



SELF- DEFENSE CURRICULUM

T R A C T I O N
P R O J E C T

Permissions & Dedication

We invite you to use any or all of this curriculum in your own training groups, with credit to Traction Project or TransFighters. We have even written an extensive guide for Running Your Own Classes including Sample Classes. Our hope is that this unusual information changes how everyone views the practice of Self-Defense. We also hope you can help sustain Traction Project by telling your students about us and what we do.

This information is based on the experiences of running our Oakland and Portland training clubs from 2014-2024, expanded from what we first published in *A Self-Defense Study Guide For Trans Women** (2021). This is the core project of Traction Project, the result of 10 years of work by dozens of people,

Reflection Space

A 20x20 grid of dots on a white background. The dots are arranged in a regular, repeating pattern, forming a square grid. There are 20 dots in each row and 20 dots in each column, totaling 400 dots. The dots are small, dark gray circles.

- Carrying weapons.
- Any overt violence (ie. punching, shoving, or shouting).
- Even just calmly talking back, or filing a complaint.

2. Being dependent on your attacker:

Is your attacker someone who also gives you resources, like money, housing, or child custody?

Do they control things in your life, like a parent, a school administrator, or a doctor?

Will they take those things away if you openly defend yourself?

- Defend yourself in **inconspicuous** ways, so that they don't realize you are even defending yourself.
- Use **teamwork** strategies to give yourself power over them instead.

including LGBTQ elders, trans women of color, and sex workers, 3 of whom died in the pursuit of this knowledge. We dedicate this curriculum to the people we lost, rest in power.

TRACTION PROJECT

Self-Defense Curriculum

This is what Traction Project recommends that you study (or ask your instructors to teach you.) This curriculum is unlike any other self-defense program we know about, because it was built to address the needs of trans-feminine people specifically, especially those who are BIPOC or sex workers, who need to be careful of the consequences of defending themselves.

Table of Contents

Verbal Manipulation	4
Inconspicuous Grappling & Intimate- Partner Defense	11
Nonverbal Manipulation (Intimidation & Fawning)	17
In-Person Teamwork Tactics	21
Lifestyle Teamwork Strategies	23
Weapon Defenses & Offense	30
Why Do We Need A Special Curriculum?	32

This curriculum is designed for adults (ages 18+), because it includes self defense options related to sex work and drug use. If working with minors, an instructor should use their discretion to select only the skills that are appropriate for minors.

Why do we need a special curriculum for trans people?

The big concerns are: what other people think, and if you're dependent on your attacker for resources.

1. What other people think:

Will bystanders side against you because of transmisogyny or racism?

Even after it's over, will you be punished for it? ie. by a cop, a court, your boss, your friends, or the person who attacked you.

- You can still defend yourself while avoiding doing things that will later require you to appear in court, or have to talk with a school Principal or Human Resources Officer, or have to explain yourself to your community.
- Things that often get you in trouble are:

women still carry knives despite the weapon's poor performance history.

- Stance & slashing attacks (can use rattan sticks & escrima drills).
- Sparring weapon vs weapon, using foam props or markers.

Verbal Manipulation

Femme Voice

- Does not need to be a “passing” voice (ie. it can just be the “Gay Lisp”).
- Femme Voice can disarm people who are seeking a masculine adversary.
- If a Femme Voice is increasing the phobic aggravation, switch to a masc voice.

Fast-Talk / Smooth-Talk / Railroading

1. Basic: Using a constant stream of words, can just be stream-of-consciousness
 - Can be slow, but without breaks.
 - Interrupts their verbal agenda & derails their ramp-up.
 - Don't use clever comebacks (which actually help your adversary ramp-up)
2. Intermediate: Repeating a Command
 - Controls the topics they are thinking about.
 - Can induce a subconscious action (ie. “you are leaving”).

- Be ready to pivot to another verbal tactic once the bully figures out how to zone-out
3. Advanced: Allowing for conversational give-and-take to combine with the verbal tactics below.

Shaming

- Labelling what they're doing as unethical.
 - "What will the community think if they find out?" / "This isn't Christian behavior." / "You're acting like dad."
- Implying that specific other people will judge their behavior.
 - name a specific teacher, parent, neighbor: "Mrs. K wouldn't like that you're doing this."
 - Let them think de-escalation was their idea.

Bluff That You Have Backup

- Lying that someone is nearby, or is watching.

Weapon Defense & Offensive Knife Use

Weapon Defense:

- Verbally interviewing the attacker to make them feel heard & self-deescalate.
- Teamwork defense (see: Hug Game).
- Inducing or directing a bystander to intervene (see Verbal Manipulation).
- Unarmed blocking or catching slashes and stabs.
- Unarmed two-handed desperate control (grab and hold on), integrated with grappling.
- Thumb- or finger-peeling knife takeaways (not sword-specific disarms).

Weapon Offense:

* This is a departure from our usual requirements for reduced repercussions. We teach it as a "harm-reduction" consideration because so many trans

1. Experience *work* together (ie. bake a cake together).
 2. Experience *anxiety* together (ie. go to a women's clothing store together).
 3. Experience *danger* together (ie. go to a protest together, study martial arts together).
 4. Trauma Bond (ie. get into trouble together).
- *Know the consequences of bonding with others in this intense way*
 - Hard and slow to undo.
 - When they fall on hard times you will go with them.

- Point out someone in a window, or people coming up the street, whether they're real or not.
- Say that someone is waiting for you nearby, is about to arrive, or is waiting for you to text back.
- Calling for help, ideally by name (whether that person is nearby or not).
- Letting them see/hear you asking for help (phone call, bystanders).
 - Bystanders won't actually help; don't go so far that your bluff gets called.
- Approaching a stranger and talk to them like you know them.

Verbal Escalation (ie. "You got a problem with me?!")

- Guessing what the bully's intended level of violent intention is, then:
 - Verbally invite greater violence than they were intending.
 - "Let's take this outside." / "Do you want to fight me?"

- Threaten to bring the issue to an authority figure.
 - “I’m going to tell mom!” / “Ok, let’s bring the neighbors into this.”
- Catcallers / Sexual Harassment:

Aggressively flirt back with them, or befriend them, if it seems like they aren’t prepared for that level of engagement.
- Don’t keep pushing once they’re done:
 - i. Let them laugh it off or tell you to chill out .
 - ii. Allow them to de-escalate you.
- Do not use this tactic if they seem totally comfortable with you raising the stakes, or if their true objective is violence (rather than power, prestige, territory, money).
- Prepare to pivot to another tactic, like fawning.
- Careful not to go so hard that you push them into a violent panic or self-defense response.

- rather than your special interests.
 - Your life story implies your future, which is how you hook them.
- Turn allies into friends by:
 - Spending time. See above: Re-organize your life to not be independent.
 - Identify who is in need and show up for them, whether or not you like them.
 - Note: friends are cool, but won’t necessarily know how to support or defend you, and aren’t as intimidating as a coordinated squad, so:
- Turn *some* friends into a ride-or-die team of 3-5 people.
 - Go together into an emergency environment:
 - Pre-negotiate the terms and choose a level of bond. Do everything intentionally.
 - Options for a different intensity of bond:

(turn bullies into acquaintances, into allies, into friends, into a squad).

1. Bait bullies into having a stake in your existence.

- Buy lunch, gifts, do services (do their homework).
- Put yourself in debt (repay them, and then re-borrow).
- Ask them for big non-monetary favors (make them think “that kid owes me”).
- Let them take advantage of you so that they think of you as a valuable resource.
 - Make sure they also see you as somewhat dangerous.
- Even if they’re not helpful, if they act like they know you no one else will mess with you.

2. Make acquaintances into allies by talking about your history (even if they’re moderately transphobic).

- Focus on where you’ve been,

Distraction

1. Basic:

- Pointing at something, changing the subject, or being confusing.
- Lying about contagion (AIDS, COVID, hands are dirty).
- Responding to insults with flat denial.
 - “Oh, I’m not a transgender, why the hell would you think that?”
- Playing with tone & volume to induce subconscious response.
 - Get loud, get soft.
 - Get angry, get friendly.
 - Get closer, create distance.

2. Intermediate:

- Getting them answering basic questions:
 - Their name; directions; what they hate about the Libs.
 - Use this to control the conversation instead of letting them choose how to escalate.
- Inserting human connection:

- Mention your kids, parents, common friends.
- Mention where you're from, or other personal history.
 - Creates snippets of your life story in their head, making them think of you as surviving beyond this moment.
 - Fishes for a common history that you can exploit for befriending tactics.
- Ask them to talk about *their* history, and relationships/family /religion.
 - Still fishing for common history.
 - Helps them feel heard, which is calming.
 - Asking about their kids or friends can help them see themselves as a whole person, not just an enraged or panicked animal.
- Compliment or befriend them.

Medical Advocates:

- Bring a friend to your doctor visits, as silent intimidation.
- Emergency Department:
 - A trans patient shouldn't navigate ER alone.
 - Schedule advocate shifts, especially to intimidate overnight staff & early morning rounds.
 - If no visitors allowed, intimidate the hospital staff by saying an advocate is monitoring the patient from the lobby or parking lot.
- Manage legal next-of-kin before they show up to interfere with care, or before a patient passes away (to control the remains & belongings).

Squad Building:

- Intentionally manufacture a squad, even out of people that don't necessarily like you, by evolving each relationship in stages instead of trying to do it all-at-once

- Meet up before going out.
- Live with roommates. Befriend neighbors.
- Activate location data / let someone know where you're going & have scheduled check-ins, compulsively tell people you got home.
- Buddy system when doing jobs for strangers.
- Befriend or date/marry an ally who vouches for you by association (aka the gay "beard").

Pre-emptively coach your bathroom

buddy (or your vouching-ally that is giving you access to a transphobic space).

- Buddy should stay close, not wait in the hall.
- Buddy should talk (or physically associate) constantly, even if you don't respond.
- Best if buddy is a clearly respected member of that group (ie. white cis woman).
- Train or manipulate coworkers to run interference (see Squad Building notes).

- Refocusing conversation on their apparent interests, and then:

3.Advanced:

- Choose a topic they've already brought up (ie. a slur).
- Ask a clarifying question about that topic.
- Aim to have them thinking harder than you are.
- Make your Inconspicuous Grappling move the moment they begin to think.

Inconspicuous Grappling & Intimate-Partner Defense

- Prioritize “no-gi” training, in tight quarters, assuming the application will be without clothes, in a bedroom, on a couch, or in a car (this section is not for “street”).
- Prioritize gentleness and subtlety, assuming the defender needs to protect the feelings of the aggressor, as with a client who hasn’t paid yet, or a partner who controls their housing.

1. Basic:

- Creating space:
 - Butt-scoot backward w/one leg.
 - “Shrimp” Hip Escape.
 - Practice from Mount and Side-Control.
 - Technical Stand-Up (aka Turkish Get-Up).
 - Practice with partner pushing you back down.

If you’re alone, make yourself not alone.

- Text someone, or send location data, every time you put yourself into play (ie. walking alone, confronting someone, doing a solo job).
- Take a photo and post it to Instagram. Start livestreaming.
- Just tell your attacker you’re not alone, even though you are.
 - Someone is in the next room
 - Someone is waiting for you in the parking lot
 - Someone is on the phone with you, or waiting for you to text back

Re-organize your life to not be independent, so you are rarely alone. Ideas:

- Ask for more help doing everything.
- Join group hobbies instead of pursuing solo hobbies.
- Carpool, walk together, get everyone home safe.
 - Model after Homobiles.

Lifestyle Teamwork Strategies

This section is great for sit-down seminars, or collective chats among teams/clubs/friends.

Looking out for each other:

- Sharing money & resources (to avoid those people having to make decisions out of desperation).
- Organized shifts for medical advocates, surgery recovery, suicide watches.
- Social-media-based search & rescue teams.
- Watch friends' drinks at parties, trip-sitting, doing drugs with help.
- Stay in touch with friends who are in exclusive relationships.
- Brainstorm: What needs do specific individuals have? How else can you look out for each other?

- Grip escapes:
 - Prioritize being gentle, to not alert the partner that you've taken control or defended yourself.
 - Redesigned traditional grip "breaks" to be subtle/intimate techniques:
 - Hand-on-arm:
 1. Circle-out.
 2. Gently re-grip.
 - One arm-around-waist:
 1. Gently turn toward partner
 2. Create space with forearm frames, or:
 3. Stay close/intimate while claiming a Casually Controlling Position (see below).
 - Bear hug escape.
 - Same gentle escape as "arm-around-waist" but from inside a two-arm hug.
 - Arm-over-shoulders or clinch escape using "Slide-By" move.
 - Casually Controlling Positions:

- Clinch (intimate head/neck).
 - Russian 2-on-1 (but make it like a gossipy cheerleader).
 - Underhook, near side or far side (like a cuddle).
 - Half-bodylock (casual side-hug around waist).
 - Body Lock (aka side hug).
 - Framing for makeouts & bedroom:
 - Forearm framing / single-arm clinch.
 - Practice subtlety & selling it as an intimate gesture.
 - Shin Shields:
 - i. Practice gaining this position from side control.
 - ii. Gently frame their hips away to create space.
 - iii. Also try Z-Guard, Single Butterfly.
2. Intermediate:
- Aggressive-but-outwardly-inconspicuous grip escapes:

Grappling Using Teamwork

- Two teammates vs one enemy (see Hug Game class guide).

Teams vs Teams

- Technical Stand Up from inside big group grapples.
 - Get off the ground, no “pulling guard.”
- Freeze Tag or big fun boffer-weapon fights, focus on:
 - Flanking
 - Verbal Coordination

In-Person Teamwork Tactics

Bystander Training

- Breathing and then taking an action.
 - Un-train the freeze response.
 - Be more thoughtful before intervening.
- Communicating constantly with teammates / bystanders (see: Fast Talk)
- Commanding other bystanders (if appropriate to take charge).
- See other groups' bystander training guides for more detailed plans (ie. Distract, Delegate, Document, Delay, and Direct).

Positional Team Confrontation (for verbal or physical encounters).

- Fanning out to show numbers.
- Flanking to unsettle opponent's focus.

- Grab one finger
- Thumb compression
- Aikido style wrist locks
- Position Escapes:
 - Side-Control escape to a shin-shield
 - At least 2 escapes from Mount:
 - Bump & Roll
 - Shrimp & Frame
 - Scrape a leg into Half-Guard
 - Recover from Turtle into Side-Control into Full-Guard.
 - Full-Guard transitions to:
 - Hip Bump Sweep
 - A shin-shield, then to Technical Stand
 - Escape from Back Mount with no opponent hooks.
- Position retention, defensive:
 - Full Guard
 - Half Butterfly
 - Z-Guard
 - Turtle
- Position retention, offensive:

- Side-Control
- Knee on Belly
- Back Mount
- Optional: Scarf Hold, S-Mount
- Submissions:
 - Rear Naked Choke, from standing & from seated.
 - Guillotine from full guard, Guillotine from standing snap-down.
- Takedowns:
 - No-gi Arm Drag to a Body Lock, to rear-side sinking trip (Tani-Otoshi).
 - Russian 2-on-1 to near-side and/or far-side trip, or ankle pick, or snap-down.
 - Any other Judo sacrifice throws or controllable/gentle trips.
 - No big dramatic throws (ogoshi) or wrestling shots.

3. Advanced:

- Train sport submission grappling *with sparring* (ie. Sambo, no-gi BJJ).

attacker intends; see section on Weapon Defense).

- Pre-emptively removing weapons from their hands:
 - Give them a different object to hold (ie. a drink, your body).
 - Move to a room where the potential weapon feels awkward (ie. casually holding a kitchen knife feels inappropriate outside of the kitchen).
 - Just tell them (or ask them why) they're holding a weapon (ie. with cops).
 - Also train disarming yourself, by setting down potential weapons during arguments.

- Exaggerating Injury Training (to accelerate the attacker's feeling of satisfaction):
 - Exaggerate how much they move you:
 - Getting pushed or shaken.
 - Pushed into a wall, with a wall-fallbreak.
 - Pratfall into furniture, or to the floor.
 - Dropping things, moving furniture extra.
 - Theater-acting pain and light injury:
 - Pain/shock vocalizations.
 - Holding a hand over the "injury."
 - Slumped spine, doubling over.
 - Practice not overdoing it.
 - Soft block/parry that still lets the blow hit somewhat.
 - Not going dead inside (show evidence that you're being emotionally affected or taking some damage)
 - Do not use this tactic if they are holding a potential weapon (weapons cause damage faster than the

- Talk the entire time while sparring, especially the fun exercises from the Verbal Manipulation section like "Clarifying Questions."
- Prioritize gaining positional control rather than submissions (or only allow chokes).
- Prioritize a soft, slow, fluid, lazy approach, that can be applied to intimate/bedroom grappling, rather than aggressive, dynamic, competition-oriented training.
- Can learn some joint locks, or try full-speed sparring, to make training fun, but these aren't *inconspicuous* self defense.

Non-Verbal Manipulation (Intimidation & Fawning)

Intimidation

- There are so many ways to intimidate someone. If you're already comfortable using a different method (ie. size, cool, loud, history, flinch), that's probably your best approach. If you *don't yet* have skill with intimidation, try learning the following approaches rather than using a weapon or pure aggression, in order to reduce consequences:
- Internal stance work:
 - Engage the hip lateral rotators.
 - Root the feet.
 - Relax the shoulders.
 - Lower the brow / drop the chin.
 - Alternatively: visualize yourself as a cornered cat or feral animal, and let your body find the rooted posture.
- Teamwork:

- Just hang out in groups, ideally that look organized or coordinated.
- Insert yourself into groups of bystanders, or verbally recruit bystanders to stand with you.
- See flanking positions in Teamwork Tactics section.
- Train any sparring martial art regularly.

Manipulative Fawning

- Passive Stance Training:
 - Palms out ("I surrender" posture), or limp wrists (ie. cat-girl hands, or pangolin folded hands).
 - While also putting your arms in your favorite ready-position (ie. from boxing, taekwondo, wrestling).
 - Practice temporarily turning *off* the internal stance work from the Intimidation section (esp. hip lateral rotators), to communicate non-aggression.