

VITAL INFORMATION ON CRIME & SELF DEFENSE THAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

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"There have been many questions directed at me during my career, instructing martial arts. These questions were concerning crime, its underlying influence and the importance of self-defense. I thought by sharing and answering these frequently asked questions, it may help resolve concerns about personal safety individuals may have. My intentions are not to offend anyone."

Q: Why do you think the United States has such a high rate of violent crime?

A: *I think crime in America can be attributed to many barriers, influences, and factors. Across the socio-economic spectrum, intrafamilial abuse is prominent. In some cases, little importance is placed on discipline, education, or morals. Children from these types of belief systems and living situations may have low self-confidence and low-esteem, and in turn fail to realize their potential for success. Drugs may become an escape from a seemingly hopeless environment. An addiction may compel a drug user to commit crimes in order to support their drug habit. Crime connected to violent gangs seems to stem from a need for acceptance, likely due to the lack of a cohesive, supportive family atmosphere.*

The United States is a diverse country. While overwhelmingly our country and its citizens respect multicultural traditions and beliefs, some do not. For people with an ethnocentric perspective, it may seem necessary to form groups that target hate messages at those they believe threaten their way of life. One group may blame another for insufficient opportunities, at times resulting in financial strain. Unfortunately, poverty becomes a factor on some level, and decisions to commit crime may result from stress caused by an inability to earn a living wage.

Beyond these factors, our media may perpetuate crime by glorifying sex, drugs, and violence. For example, lyrics in popular music, may influence a person already at risk for committing crime, for instance from one of the former scenarios. There are few watchdog organizations to protect consumers from the effects of such glorification. Moreover, all of the crimes found within society can be encountered using the Internet, whether directly online or as a result of communication over the Internet. It is a dangerous place if one is not careful to protect personal privacy.

Q: Are there any danger signals that people need to be aware of when they are out in public?

A: *Basically, use common sense. Stay away from neighborhoods or districts where the threat of crime is high. Carry a cell phone, in case you need help, and make sure that someone knows where you are going. Be aware that violence can occur anywhere, so stay alert to your surroundings.*

Q: Is there any way to recognize criminals?

A: No. Criminals can be male or female, and of any age, race, or religion. They are often quite cowardous, needing disguises to give them courage to attack vulnerable and unsuspecting people. Predators often target children and the elderly, but women are especially vulnerable. It has been said that one in three women will be a victim of a criminal act or attack in her lifetime.

Q: How do you view society's response to this situation?

A: For some time, it seems people relied upon law enforcement agencies, the judicial system and prisons to catch, prosecute and rehabilitate criminals. But, prisons are becoming overcrowded, which can mean that a criminal is likely to spend little or no time in jail. Those who do spend time in prison often return to society hardened, and with additional criminal knowledge. I think that, as a society, we are recognizing crime as a social disease. It is obvious that we lack a cure.

On a grassroots level, however, there is less tolerance for criminal activity. Community organizations are taking action, speaking out, and in some areas openly challenging neighborhood drug dealers and gang members. These groups are spreading the notion that an individual is responsible for his or her behavior, and that parents need to be accountable for the guidance and security of their children.

It used to be that reporting and management of intrafamilial violence was left to each family or group. However, society is beginning to be more critical of acts of violence among relatives and peers. For example, advocacy and awareness of domestic abuse, date rape, and child abuse, is commonplace in most communities. By law, some professionals are required to report suspected or known violence in the family, or risk penalties themselves.

Q: What role can self-defense training play in protecting a person against violent crimes?

A: The most common question people ask themselves when considering the potential of attack is, "Should I fight back?" It's tough to answer this question because no one can be completely certain of the outcome. Generally speaking, if a criminal wants money, jewelry, or a vehicle, then it's likely he or she will take the item and the person, without causing physical harm. However, if the victim knows the criminal, then there is the possibility that the criminal would not want to risk identification, and thus attempt to harm or kill the victim. Rape is another matter. Date rape may not pose a threat to life, but an unknown assailant may indeed intend to kill the victim after the rape. Fighting the criminal in this situation may save a victim's life. Of course, it is important to remember that the criminal mind can harbor various characteristics, ultimately prone to anger and rage, especially in an emotionally and physically charged moment. For that reason, it is probably best to consider that any attack could be life threatening.

Q: What should a person do to prepare for a possible attack?

A: There is a danger of false-security in self-defense training. People must be physically and emotionally able to defend themselves. There are short-term, self-defense seminars that are informative; but if you expect

to use these successfully in a real situation, long-term training and conditioning is necessary. You also need to prepare your mind.

Q: Prepare the mind? What do you mean?

A: There is a very intricate relationship between the mind and body, and the body cannot function without a command from the mind. In a threatening situation, the mind can become overwhelmed by fear, which can cause temporary paralysis and leave the victim helpless. This is especially true for those of us who were raised to be gentle and not to fight. For women, this may be interpreted as being “lady-like.” These messages, often passed along to children, may inhibit our minds in response to an attack. Therefore, it is important that we train, or retrain, our minds to react spontaneously to life-threatening situations: to stay in control. The best way to do this is to condition the mind by practicing simulated attack situations and sparring.

Q: Why is long-term training necessary if a person learns some basic self-defense moves that will get him or her out of trouble?

A: Physical conditioning and strengthening are equally important to preparing the body to ensure the effective execution of any self-defense technique. Good muscle tone can help protect vital organs and prevent injuries. Thorough stretching can aid in agility, which is important because criminals often attack a victim from behind. The ability to move quickly will enhance the effectiveness of the defensive response.

Q: What kinds of exercises do you suggest for self-defense training?

A: People can strengthen their entire body –including the heart and lungs – through several different methods. Light weight training, working on speed bags and kicking bags, calisthenics, and practicing defensive techniques with someone larger and stronger than you, are all ways to strengthen the body.

Training designed for the Armed Forces, as well as various law enforcement agencies across the country, illustrates the importance of a conditioned response. Members of these groups face potential attack every day, and they undergo vigorous training to ensure physical and psychological preparedness.

Q: Beyond stressing what you have here, what can instructors do to help prepare their students?

A: Instructors need to realize that they have a responsibility to be honest with their students. If it is your opinion that a student would be ineffective in a street situation, then you need to point this out to the student. Building self-confidence, and training the mind to overcome inhibitions, takes time. So while it is important to be assertive, you also need to be patient.

****Choon Lee's Academy, under the direction of Grand Master Lee, has locations in Missouri, Florida, California, and Colorado.*