



The Safety Team, Inc.

Empowerment Self-Defense for Women by Women

What is the situation?

The statistics on violence against women are staggering. At least 25% of college women report being sexually assaulted during their college years, 20% of high school females are assaulted by their dating partner, and more than half of women in the U.S. report some form of sexual assault over the course of their lifetime. The impact of this violence is significant, and includes psychological distress, lowered self-esteem, academic or vocational challenges, and greater risk for future assault. This impact can be long-standing and severe.

What is the need?

A call for effective, evidenced-based sexual assault prevention programs has been highlighted in the media and in the 2014 White House Task Force on Violence. Current research indicates that empowerment self-defense programs can significantly improve women's self-confidence, feelings of personal power, assertiveness skills and self-advocacy, while also reducing their risk of initial victimization or re-victimization. In addition, a growing body of research (e.g., Dr. Van der Kolk, Dr. Levine, etc.) suggests that trauma-informed, empowerment self-defense trainings can promote healing and recovery from a previous assault.

Who are we?

The Safety team is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to the empowerment, well-being, resiliency and safety of women. We have been offering women's empowerment self-defense trainings (ESD) for over fifteen years that encourage open dialogue and effective communication, foster positive self-advocacy, and teach hands-on skills.

The Safety Team's instructors consist of 7 professional women--all of whom have careers that expose them to the realities of violence against women (clinical psychology, law enforcement, education, forensic toxicology, physical therapy, higher education, community outreach). As such, each team member brings valuable, diverse, and complementary expertise to our trainings, as we collectively understand the complicated nature and profound impact of violence against women. Additionally, members have extensive martial arts experience, with five members having black belts and two with brown belts in a variety of martial arts styles. Together, as a team, we offer comprehensive and dynamic ESD programs that are uncommon in Vermont and Northern New England.

What makes us different?

In contrast to other self-defense programs, our curriculum is trauma-informed, *evidenced-based* and updated frequently. We are dedicated to listening to the voices of women and incorporating their input and expertise into our programs. We offer leadership and mentoring opportunities, and have developed a robust internship program. In all of our classes, we adhere to a strict 5:1 student to instructor ratio to allow for a high level of individualized instruction. Our workshops cultivate women's abilities to make proactive choices regarding their own safety, while simultaneously building a supportive network that is active in promoting a culture of respect and the right to be safe.

A vital aspect of the Safety Team program, in addition to the high level of student involvement and leadership in the program, is the "*for women by women component*." The all-women format is unique but critical; this format provides a safe and comfortable environment for students to share and discuss strategies, concerns and relevant experiences. In addition to connecting with one another, women indicate that they feel very comfortable learning and practicing the verbal and physical techniques in an environment that is both safe and encouraging. This is particularly important given the sensitive nature of the material presented. Research supports and encourages the use of "women only" groups for these trainings, and women repeatedly and frequently mention this as a crucial component of our workshops.

In addition, to our own ongoing data collection and analysis, we are collaborating with national experts in the field of violence prevention (Dr. Tina Dardis from Towson University and Dr. Lindsay Orchowski from Brown University) to evaluate the efficacy of our trainings. Nancy Keller, M.Ed., CAS, a member of our team and a doctoral candidate at the University of Vermont, is also conducting a pilot study to help determine the impact of our program in promoting trauma recovery.

What types of trainings are offered?

The Safety Team offers a continuum of specialized empowerment trainings. Women may enroll in individual sessions, small group classes, or larger group community-based workshops. The Safety Team has launched a train-the-trainer leadership and mentoring program called Project WISE (Women Inspiring Safety and Empowerment) which is open to all women who have participated in our classes. In addition, we are now offering an innovative trauma recovery program: Therapeutic Empowerment Self-Defense program or TESD. This program is specifically designed for survivors of interpersonal violence and sexual assault and features an integrated mind-body approach to trauma recovery. In all of our offerings, women find their voice, develop resiliency, reclaim a sense of power and control, and as a result reduce the risk of assault.

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