

Commentary

Anti Gay Violence - Self Defense

Following are some suggestions as to how lesbians and gay men can protect themselves better from street violence. They are based on safety information published by various local groups. Remember that not all attacks can be prevented or escaped from; these self-defense guidelines should not be construed as an attempt to shift responsibility from the assailant to the victim.

How to Minimize the Risk of Attack

1) Know your local "danger zones," areas where lesbians and gay men have been frequently attacked. Try to avoid these areas if you are alone. Pick routes where there is life in the streets: other pedestrians, open stores, traffic. If it is late and you are able to take a cab or bus to your destination, do so.

2) If you must walk alone, walk assertively and be alert. If you are intoxicated, drugged, tired, or upset, try not to show it. Assailants have a nose for vulnerability and are looking for easy targets.

3) Make brief eye contact with people who walk towards you to determine

whether they are a threat and to let them know you are aware of their approach. If you hear someone behind you, don't be afraid or embarrassed to turn around and see who it is. If you feel threatened, you very well may be, and you should act accordingly. Analyze later. Every second of denial reduces the time you might need to escape.

4) If you think someone is following you, widen the distance between the two of you. Walk closer to the street or cross the street. Walk into a store. Run if you need to.

5) Avoid close-up verbal exchanges with people you are not comfortable with. If people in cars or on the street ask you a question or request directions, yell back a response rather than approach them.

6) Prolonged or aggravated verbal exchanges often result in violence. If someone taunts or harasses you, do not respond unless you are prepared for a fight.

7) Learn some basic self-defense techniques. Their purpose is not to overpower and subdue an attacker but to injure a vulnerable area so that you can escape.

What to Do If You Are Attacked

1) If you carry a whistle-and you should-use it. Or yell.

2) On the other hand, if your assailant is armed with a gun, stay quiet and still. And never rush at someone who has a knife. If the motive is robbery rather than assault, do not resist.

3) Once violence has begun, however, defend yourself. Homophobic assailants are no less vicious if you are passive, and they often don't expect much resistance from their gay victims. Surprise them. Aim blows at vulnerable areas: the face, throat, solar plexus, groin, kidneys. Stomp their feet. Kick their shins. Knee them in the crotch. Scream bloody murder. And as soon as you can, run like hell.

4) A single heavy blow to your face or head could be fatal. If you fall or are forced to the ground, tuck your head into your arms.

What to Do If You See an Attack

1) Call the police immediately from the nearest phone. In many communities, dial-

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