiple options. The class should present a range of options for preventing and interrupting violence including awareness, verbal strategies, avoidance strategies, and fighting techniques. It should recognize that compliance with an assault is a viable strategy. There are many ways to defend oneself, and ultimately the defender makes the choice that is right for herself/himself.

Real-life forms of violence. The class should address verbal, emotional, and physical forms of violence, ranging from irritating to life-threatening. The class should recognize patterns of violence—including systemic violence such as racism, homophobia, and sexism.

Confronts stereotypes and misinformation that can endanger us. The class should address common misconceptions about who perpetrates violence, and who is victimized. It should provide strategies to stop violence from people we know, people we love, and strangers.

Accessibility. The class should teach physical techniques that are simple to learn, easy to remember, and able to be done by people of different ages, sizes, and abilities.

A safe space. There should be ground rules that promote students' physical and emotional safety and that create a sense of camaraderie among participants.

No victim-blaming. The class should allow people to share past experiences, express vulnerabilities, and receive support and guidance in a non-judgmental manner. The class should place the blame on the attackers, harassers and abusers who perpetrate violence. It should not blame—directly or indirectly—survivors of violence for what they have experienced.



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What to look for in a Self-Defense Program (continued)

Peaceful conflict resolution. The class should teach physical fighting techniques as a 'last resort strategy' and teach other strategies—such as escaping or verbal boundary setting—as first choices.

Has a skilled, compassionate teacher. The class should be taught by an engaging, compassionate instructor with professional training in violence prevention and group facilitation, as well as physical defense training. It should allow for questions and feedback to instructors.

The Ethic of Least Harm

At Thousand Waves, we believe that we have responsibilities as self-defenders to do our best to match our response to the situation. The ideal expression of the ethic of least harm is a fight that never happens because the conflict is resolved with words and direct, respectful communication. In situations where we decide that there is no alternative to using fighting skills to defend ourselves, our commitment is to fight back using the ethic of least harm. This means using strategies and techniques that inflict the minimal amount of pain and injury needed to secure our escape and survival. The more skills we have, the more responsibility we have to use the appropriate amount of force – no more – to control a situation.