

Principles of Physical Defense

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Principles are the foundation, laws, fundamental truths, and motivational forces that drive our responses to physical violence against us. All too often students are introduced to physical defense or combatives training with numerous techniques and tactics leaving the student remiss when it comes to the basic foundations upon which these skills may work when called upon.

In this article I'd like to present some basic principles of physical defense which are essential to a well rounded defensive program. Many of these principles may be old hat for some, new to others. Maybe you have seen them before or subconsciously know them but didn't give it much thought. Either way, I hope that for beginner and advanced student alike they may provide a little insight to the foundation of fighting to win.

Principle #1: Know and Train All Ranges of Physical Defense

Different threats exist at constantly changing ranges and different responses/tools apply at the various ranges. It's best to figure this out in training instead of on the street. Specializing in a specific range or style is great but do not become range fixated and adjust all of your responses to fit the range your good at or may be the flavor of the month. Be proficient in every range. Examples may include:

1. Long Weapon Range - Reachable with hand-held weapon just outside of kicking range
2. Kicking Range - Vulnerable to kicks but relatively safe from hand strikes
3. Striking Range - Inside of kicking range but vulnerable to hand, elbow and other close range weapon strikes or grabs
4. Grappling Range - Capable of or actually grabbing, pushing, pulling or controlling both standing (clinch) and on the ground

Principle #2: Have a Plan, the PFC Assault Response Model (ARM)

Physical confrontations are dynamic, constantly changing events in which numerous response solutions can be thought of, applied or discarded in a fraction of a second. Because of this it's important to have a general plan to follow for numerous situations which can be followed to completion when necessary or a single element may only be required to achieve your specific goal. An Assault Response Model can be a map to follow through varied and diverse situations:

1. Evade – Move to avoid contact and/or gain a positional advantage. This may be all that is required to escape harm or resolve a potential conflict
2. Contact – Locate, deflect, control, and/or track the opponent's limbs or body. Again, the contact stage may provide a resolution or serve as a step toward a greater level of response
3. Diminish – Attack and begin to break down the adversary's ability to strike
4. Destabilize – Take away the opponents stability and mobility

5. Disable – Injure and escape, restrain and contain, or kill if necessary

Principle #3: Have a plan if things go south, the Grappling Engagement Model (GEM)

Similar to the Assault Response Model this model applies to both standing and ground situations. Submission holds can constitute deadly force so don't take this range lightly just because you were a high school wrestling star. Select the appropriate tactic (or combination of tactics) based on time, threat, positional relationship and target availability. Regardless of position or submission, at least one response option is available:

1. Impair – Strikes to the Face, Throat, Arms or backs of the Hands
2. Crank – Head twist, Finger break or twisting and ripping of the Ear
3. Crush – Eye gouge, Groin attack, or Throat attack
4. Cut – Deep biting (teeth), circular Stab (knife) or contact Shot (gun)

Principle #4: Take them down, Triangulation

Under certain circumstances it may be necessary or prudent to ground our opponent in order to better control or inflict more severe damage. Another situation might require you to take an innocent bystander down to protect or to remove them from the immediate activity zone. This is easier said than done with a panicked 250lb. guy who's never heard a firearm discharge within 5 feet of his immediate position. Triangulation is the key to destabilizing and grounding an opponent. Picture a three legged table where you remove one leg. What happens? The table falls into the "blank" space where the supporting leg was. Triangulation can be performed from the front or rear of our opponent and transverse long or short angles. Our opponent's positional relationship, posture and balance determine the best triangulation point and our positional relationship and/or attachment usually determines the best method or technique for taking the adversary to the ground.

Principle #5: Be prepared to fight the whole fight, Energy Management

Physical confrontations are often only seconds long although they may seem like several minutes. Proper energy management is essential to gaining and maintaining dominance and finishing the fight as the victor. Do not try to overpower your opponent, transition from being "hard" to "soft" based on the phases of the encounter and flow with the direction of felt force exploiting your opponents vulnerabilities along the way. "Listen" to where your opponent wants to go; do not resist their movements, make them work in your favor thus retaining energy for moments when explosive force and power are required. Don't be selfish; find the easy way- give first, then take.

Principle #6: Gross motor doesn't mean FRENZY, Assault Economy

Under the stress of a physical engagement numerous physiological effects will inhibit and aide your defense. Gross motor skills will work best but gross motor doesn't have to mean a cave man type frenzy of action draining you of energy, leaving you unable to defend against a second adversary. Following the late Bob Kasper's proven combative format: Stay relaxed, Weapon First- lead with the weapon or tool your attacking with, Accelerate the weapon, Move in the direction of your target and Penetrates through the target – don't fall short. Remember less is more; especially in a weapons based and multiple aggressor environments. Operate inside your window of combat (usually between your arms or inside your "cage" or "guard" where you're strongest). Movements outside of this open you to counters, fouls and hinder subconscious referencing of where your tools are during the engagement. Eliminate excess steps, movements and actions and move through the selected responses with efficiency and no wasted motion. Unnecessary or excessive actions may defeat proper timing, interrupt effective sequencing, and/or allow your opponent to defend and counter.

No matter your style, proficiency level or background, principles can guide you through the design and execution of more efficient and meaningful training evolutions for yourself and students. Technique practice, drilling, and sparring are less than what they are meant to be without proper explanation and study of the principles which form the foundation for them to be effectively utilized. These are but a few of the principles essential to building and utilizing effective physical defense skill sets. The next time your training, take a moment to think about which of these principles apply to what your working on and how they can make your training the best it can possibly be.