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Gary Stringer writes this month's *Guest Column* focusing on teaching techniques and principles that can be applied in a flexible way.

# WANTED: HONEST, REALISTIC SELF DEFENCE TRAINING



**T**eaching self-defence martial arts is not just about technique, it's much more than that. Whilst the techniques are important, one might argue vital in fact, they become useless if not connected to other competencies, including awareness and observation skills and dynamic risk assessment.

There is a big difference in teaching a self-defence workshop/course from teaching a martial art, and in particular when that class is aimed at women who may be attacked in different ways and for different reasons than males.

There are many different schools of thought and methodologies offered today within the field of self-defence/personal-protection. Whichever training path someone chooses it is always good to remember that self-protection is not instinctive. Almost everything we know, we have to be taught or we learn by experience. We learn by observation as well as instruction. Most of what we think of as instinctive behaviours are learned at such an early stage we simply do not recall the process of learning it.

There are, however, certain physical responses

that are instinctive which can be utilised in effective self-defence techniques - a good example of this is the 'flinch response'. If you are thinking of designing or running a self-protection course or workshop, you may wish to consider some of the following points.

Rather than trying to teach specific responses to specific attacks, think about teaching flexible responses, utilising methods that can be employed against more than one type of attack. In my experience, wide as it may seem to some and limited as I think it is, violence is just too huge a field of study for any single person, no matter what their qualifications and training background is. To be an all-round 'expert' I have found it far more effective to teach a small number of techniques, employing principles that can then be applied in a flexible way making them far more useful. Can the techniques be adapted for use on the ground or against a wall for example?

Strikes must be simple and direct; the palm heel jab and bottom fist strike are very effective. The heel of the palm is physiologically the strongest hand formation for striking. Using the bottom fist (Hammer

Fist) we ensure once again that the hand is at the least risk of suffering damage when used as a weapon.

Kicks should be low line; dependent upon your style/art/preference we will all have favourite kicking techniques, in self-defence oriented training however, practicality and ease of execution have to be the first considerations. Tight or restrictive clothing may make certain actions difficult if not impossible.

Unarmed defence against any edged weapon is extremely dangerous, even for an 'expert' let alone someone who has completed a self-defence class. To paraphrase Captain W.E. Fairbairn - trainer to the Commandoes in WW2, "Even the smallest man with no training when armed with a knife is more than a match for any expert." Be honest and realistic with your students, you owe them that...

■ GARY STRINGER

## About the Author

Gary Stringer's career spans five decades during which time he has trained under such martial arts legends as Charles Mack, Dan Inosanto, and the late Wally Jay and Larry Hartsell respectively. He is currently an executive board member for the Kodo Butoku Renmei and Lead Director / Chief Instructor at The Modern Combatives and Self Defence Academy - [www.mcsda.co.uk](http://www.mcsda.co.uk)

Gary is regularly invited to teach on international seminars both in Europe and the U.S.A. He retired from the Police as a Detective with 28 years' service in 2012. He now devotes his time to teaching and researching effective self-defence methods.

