

# NRA GUIDE

LEARN  
ADVANCED  
SKILLS

BASICS OF  
**PERSONAL  
PROTECTION**  
OUTSIDE THE HOME



**NRA**

**NRA**  
**GUN**  
**SAFETY**  
**RULES**



**ALWAYS**  
keep the gun pointed  
in a safe direction.



**ALWAYS**  
keep your finger off the  
trigger until ready to shoot.



**ALWAYS**  
keep the gun unloaded  
until ready to use.

**When Using or Storing a Gun, Always Follow These NRA Rules:**

- Know your target and what is beyond.
- Be sure the gun is safe to operate.
- Wear eye and ear protection as appropriate.
- Store guns so they are not accessible to unauthorized persons.
- Know how to use the gun safely.
- Use only the correct ammunition for your gun.
- Never use alcohol or drugs before or while shooting.
- Be aware that certain types of guns and many shooting activities require additional safety precautions.

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**NRA GUIDE**  
BASICS OF  
**PERSONAL**  
**PROTECTION**  
OUTSIDE THE HOME

Produced by the Education & Training Division

A Publication of the National Rifle Association of America



# NRA

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This manual is under no circumstances to be viewed as a restatement of the law in any jurisdiction or to assure compliance with any applicable federal, state or local laws, ordinances, rules or regulations. You must consult a local attorney to ascertain compliance with all applicable federal, state or local laws, ordinances, rules or regulations and to advise you of the applicable duty of care required of firearms instructors in your jurisdiction.

Instructors should consult with their attorneys for advice on reducing their potential liability for injuries or damages which students or others may incur while learning to present the handgun from concealment, or as a result of other activities. The effectiveness of theories of liability (e.g., strict liability, negligence and others) and methods for protecting oneself from liability (e.g., incorporation, waivers and others) vary between different jurisdictions, and the attorney consulted should be familiar with the law of the applicable jurisdiction.

Discharging firearms in poorly ventilated areas, cleaning firearms, or handling ammunition or lead-containing reloading components may result in exposure to lead. Have adequate ventilation at all times. Wash hands after exposure.

Great pains have been taken to make this book as complete as possible; however, it is designed to be used in conjunction with the classroom and firing range instruction of the NRA Personal Protection Outside the Home Course. Reading this guide is not, in itself, sufficient to confer proficiency in the many techniques of personal protection outside the home. The reader of this guide should obtain additional knowledge and hands-on training. Contact the NRA Education and Training Division at (703) 267-1500 for more information.



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## SAFETY NOTE

The NRA's first Rule for Safe Gun Handling is **ALWAYS** keep the gun pointed in a safe direction. Implicit in that is the notion that a firearm must never be pointed at another human being (except, of course, in a self-defense situation). This rule must always be observed; it cannot be relaxed even for legitimate education or training purposes.

Many of the photographs in this book illustrate defensive firearm use, gun presentation techniques, and specific shooting stances or positions. For instructional purposes it was often necessary to position the camera in front of the muzzle of the gun, or to re-create defensive scenarios in which the defender would point his or her firearm at an attacker. At no time was an actual functioning firearm used in these photographs; special deactivated, non-firing training guns, or solid plastic gun simulators, were employed.

Absolute, unvarying adherence to this first and most important of gun safety rules cannot be overemphasized. Real guns—even when clearly unloaded—must never be used in re-creating or practicing self-defense scenarios, or in any other training activity in which the firearm may be pointed at a training partner or other person. If you engage in such activities, always use a non-firing training gun or gun simulator designed for that purpose.

# INTRODUCTION

Currently, 42 states and the District of Columbia respect the right of law abiding Americans to carry a concealed firearm. All 50 states provide for some form of concealed carry, and 16 states do not require a permit to carry a concealed firearm. Millions of people have taken advantage of this right, creating a need for a comprehensive course that covers the full spectrum of issues and information relating to concealed carry and self-defense. This includes not only techniques for properly carrying, presenting and shooting a concealed firearm, but also strategies for preventing violent encounters, and the legal ramifications of using lethal force in self-defense outside the home. The NRA's Personal Protection Outside the Home Course was designed to meet this need.

The use of force is only one of many methods that you can employ to defend life and limb, and is used only as a last resort, when other methods have failed. *For a myriad ethical, legal and practical reasons, it is always preferable to escape, evade, deter or otherwise avoid an attack rather than be forced to counter it with force.* Even when planning and skill give you an overwhelming advantage over an assailant, sidestepping a violent confrontation is always the best course. This is especially true when you are legally carrying a concealed gun in public. Not only is retreat or flight from a confrontation outside the home the most sensible alternative, it is required by statute in most states (as long as you can retreat safely).

There are times, however, when circumstances allow no other option but the use of force to save your life or the lives of others. When you are confronted with such circumstances outside the home, a concealed firearm is unquestionably the most effective defensive tool available, if it is used properly. The ability to draw a firearm from concealment and shoot accurately is not something you are born with; it must be developed through the mastery of a series of interlocking skills, and then must be reinforced through frequent practice.

Note that, in many defensive situations, merely presenting the firearm will deter the threat, without the need for the gun to be fired. The NRA Personal Protection Outside the Home course will help prepare you to make decisions regarding the level of firearm use that is necessary to protect your life or the lives of others.

The main focus of the *NRA Guide to Personal Protection Outside the Home* is on the effective use of a concealed firearm for self-defense outside the home. Included are chapters on concealment techniques and devices, presenting the firearm from concealment, utilizing cover and concealment outside the home, presentation and movement, point shooting, instinctive shooting, low-light shooting, engaging multiple targets, and one-hand shooting. These skills and others presented in this book form the core shooting skills used to counter a life-threatening attack outside the home.

For those who do not wish to incorporate a firearm into their personal protection plans, or who may not always be able to carry a firearm outside the home, the book also presents techniques and strategies to help you avoid, deter, repel or escape an attack without the

use of a firearm. Included are ways to make you seem like less of a target to potential attackers. Additionally, the NRA course, *Refuse to Be a Victim*®, can help you create a personal security plan that does not include firearms.

*The NRA Guide to Personal Protection Outside the Home* is divided into seven parts: Safety; Strategies for Personal Safety Outside the Home; Carrying a Concealed Firearm and Presenting the Firearm from Concealment; Developing Basic Defensive Shooting Skills; Developing Concealed Carry Defensive Shooting Skills for Use Outside the Home; Special Defensive Shooting Techniques; and Concealed Carry, Self-Defense and the Law. Also included are appendixes on resources for additional information, and facts about the NRA.

Although this book has a wealth of information on virtually every aspect of concealed carry and personal protection outside the home, it is meant to be used within the framework of the NRA Personal Protection Outside the Home Course, a hands-on program encompassing 14 hours of classroom and range instruction. You should understand that merely reading a book—any book—will not, in and of itself, make you proficient at the various skills involved in concealed firearm carry and armed self-defense outside the home. For more information on the NRA Personal Protection Outside the Home Course or any other NRA course, call (703) 267-1500.

#### **A Gun Owner's Responsibilities**

Americans enjoy a right that citizens of many other countries do not—the right to own firearms. But with this right come responsibilities. It is the gun owner's responsibility to store, operate and maintain his or her firearms safely. It is the gun owner's responsibility to ensure that unauthorized or untrained individuals cannot gain access to his or her firearms. And it is the gun owner's responsibility to learn and obey all applicable laws that pertain to the purchase, possession and use of a firearm in his or her locale. Guns are neither safe nor unsafe by themselves. When gun owners learn and practice responsible gun ownership, guns are safe.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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# PART I

# SAFETY



# CHAPTER 1

## Basic Firearm Safety

Safety is fundamental to all shooting activities. Whether you're practicing at the range, cleaning your gun in your workshop, or defending your family from an attack, the rules of firearm safety always apply.

Safe gun handling involves the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes—knowledge of the gun safety rules, the skill to apply these rules, and a safety-first attitude that arises from a sense of responsibility and a knowledge of potential dangers.

Though there are many specific principles of safe firearm handling and operation, all are derived from just three basic gun safety rules.

### FUNDAMENTAL RULES FOR SAFE GUN HANDLING

**ALWAYS** Keep the Gun Pointed in a Safe Direction. This is the primary rule of gun safety. A safe direction means that the gun is pointed so that even if it were to discharge, it would not cause injury or damage. The key to this rule is to control where the muzzle or front end of the barrel is pointed at all times. Common sense dictates the safest direction, depending upon the circumstances. If only this one safety rule were always followed, there would be no injuries or fatalities from accidental shootings.



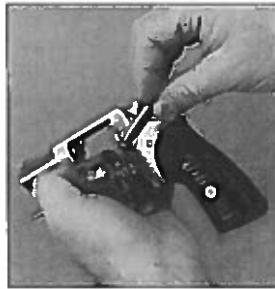
**ALWAYS** keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot.

Unintentional discharges can be caused when the trigger of a loaded gun is inadvertently pressed by a finger placed in the trigger guard instead of being positioned straight along the side of the gun's frame.

**ALWAYS** Keep the Firearm Unloaded Until Ready to Use. A firearm that is not being used should always be unloaded. For example, at the range, your firearm should be left unloaded with the action open while you walk downrange and check your target. Similarly, a firearm that is being stored in a gun safe or lock box should generally be unloaded (unless it is a personal protection firearm that

**ALWAYS** Keep Your Finger Off the Trigger Until Ready to Shoot. Your trigger finger should always be kept straight, alongside the frame and out of the trigger guard, until you have made the decision to shoot.

When holding a gun, many people tend to place their finger on the trigger, even when they are not ready to shoot. This is extremely dangerous.



**ALWAYS** keep the gun unloaded until ready to use.



may need to be accessed quickly for defensive purposes—see Chapter 2: Concealed Carry Safety).

As a general rule, whenever you pick up a gun, point it in a safe direction with your finger off the trigger, engage the safety (if the gun is equipped with one), remove the magazine (if the gun is equipped with a removable magazine), and then open the action and look into the chamber(s) to determine if the gun is loaded or not. Unless the firearm is being kept in a state of readiness for personal protection, it should be unloaded. If you do not know how to open the action or inspect the firearm, leave the gun alone and get help from someone who does.

## RULES FOR USING OR STORING A GUN

In addition to these three basic Rules for Safe Gun Handling, you must follow a number of additional rules when you use or store your firearm.

**Know Your Target and What Is Beyond.** Whether you are at the range, in the woods, or in a self-defense situation, if you're going to shoot you must know what lies beyond your target. In almost all cases, you must be sure that there is something that will serve as a backstop to capture bullets that miss or go through the target. Even in an emergency, you must never fire in a direction in which there are innocent people or any other potential for mishap. Think first, shoot second.

**Know How to Use the Gun Safely.** Before handling a gun, learn how it operates. Read the owner's manual for your gun. Contact the gun's manufacturer for an owner's manual if you do not have one. Know your gun's basic parts, how to safely open and close the action, and how to remove ammunition from the gun. No matter how much you know about guns, you must always take the time to learn the proper way to operate any new or unfamiliar firearm. Never assume that because one gun resembles another, they both operate similarly. Also, remember that a gun's mechanical safety is never foolproof. Guidance in safe gun operation should be obtained from the owner's manual or a qualified firearm instructor or gunsmith.

**Be Sure Your Gun Is Safe to Operate.** Just like other tools, guns need regular maintenance to remain operable. Regular cleaning and proper storage are a part of the gun's general upkeep. If there is any question regarding a gun's ability to function, it should be examined by a qualified gunsmith. Proper maintenance procedures are found in your owner's manual.

**Use Only the Correct Ammunition for Your Gun.** Each firearm is intended for use with a specific cartridge. Only cartridges designed for a particular gun can be fired safely in that gun. Most guns have the ammunition type stamped on the barrel and/or slide. The owner's manual will also list the cartridge or cartridges appropriate for your gun. Ammunition can be identified by information printed on the cartridge box and sometimes stamped on the cartridge head. Do not shoot the gun unless you know you have the proper ammunition.

**Wear Eye and Ear Protection as Appropriate.** The sound of a gunshot can damage unprotected ears. Gun discharges can also emit debris and hot gas that could cause eye

injury. Thus, both ear and eye protection are highly recommended whenever you are firing live ammunition in your gun. Safety glasses and ear plugs or muffs should also be worn by any spectators or shooting partners present during live-fire sessions. Obviously, during an actual violent encounter necessitating the use of your firearm, it likely will not be possible for you to use eye and ear protection.

**Never Use Alcohol or Drugs Before or While Shooting.** Alcohol and many drugs can impair normal mental and physical bodily functions, sharply diminishing your ability to shoot safely. These substances must never be used before or while handling or shooting guns.

Note that these effects are produced not just by illegal or prescription drugs. Many over-the-counter medications also have considerable side effects which may be multiplied when certain drugs are taken together or with alcohol. Read the label of any medication you take, no matter how innocuous, or consult your physician or pharmacist for possible side effects. If the label advises against driving or operating equipment while taking the medication, you should also avoid using a firearm while taking it.

**Store Guns So They Are Inaccessible to Unauthorized Persons.** It is your responsibility as a gun owner to take reasonable steps to prevent unauthorized persons (especially children) from handling or otherwise having access to your firearms. You have a number of options for accomplishing this, which are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3: Safe Firearm Storage. The particular storage method you choose will be based upon your own particular home situation and security needs.

**Be Aware that Certain Types of Guns and Many Shooting Activities Require Additional Safety Precautions.** There are many different types of firearms, some of which require additional safety rules or procedures for proper operation. These are commonly found in your firearm's owner's manual. Also, most sport shooting activities have developed a set of rules to ensure safety during competition. These rules are generally sport-specific; the procedures for loading your firearm and commencing fire, for example, are different in NRA bullseye shooting than they are in NRA Action Pistol competition (see Chapter 22: Opportunities for Skills Enhancement).



*Wear eye and hearing protection when shooting.*



## CHAPTER 2

# Defensive Shooting Safety Outside the Home

The gun safety rules in the preceding chapter are applicable whenever a gun is handled or fired. However, some of these rules need to be reinforced in light of the particular dynamics and characteristics of defensive shooting situations outside the home.

Probably the greatest obstacle to safe gun handling in defensive situations is stress. In the overwhelming confusion of a violent encounter, it is possible to forget or disregard even the most basic gun safety rules. After all, when you are being attacked, your entire being is focused upon just one thing: survival.

*Keeping a firearm pointed in a safe direction* is fairly easy when at the range. Generally, pointing the gun downrange is safe. In the street, however, when facing an aggressive attack, a safe direction may be harder to identify. Bystanders, pets in a yard, moving vehicles in the street, or the windows of surrounding buildings must all be considered before you even draw your firearm. In addition, outside the home there may be oil, propane or gas tanks, or other vessels containing flammable substances. Since many bullets can travel a mile or more, anything within that radius is at risk, including airports, rail lines and, of course, people. A stray bullet can also ricochet off a glass, metal, water, stone or concrete surface and cause property damage, injury or death.

In a store or workplace, a "safe direction" may be especially difficult to find, as a violent criminal may be interspersed with customers, employees or other innocent bystanders.



*A typical urban environment, with vehicles passing in the street, pedestrians on the sidewalks, and buildings with windows and doors facing the street. The concealed carrier must be conscious of the potential safety risks of firing in such an environment.*

Additionally, in most defensive confrontations, people rarely stand still; both attackers and bystanders are usually moving. The scene is dynamic and fluid, and what is a safe direction one second becomes unsafe in another.

In anticipation of the need to fire quickly during an encounter with an aggressor, some people may unconsciously hold their firearm with their finger on the trigger, even when they are not intending to fire immediately. This violation of a basic Rule of Safe Gun Handling—**ALWAYS keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot**—can have disastrous consequences, as the stress of a real or potential attack can make you prone to an involuntary, reflexive trigger pull if you are suddenly startled. For the same reason, it is particularly important to avoid prematurely putting the trigger finger on the trigger when drawing the gun from a holster.

As was explained in the previous chapter, it is a basic Rule of Safe Gun Handling that *a firearm should be kept unloaded until ready for use*. In the context of personal protection, “ready to use” means more than merely “ready to shoot.” A self-defense firearm you keep in a holster on your person is “ready to use” throughout the entire period you wear it. A gun you keep in a pistol lockbox next to your cash register in your shop is “ready to use” during the hours you spend at your shop. When your business is closed, however, the firearm kept there is no longer ready to be used by you or any of your employees, and must then be kept unloaded and secured to prevent theft or access by an unauthorized person.

One of the most important—and problematic—safety rules in relation to defensive shooting situations outside the home is know your target and what is beyond. Knowing your target is critical to prevent shooting any unintended target.

In the home, a threat to your safety is usually fairly easy to recognize; any stranger there is an intruder whose motives are unknown. In public, situations and interactions are more ambiguous. The approach of a panhandler may be no more than an irritation to some, but can seem to be a deadly threat to others. You must exercise good judgement to differentiate between those who are genuine threats to your safety, and those who merely seem threatening. Safety, ethics and the law dictate that you identify your target and verify it is a lethal and imminent threat before you even draw your firearm.

Moreover, never forget that a concealed carry permit does not entitle you to act as a police officer. The right to carry a gun does not confer the right to intervene in any seemingly confrontational situation.



*The responsible carrier of a concealed firearm must not overreact to ambiguous situations, such as in the photo at left in which the man appears to be reaching for a weapon. In reality, he is simply getting one of the promotional flyers he's handing out.*



*Typical street scene with attacker in foreground, pedestrians, cars and buildings beyond.*

It's equally as important to know what's beyond your target. In the stress of an aggressive attack, you cannot assume that all of your shots will hit your target. Also, depending upon the gun and ammunition you are using, the distance at which a shooting takes place, the size and dress of your attacker, and the location of your hits on your attacker, some of your bullets may completely penetrate your assailant and continue on, presenting danger to persons or objects beyond. In the home, bullets that miss or overpenetrate their target often lodge in a wall or piece of furniture. In the street, however, such bullets can cause property damage or injury.

*Never use drugs or alcohol while or before shooting* is an important rule, but one that can be difficult to observe outside the home. Many people enjoy a beer at their local bar after work before going home, or a glass of wine with dinner at a restaurant. A person who uses his or her

firearm to stop a violent criminal after such an innocent drink may have a positive blood alcohol test. Even though that person's blood alcohol level may be well under the legal limit for sobriety, the fact that any alcohol at all was present may cast doubt upon a claim of legitimate self-defense. Alcohol and drugs can cloud judgment, slow reflexes and alter perceptions, even at low levels of consumption; you should avoid them during periods when you may be carrying a firearm.

Defensive shooting safety outside the home also extends to proper holster selection and use. Holsters that are poorly designed or manufactured, holsters not designed for concealed carry use, or holsters that are improperly used or worn can all cause unsafe situations, such as spilling a loaded gun out on the ground or forcing the user to employ an unsafe drawing motion. Also, some holsters may be deemed hazardous because they hold the gun in an unsafe position (such as pointing straight rearward).

Gun safety must also be observed while you are honing your firearm skills, whether you're shooting live ammunition at the range or performing dry-fire practice at home. Specific safety precautions for these activities are outlined in Chapter 22: Opportunities for Skills Enhancement.

It may seem unrealistic to expect a person undergoing an attack to be conscious of the gun safety rules, much less adhere to them. Nonetheless, through constant repetition and mindfulness, safe gun handling skills can become habits that function automatically even during the stress of a violent encounter.



*This holster is unsafe because it doesn't properly fit the gun.*



## CHAPTER 3

# Safe Firearm Storage

Safe gun storage is an integral part of gun safety. It is one of your prime responsibilities as a gun owner to take all reasonable precautions to prevent unauthorized persons from having access to your firearms. By storing your firearms safely, you not only avoid the possibility of an accidental shooting involving a child or other untrained person; you may also prevent a criminal from using your firearm against an innocent person, including members of your own family.

In addition, some jurisdictions have laws mandating secure firearm storage. Almost all jurisdictions have criminal negligence laws that can be applied to gun owners who do not take reasonable precautions in storing their firearms.

Safe firearm storage is of course critical when you have a gun inside your home, but is even more critical when a gun is taken outside the home. A gun that is stored in a vehicle's glove compartment, a desk drawer, or under the counter at a store may be easier for unauthorized persons to access than a gun kept in your home in a gun safe or lockbox. Just as you may be held responsible for any damage caused by a gun that is stolen from

your home, you may be held equally liable if your gun, taken from your workplace or your automobile, is used to injure or kill an innocent person during a crime.



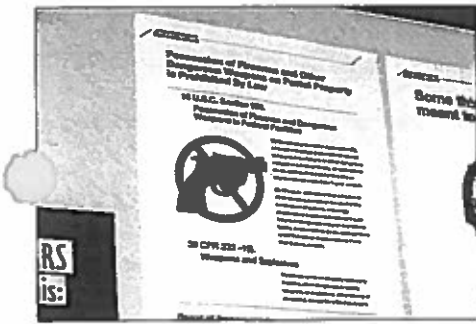
*Concealed carrier storing handgun in locking gun case in car trunk.*

There are two main requirements for the storage of firearms. First and foremost, the storage method chosen must provide an adequate level of protection to prevent unauthorized persons from accessing the firearms. The determination of what is "adequate protection" is a matter of judgment on the part of the gun owner.

Temporarily storing your unloaded gun in the locked trunk of your vehicle while you make a quick trip inside a post office may be appropriate in a low-crime suburban or rural area, but may be irresponsible in a high-crime area in which thieves are known to pop open a trunk in a matter of seconds. Similarly, storing your unloaded gun in a locking desk drawer in your private office—to which only your administrative assistant has access—represents a different level of safety risk than storing it in a locked drawer of a desk on the loading dock, where virtually anyone can easily gain access to it.

The second requirement is that the storage method or device used must allow the gun to be easily retrieved as needed to defend against an intruder or an attack. This is just as





When you are visiting places in which you are prohibited from carrying your concealed firearm, as indicated by this notice on the wall of a United States Post Office, you must avail yourself of some means of temporary gun storage.

by storing the gun in a location or a device where it cannot be seen; ideally, the device itself should not signal to a burglar or thief that a gun is inside. Concealment is especially important when you are storing a gun outside the home, as in a vehicle or workplace. In such locations, many more people can potentially gain access to your gun, and thus there is a greater risk of theft or unauthorized use.

There is no one best method of firearm storage nor one best type of locking or storage device. Each has advantages and limitations. You must choose the firearm storage method that is best for you given your circumstances and preferences.

It is also incumbent upon you as a responsible, law-abiding gun owner to know and observe all applicable state and local laws regarding safe gun storage. For example, if the law in your jurisdiction requires a trigger lock on all stored guns, you must abide by that law no matter what other storage methods you also use, such as a high-security gun safe.

## TYPES OF LOCKING MECHANISMS

All storage methods designed to prevent unauthorized access utilize some sort of locking mechanism. Different types of locking mechanisms offer varying degrees of security and accessibility. Keyed locks, such as padlocks and the lockable drawers of desks and nightstands, can offer a reasonable level of security (depending upon the construction of the lock and the storage device). However, under stress or in darkness it may be difficult for some to locate the correct key or to manipulate it in the lock. A lesser concern, but one worth mentioning, is that inserting and turning a key in a gun box lock would likely create some sound—whether it is keys jingling together on a key ring or the movement of the lock's tumblers—that could alert a stealthily approaching attacker.

*Combination locks* are often found on gun storage boxes, and range from simple triple-rotary-tumbler models to units that rival the mechanisms found on bank vaults. For many people, combination locks are both secure and familiar to operate. Under stress, however, lock combinations can be confused or forgotten by the gun owner, and the tumblers can be challenging to manipulate quickly and accurately. Also, in darkness or even

important to a shopkeeper behind her counter as it is to a homeowner awakening at night to the sound of an approaching intruder. Again, “easily retrieved” depends upon the particular circumstances of the environment. Be aware that storage methods that provide a high level of security often do not allow quick and easy firearm access; thus, defensive firearm storage inside or outside the home usually involves a compromise between security and access.

Additionally, a firearm storage device should provide some level of concealment. A gun that is not seen is less likely to be stolen. Concealment is achieved



*Simplex\*-type locking device.*

dim light, combination locks can be virtually impossible to operate, making them less than optimal for devices used for emergency firearm storage.

*Simplex\*-type* locks provide a good combination of security and quick access. Such locks feature a number of buttons that are pushed in a specific order to open the device. With only minimal practice, these locks can be easily worked in total darkness. Locks having Simplex\*-type mechanisms can be just as strong and tamper-resistant as any other.

Another advantage of a Simplex\* lock is that incorrect entry blocks any further attempt to open the lock. A separate clearing code must be entered before the lock will accept the correct combination, making this lock even more resistant to unauthorized attempts to open it.

The basic Simplex\*-type lock is a mechanical lock, and thus does not depend upon house current or batteries. Some locking devices combine Simplex\* principles with modern electronics. Typically, the storage device features a numeric keypad whose numbered buttons are pushed in a specific order to unlock.



*Fingerpad-type locking device.  
Key provides manual override.*

A variation on this involves five *fingerpads*, ergonomically placed on the top or front of the device, which can easily be felt in the dark and which are pressed in a sequence (such as thumb, middle finger, little finger, ring finger) to open the device. It is important to note that such locking mechanisms are usually disabled when electric power is lost (as from dead batteries or a failure in house current). There usually is a provision for opening the box with a key under such circumstances, but this could be problematic under stress or in the dark. Some units that use house current have provisions for a backup battery power supply to ensure continuous operation.

A new type of gun storage device uses biometrics to control access. The most common type of this device features a computer-controlled fingerprint reader to activate unlocking. Though this technology is promising, there are still issues to be resolved (such as the reliability of the reader to distinguish a print on a finger that may be wet with water or blood).

## TYPES OF STORAGE DEVICES

There are many different methods for storing firearms safely inside and outside the home, several of which may fit into your defensive plan.

Gun cases are commonly used for the transportation and storage of firearms. Gun cases are typically of synthetic material, though some more costly models are made of aluminum. Some have integral locks; others feature hasps for small keyed or combination padlocks.

Gun cases can be useful in several ways. Where it is legal to transport your gun by air or other common carrier, it must be in a gun case; some specific requirements as to the type and construction of the case may apply. Also, federal law mandates that a gun transported across state lines in your vehicle must be in a "locked container" (such as a gun case) when it cannot be transported in a compartment separate from the driver's compartment.



Plastic gun case secured with padlock.

Some states also have additional requirements for transporting guns within state boundaries. Even in jurisdictions or situations in which guns need not be transported in a gun case, it is still a good idea to do so, both to keep them out of sight and to protect them from being jostled together or damaged in your trunk, truck box and so forth. In the

home, gun cases serve to protect firearms from dust and moisture. Often, guns kept in gun safes for long-term or permanent storage are first put into gun cases.

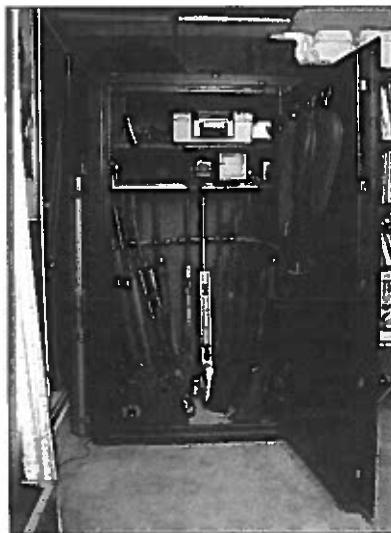
A pistol lockbox allows you to store a gun in your vehicle or workplace so that it is protected from unauthorized access but can still be retrieved quickly. Typically, such boxes are made of steel and feature integral keyed, combination or Simplex®-type locks; a few have electronic numeric keypads or fingerpads. Some lockboxes are designed to store a gun securely out of sight while also providing quick access to that gun if it is needed for defensive purposes. Such boxes are typically located in desk drawers, under countertops, or in the kneewells of desks. Some models are designed for automotive use. These lockboxes are attached using screws or bolts that can be accessed only when the box is open; easy theft of the box is discouraged. Quick-access boxes usually feature locks of the Simplex®, electronic keypad or fingerpad type. Many novel mechanisms exist to provide quick access once the box is opened, from harnesses that swing out and present the gun grip-first to platforms that slide out for easy access.



Locking pistol box combination lock affords portable handgun security.

Gun safes are designed to offer the greatest level of safety for your guns. Upper-end models provide walls and doors that are virtually impossible to defeat by brute force, high-security mechanical or electronic locks, and complex locking patterns that fasten the door to the frame in multiple locations with thick, hardened steel pins. Most of these models are too heavy and bulky for thieves to carry away easily, even when they are not bolted to the floor; some also offer a degree of fire protection.

Although appropriate for permanent firearm storage, gun safes may not be the best choice for the temporary storage of guns that may need to be quickly retrieved. The weight and size of gun safes often consigns them to the basement of a building, far from your office or work location. Also, gun safes provide little concealment value. No matter where a gun safe is put, almost anyone seeing it will recognize it as a device for the storage of firearms or other valuable items, making it a target for thieves and burglars. Finally, the combination locks and heavy bolting mechanisms typical of such devices make it difficult to access your gun quickly and quietly. Even when equipped with a lighted keypad for quicker access, the sound of the handle being turned and the locking pins retracting will unquestionably alert an intruder in a quiet home or workplace.



*Gun safe*

There are a few alternative storage methods that should also be mentioned. Many people store guns in a *lockable drawer* of a desk, nightstand, file cabinet or the like. Arguably, under some circumstances in a home or workplace, it may be safe to keep a loaded defensive firearm in an unlocked drawer while the gun owner is actually in the same room and is able to keep the firearm under his or her control. A moment's inattention or carelessness could result in the gun coming under the control of a child, a criminal, a curious co-worker, or some other unauthorized person. The decision to store a gun in this manner must be reached after a careful consideration of the circumstances, needs and risks involved.



*Two methods of locking a handgun: top, a padlock around the top strap of a revolver; bottom, a cable lock through the frame and slide of a semi-automatic pistol.*

Another alternative form of storage is a *lockable gun rack* allowing firearms (particularly long guns) to be displayed or stored openly. This type of device typically features a locking bar (or sometimes a thick, plastic-covered steel cable) that passes through the trigger guard or around the frame, and is secured by a keyed or combination lock. Since a lockable gun rack does not protect a gun from moisture, dust, or fingerprints, and does not conceal a gun from prying eyes, it is best mounted in a locked gun room or gun closet.

Also available are several types of quick-access devices that orient a handgun for a fast grab. Some of these devices are designed for nighttime use, and orient a gun in a grip-upward position alongside the mattress. Others place a gun in a horizontal position directly under a counter, drawer or desktop. These items may be useful in high-threat environments

in which there may be no time to work even a Simplex®-type lock—an environment in which life or death may hinge on immediate access to a firearm. These devices do not prevent gun theft or unauthorized access, and are thus not suitable for gun storage.

## STORING A GUN SAFELY IN THE HOME

Even a concealed carry gun will be stored in the home part of the time. In some respects, a gun stored in the home is both safer, and more vulnerable, than a gun stored in a vehicle or a typical work environment. Home firearm storage is usually quite safe, as a properly prepared house or apartment can deter most attempts at burglary or theft. In that sense, you can regard your home as a large gun safe or lockbox that represents the first line of defense against any criminal or other unauthorized person.

On the other hand, if a criminal does succeed in breaking into your home, he sometimes has the luxury of taking his time to search for your guns and other valuables. While a person who breaks into your vehicle on the street usually has only a few seconds to complete his crime before a passerby detects him and calls the police, a burglar who entered



Homeowner retrieving gun from quick-access lockbox in safe room of home.

your home without raising an alarm may have several minutes, a half-hour or even longer to ransack it. This makes a hidden gun more likely to be found, and thus more vulnerable to theft.

There are two types of home gun storage, each with benefits and limitations. Long-term gun storage involves the extended storage of firearms in a device offering extreme protection from theft and sometimes fire and moisture, but delayed access to the firearm. A gun safe is typically used for permanent firearm storage; its size and weight prevent easy theft, and its enclosed environment affords the best possible protection from fire damage, high humidity, etc. This protection is gained, however, at the expense of easy gun access.

Quick-access or temporary gun storage does not provide the same degree of protection as long-term storage methods, but gives the ready firearm access that may be needed in the event of a home invasion, nighttime burglary or other defensive emergency. Some quick-access gun storage methods are as simple as putting a gun in an unlocked kitchen or nightstand drawer. However, such measures would not provide appropriate security if you left the room. Greater security can be achieved by using a fingerpad-activated lockbox located by the bed or in the office, basement or TV room.

As a general rule, you should avoid storing a gun (loaded or otherwise) in an unlocked drawer, cabinet, etc. when you are not physically present in the home. Even when you are physically present, gun storage in unlocked areas may not be appropriate if you also have

children, relatives, friends or others around. You must balance the need for quick access against the need for security.

A few gun safes attempt to provide the best of both worlds by offering, in addition to the heavily-locked main firearm compartment, an auxiliary easy-access compartment containing a single firearm. Access to the auxiliary compartment is by a fingerpad that can be worked quickly, even in the dark. This combination long-term and easy-access storage device can work well if the gun safe is placed in the bedroom or other location in which fast access is most often needed. When situated in a basement, however, the benefit of such a device is greatly diminished.

## STORING A GUN SAFELY OUTSIDE THE HOME

Most of the time when you are outside your home, your concealed firearm will be on your person, carried in a holster, handbag, fanny pack or other concealment device. However, there will be occasions when you find it necessary to temporarily remove your gun and store it in a safe manner. For example, in many states allowing concealed carry it is illegal to carry a firearm in an establishment in which alcoholic beverages are served, such as a bar or restaurant. Carrying a firearm is likewise prohibited in federal buildings (including post offices), as well as in many state and local government offices. Guns are also prohibited in schools and churches, and in many workplaces. Additionally, even in jurisdictions where concealed carry is permitted, businesses may still prohibit legal permit holders from entering with their guns. Thus, a person with a concealed gun who goes to the post office to buy some stamps, then meets with a teacher at her child's school, and then finally joins her spouse at a restaurant, will need to avail herself of a safe gun storage method several times during the day.

Outside the home, guns are usually temporarily stored either in a vehicle or in the workplace. Vehicle storage can be necessary when you travel to places where concealed carry is not allowed. Workplace storage may be required when concealed carry is prohibited in your work environment and you must find someplace to put a gun you carry to and from your place of employment. Additionally, in those work environments in which concealed carry is not explicitly prohibited, there may still be times when carrying a gun on the job is not comfortable, practical or safe.

**Vehicle Storage.** Many people temporarily store firearms in various areas of a vehicle—the glove box, the trunk or truck box, the map pocket in the vehicle door, or even under the seat. These locations offer some level of concealment and access to the firearm, but little protection against theft or unauthorized access if the vehicle is broken into, or simply left unlocked. In addition, burglars and car thieves make a point of searching these areas for guns. Also, never leave a child alone in a vehicle while you run into a convenience store or gas station if there is an unsecured gun in an accessible area, such as an unlocked glove box or center console.

At the very least, you should store your firearm in a locked gun case inside the vehicle's trunk, cargo box or other lockable area. This method of storage will not prevent the theft of your gun if the vehicle is burglarized, but at least will prevent a criminal from immediately putting your stolen gun to use. Of course, you should unload your gun before

locking it inside the gun case, and store the ammunition in a separate locked container.

Greater security and access can be afforded by a special pistol lock box designed for automotive environments. Such devices are usually securely attached to part of the vehicle, such as the floorboard under the seat, the interior of the glove box, the underside of the dashboard or the interior of the storage compartment in the center console. Some of the units may slide or swing out to provide access; all normally require the entry of the proper combination or keypad sequence to access and withdraw the gun. Such a unit, properly installed, will provide no visual clue of the presence of a gun in the vehicle, but will allow ready access in only a few seconds.

The risk of theft inherent in temporary gun storage in your vehicle can be reduced by carefully planning your travels when you are carrying a gun, and by making sure you have a secure storage method available (such as a locking gun case or pistol box) if you will be visiting places where concealed carry is prohibited. Alternatively, you can choose to not carry a gun at all on that day, or during that part of the day when you will go to gun-free locations.

Advance planning is also essential when you will be traveling out of your home state and into a state in which your carry permit is not valid, or if you travel in-state on an airplane, train, bus or subway. The carrying of firearms frequently is restricted on public transportation. Always be aware that you are carrying a gun; you must not become complacent and forget it is there, or inadvertently go to someplace where carry is forbidden.



*Both discretion and security are essential in workplace gun storage.*

**Workplace Storage.** Workplace storage can be problematical in several ways. Many companies will frown upon—or simply prohibit—a gun on the premises, even if it is unloaded and secured inside a locking gun case. Even where the presence of a gun is accepted, it may be difficult for you to discreetly transport and store the gun in the workplace. This discretion is important for several reasons. First, the greater the number of people who know that you keep a gun in your desk, tool chest or locker, the greater the likelihood that it will become the target of theft or other unauthorized access. Second, some people are simply uncomfortable around guns, even when they are unloaded and secured in a gun case; keeping your gun out of sight shows consideration for their feelings. Finally, advertising yourself as a gun owner can make you a target of both criminals and of gratuitous and irrational harassment by those who fear both guns and gun owners.

Often a gun is stored in the workplace during the work day primarily because it is safer or more secure there than in an unattended vehicle in a parking lot. In a retail sales environment, however, a gun may be kept for protection against a violent robber. Such a gun must be stored so that it can quickly be acquired by authorized employees, but is protected from theft or unauthorized access at all other times.



*A locked desk drawer can offer both secure storage and quick access in a workplace.*

Thus, as in the home environment, there are two types of workplace gun storage: long-term storage, in which the gun is kept locked up all day with little or no anticipation of defensive use; and quick-access storage, in which the gun is kept readily available to ward off robbers or other violent criminals.

Long-term workplace storage requires, at the very minimum, that you store your gun in a locked drawer or cabinet. This is true even when you store a gun in your private office, to which few have access. Be aware that this minimal level of security may not prevent unauthorized access to your gun, as there may be a number of duplicate keys to your drawer

or cabinet, or the key to a similar model elsewhere in the workplace may also unlock

yours. Better security (but slower access) is attained when you place your gun in a locked gun case, and then lock it in a drawer or cabinet. This will deter the curious, who generally will not damage a gun case just to satisfy their curiosity, and will also prevent any unauthorized person from being able to use the gun immediately. However, a locked gun case can be stolen and opened later at the thief's leisure.

A locking pistol box securely attached to the inside of a locked desk drawer or cabinet provides the best practical level of security for long-term gun storage in the workplace. Such a device is highly resistant to theft, and, if equipped with a keypad or fingerpad mechanism, can still be opened relatively quickly if necessary.

This type of device is also highly recommended for the quick-access storage of a gun kept hidden near a counter or register as protection against criminal attack. Some models feature a locking storage compartment that mounts under a counter and slides outward on rails for easy access. Other models can be mounted inside a drawer, on the side of a counter, under a shelf and so forth.

In some cases, a store owner may keep a small gun hidden in the cash register drawer itself, on the theory that the drawer will inevitably be opened to give money to a robber. In some cases, however, store robbers have simply grabbed the entire register. Keeping a gun in the register may ultimately do little more than provide a violent criminal with one more weapon.

**Miscellaneous Storage Methods.** There may be occasions when you consider temporarily storing a gun in locations other than a vehicle or a workplace, such as in a locker at your gym or in a dressing room at a hair salon. While some of these locations are



*A gun kept carelessly in an unlocked or open drawer can be easily seen by others.*



safe, many are not; and you must weigh the convenience of such storage with the very real risk of theft or other unauthorized access.

No single storage method is best. The responsible gun owner will use a mixture of storage methods to prevent any unauthorized access while facilitating easy retrieval when necessary. Research into the various storage options and a carefully thought-out defensive plan will help you decide which firearm storage options are appropriate for your situation.



**PART II**

**STRATEGIES FOR  
PERSONAL SAFETY  
OUTSIDE THE HOME**



## CHAPTER 4

### Awareness

An awareness of your environment and the real or potential threats that may be in it is one of the most important keys to staying safe. Such an awareness can help you avoid a violent confrontation altogether, or can give you more time to prepare an effective response to an attack that cannot be averted. Remember, it is always best to evade a confrontation by any means possible. Deadly force should be used only as a last resort when no other option is available.

To help in evaluating your alertness at any time, it is useful to identify several different levels of awareness. Readers with military or police experience or prior practical training may have been exposed to this in the form of a four- or five-step “color code” of tactical awareness. The NRA utilizes four levels of awareness: *unaware*, *aware*, *alert*, and *alarm*.

#### UNAWARE

Much of the average person’s time in public is spent in an *unaware* condition—a condition in which *one is not alert to the immediate environment*. The ultimate state of unawareness, of course, is sleep, but an unaware state is also common during activities that require attention or concentration, such as watching television, driving a car, carrying on a conversation, or perusing items in a store. People are also often unaware of their surroundings when they are deep in thought or daydreaming, or when they are in the grip of intense emotions. An unaware state (or, at best, a state of markedly reduced awareness) can additionally be caused by fatigue or illness, alcohol, and the use of both illegal and legal drugs (including many over-the-counter medications).



*A person in an unaware condition on the street, distracted and therefore unconscious of her environment.*

Being in an unaware condition is probably inescapable at least some of the time. Nonetheless, from a practical point of view, unawareness is to be avoided as much as possible, for such a state lessens the likelihood that a threat will be perceived or recognized, and also slows your response to danger even after it has been identified. Many criminal attacks are planned for times and circumstances in which the victim feels safe and protected, and is thus likely to be in a state of unawareness.

#### AWARE

In the aware state, a person is *conscious of his or her surroundings, and of those persons around him or her*. However, at this stage, he or she has not identified any potential threats in the environment.

Awareness can involve any of the senses, including sight, hearing, smell and touch; sight and hearing, however, are the most useful in perceiving threats in your environment. Under conditions in which a potential threat is likely to be present, the prudent person avoids anything that may impair the acuity of the eyes or ears. Wearing stereo headphones while walking or jogging may help the time pass more pleasantly, but also prevents you from detecting the sound of an assailant's footsteps, or an automobile, approaching from behind.



*A person in an aware state on the street, her senses open to what is happening in her environment.*

While it is relatively easy to operate at a condition of heightened awareness for short periods, particularly under conditions in which a threat is likely, it is much more difficult to maintain awareness for an extended length of time in environments that seem protected or safe, such as your car or office.

Just as a skillful and experienced driver automatically and effortlessly perceives and responds to potential collisions and other road hazards, you can develop an unforced alertness to your surroundings.

## **ALERT**

An individual at the alert level has identified a specific potential threat or threats. This is in contrast to the aware state, in which one has only a generalized consciousness of things in the environment that could be threats.

Potential or hypothetical threats may originate from many sources. Often, certain types of people are perceived as threatening or intimidating. Relying upon stereotypical images to gauge the likelihood of a violent encounter can sometimes make one vulnerable to other, unexpected sources of danger. As you walk on the street, you may keep a wary eye on a group of rowdy teenagers on the corner; but, as a result, you may be totally oblivious to a neatly dressed middle-aged mugger.

Even in the apparent absence of other people, many possible threats in the environment remain. A clump of bushes, a darkened alley or an abandoned car may all conceal a violent assailant. Any unusual or out-of-the-ordinary occurrence, such as a broken stairway light, may also signal a potential threat lurking in the darkness. With practice, you can become more adept at identifying such dangers.

Outside the home, a specific potential threat may take many forms:

- the approach of a stranger;
- an unexpected noise;
- a suspicious-looking person alone with you in an elevator or subway car;

- a stranger asking for assistance with directions, or to borrow a cigarette or some spare change;
- an unfamiliar car with people inside, passing you slowly on the street;
- a flat tire on your car late at night in a poorly-lit parking lot;
- a dark alley or street; or
- a person acting oddly, as though they are drunk or on drugs.

As a general rule, any strangers who approach you may constitute a threat, no matter who they seem or claim to be.

Remember that the alert level involves identification of a specific potential threat, not a real or actual threat. Not every panhandler will attack you; not every stranger asking for directions is a mugger.

It is crucial at the alert level of awareness to take two steps immediately after identifying a specific potential threat. Step One is to formulate a hypothetical plan of action to respond to the threat. This plan is absolutely essential; it is always quicker to act than to react. The planned response can be the evasion of an attack—by means of avoidance, flight, issuing a verbal warning, calling for help, alerting the police and so on—or, as a last resort, the employment of force to defend yourself or others.

Implicit in this plan is not only what course of action will be taken (as in, “If he attacks me, I will take cover”) but also how (“I will retreat to the mailbox at the corner and assume a kneeling position behind it”). Of course, the plan must be flexible enough to allow you to respond to changing circumstances. Depending upon both your attacker’s behavior and the opportunities offered by your environment, you may have to shift between the “evasive” and “defensive” modes of action.

It is always important to have more than one plan of action. In a crisis, plans rarely unfold as anticipated, and having one or more contingency plans may mean the difference between life and death. It is essential to keep thinking and planning, to be continually alert to opportunities that present themselves, and to be flexible enough to adapt your plan of action to changing circumstances.

Note that your plan of action does not have to involve the use of force. Most responses to an attack fall into one of two broad categories: evasion or defense. Evasion, if safely possible, is always preferable. As has been stated above, and as is repeated numerous times in this text, the best course of action is to avoid or evade a violent confrontation altogether. The use of force, deadly or otherwise, should be regarded only as a last resort.

Even when force is used in self-defense, opportunities for evasion may subsequently arise. Your plan should take into account chances that may arise to safely flee a confrontation at any time.



*A person in an alert state on the street, having identified a potential threat in her environment.*

Step Two is to establish a "threshold stimulus" that will initiate your plan of action. Once the potential threat has crossed that threshold, the next level of awareness, alarm, is reached and the plan you have formulated immediately goes into effect. A threshold stimulus may be many things: the approach of a threat within a certain distance; the insertion of a potential attacker's hand into his pocket; the presentation of a weapon by the threat; an overt gesture or statement from the threat indicating an intention to do harm, and so forth.

## ALARM

At the *alarm* level of awareness, the specific potential threat identified in the alert stage has *crossed one or more of the thresholds previously established, and has become a real threat to your safety*. Your senses are heightened, and you will likely feel a high level of fear and anxiety. The course of action planned in the *alert* stage is now implemented.

Often it is appropriate to establish a cascade of stimuli that sets into motion an escalating sequence of actions. For example, you might establish the following sequence of stimuli and actions to respond to an approaching group of teenagers:



*A person in an alarm state on the street, about to react to a threat in her environment that has crossed her threshold stimulus.*

- *First Threshold Stimulus:* Approach of a noisy group of young men wearing gang colors (*alert* level).
- *First Action:* Cross to the opposite side of the street.
- *Second Action:* Establish the next threshold stimulus and plan your response to that stimulus.
- *Second Threshold Stimulus:* The gang crosses to your side of the street (*alarm* level).
- *First Action:* Retreat by reversing your direction, walking away from the gang.
- *Second Action:* Look for a means of escaping from or avoiding a confrontation, such as a passing empty taxi or police patrol, or a store you can go into for refuge.
- *Third Action:* Establish the next threshold stimulus and plan your response to that stimulus.
- *Third Threshold Stimulus:* The gang follows you into the store.

- *First Action:* Retreat to a position inside the store that provides cover and does not allow members of the gang to get behind you. Keep in mind that, at this point, you can't assume that there is a genuine threat just because the group is in the store. Stay alert, but don't overreact.
- *Second Action:* Establish the next threshold stimulus and plan your response to that stimulus.
- *Fourth Threshold Stimulus:* The gang approaches you, its members making verbal threats and displaying weapons.
- *First Action:* Yell for someone to call the police. This may deter your attackers, and will in any event attract attention to the situation, providing you with witnesses if you must defend yourself.
- *Second Action:* Present your firearm and order them to leave you alone..
- *Third Action:* Establish the next threshold stimulus and plan your response to that stimulus.
- *Fifth Threshold Stimulus:* The gang approaches past the threshold distance.
- *Action:* Utilize your firearm to protect your life.

Although the foregoing provides a useful succession of steps that can be used to respond to threats in an ever-changing environment, it should not override your own intuition. Never discount or dismiss your instincts about a person or a situation; and do not hesitate to flee if something "doesn't feel right," even in the absence of any overt action that crosses a threshold you have set.

As is stressed many times in this handbook, the use of a firearm or other deadly weapon to protect yourself should be an act of last resort when no other option is available. It is always better to evade, escape, avoid or deter an attack than to resolve it through the use of force. By employing your powers of awareness—one of the most important personal protection tools you possess—you will be able to recognize threats in your environment early on, which in turn may enable you to escape or avoid them. If you fail to maintain a state of awareness, you are more likely to become a victim of an attack, or to have to use deadly force to defend yourself.





## CHAPTER 5

# The Defensive Mindset

As was discussed in Chapter 4, you are often able to avoid or evade violent confrontations through an awareness of the potential threats in your environment. In some situations, however, an attack cannot be averted. Surviving such situations depends not only upon using the appropriate defensive and practical skills, but also upon having a defensive mindset. Your defensive mindset consists of the values, mental techniques, and attitude that maximize the effectiveness of your response to an assault. These attributes also influence the effectiveness of your training regimen, so the development of a defensive mindset is an important initial stage in the NRA Personal Protection Outside the Home Course.

### WILLINGNESS TO USE FORCE IN SELF-DEFENSE

The NRA Personal Protection Outside the Home Course teaches the law-abiding citizen how to use a discreetly carried handgun for personal protection when threatened with deadly force outside the home. This entails training to use a firearm as a last resort, if necessary. Any person having personal objections to using deadly force in self-defense should investigate other personal protection strategies, as are presented in the NRARefuse to Be a Victim® course.

Anyone contemplating the inclusion of a firearm in a personal protection strategy must consider the following questions:

- *Am I prepared to take the life of another human being to save my life or that of another innocent person?*
- *Does my religion permit the taking of a life in self-defense?*
- *Do my personal moral standards permit the taking of a life in self-defense?*
- *Am I prepared to tolerate the judgment of my family, friends, neighbors, co-workers and others if I must defend myself with lethal force?*

Even when it is necessary and justified, shooting a violent criminal is highly stressful. This should be planned for as part of your mental training.

The *willingness* to take a life in self-defense is very different from the *desire* to take a life. No responsible, decent person enjoys taking a life, no matter how depraved or malignant the assailant may be. The willingness to use deadly force in self-defense does not imply a devaluation of human life. In fact, those who include a firearm in their personal protection plans are affirming the value of their own lives and those of other innocent persons. The ethical person does not ever want to use deadly force, but recognizes that there are times when it may be the only option to protect innocent lives.

## DETERMINATION TO NEVER GIVE UP

There's an old country saying that runs something like this: "It's not the size of the dog in the fight, but the size of the fight in the dog." The truth of this axiom is apparent to any sports fan who has seen a larger and stronger opponent vanquished by one who is smaller, weaker, and less skilled—but more determined. In war, too, there are innumerable examples of combatants, heavily outnumbered and outgunned, who nonetheless prevailed on the field of battle through sheer will and fighting spirit.

The single most crucial factor in prevailing in a life-threatening encounter is the determination to persevere and win. You must acquire the attitude that if forced to fight, you will never give up.

This attitude of gritty determination is important for several reasons. First, such an attitude, manifested in your speech, eye contact and body language, can throw doubt and fear into a potential assailant, deterring him or her from mounting an attack. If an assault is initiated, sometimes a strong, determined response will cause it to be broken off. Furthermore, even when you are wounded in a confrontation, resolutely continuing your self-defense efforts may stop an attacker before he or she inflicts further injury. There have been many cases of citizens who, though grievously wounded in a criminal attack, refused to give up, and survived their injuries. Finally, your attitude influences your actions. The will to persevere and prevail imbues your efforts with greater power, confidence and effectiveness.

## DEVELOPING A PLAN

An important aspect of mental preparedness and an effective defensive mindset is *planning*. If you are concerned with personal protection, you must develop an individual plan to meet your specific needs. Such a plan should take into consideration your personal characteristics, habits, skills and physical capabilities and limitations, as well as the characteristics of the environments outside your home in which you may find yourself.

The most important part of any individualized personal protection plan comprises those steps to avoid having to use deadly force. For example, by staying away from certain streets or areas at night, you may avoid being placed in a situation in which you may have to use force to defend yourself. In a store, a planned escape route may allow a clerk the means to flee a robber's attack without resorting to lethal force. Avoiding a violent confrontation by flight, evasion, deterrence or any other method that can be safely used is always preferable to employing deadly force.

Since the dynamics of any defensive encounter are complex, unpredictable, and changeable, the personal protection plan must offer sufficient flexibility to allow you to make appropriate responses to a wide range of situations. This may involve a series of escalating responses that correspond to different types and levels of threat.

Just as you must regularly practice the shooting and gun handling skills presented in the NRA Basic Personal Protection Outside the Home Course to maintain a high level of preparedness, you should also practice your personal protection plan. Use a training partner to simulate various threats you may find outside the home. Additionally, frequently review your plan in light of changes in individual characteristics or abilities, the defensive environment, or the nature of the threat(s) likely to be encountered.

## VISUALIZATION

*Visualization* is the formation of a mental image of a situation or activity. Visualization is a powerful tool that has been used to improve performance in sports, business and many other aspects of life.

Visualization should be used to imagine different defensive scenarios you may encounter outside the home:

- *What if I suddenly hear a scream down the hall in my workplace?*
- *What if a person in a slowly-passing car suddenly makes a threatening gesture?*
- *What if a stranger on the street suddenly produces a knife or club and demands my wallet?*
- *What if I am stopped at a red light in my vehicle and a stranger attempts to enter by force?*

Visualizing these and similar scenarios gives you a dry run of such situations, and helps reduce the surprise factor should any of the visualized situations actually take place. Through visualization, you will better anticipate potential sources of danger in the environment, and devise practical plans to deal with them.

Visualization should also be used in your range training. Visualize the target not as a piece of paper or cardboard, but as a threat to your life or the lives of others. Using this type of imagery during shooting and gun handling exercises will help you mentally prepare for a real confrontation.

Visualization can additionally be used to build confidence. It has been said that “you can only do what you can see yourself doing.” In other words, if you can’t picture yourself doing something—whether it is bowling a perfect game, building your own house, or becoming president of a business—you’ll probably never be able to do it. Visualization is used this way by many sports psychologists and trainers. They instruct their athletes to visualize themselves not just clearing the hurdles or negotiating the downhill skiing course, but also winning the first place medal. In the same way, when you visualize yourself in a violent encounter, you should complete the mental scenario by visualizing yourself prevailing in that situation. By vividly seeing yourself prevail, and ingraining in yourself the idea that you can and will prevail, you will build confidence in your ability to control a life-threatening situation. That confidence, in turn, will enhance the effectiveness of your defensive actions in a real-life confrontation.

Shooting, gun handling and presentation skills can be critical in helping you prevail in a violent criminal attack, and thus must be diligently practiced. It is equally important, however, to develop and practice the various mental skills, attitudes and techniques—awareness, the willingness to use deadly force, the determination to persevere, planning, and visualization—that together constitute a state of mental preparedness. An individual who possesses only fair marksmanship skills but who has a high level of mental preparedness has a greater likelihood of prevailing in a deadly encounter than a highly skilled shooter who lacks the awareness, will to persevere, planning and other factors that contribute to surviving an attack.



## CHAPTER 6

# Avoiding Confrontations Outside the Home

It is often repeated in this book that the best way of surviving a life-threatening encounter is to avoid it in the first place. Avoiding a confrontation outside the home doesn't require the foot speed of an Olympic sprinter or the intimidating size of an NFL lineman. Nor does it mean that you've got to be rich enough to afford a bulletproof limousine or an army of bodyguards. Avoiding confrontations is largely a matter of thinking ahead and using some common sense—something anyone can do.

The following are some general guidelines or suggestions for avoiding a confrontation outside the home. This chapter is not intended to present an exhaustive list of violence-avoidance techniques, however. More information on this subject is offered in the NRA Refuse to Be a Victim® Course.

### BE AWARE

Awareness of your environment and the potential threats it contains is the single most important factor that will enable you to avoid a violent encounter outside the home. The more aware you are, the sooner you will recognize a threat, and the more time you will have to retreat, evade or otherwise avoid it. Conversely, you will never take steps to avoid a threat of which you are not aware.

Maintaining a high level of awareness outside the home is difficult to do for long periods of time. When you're taking a walk in the park or waiting for a bus, there is a natural tendency to daydream or become preoccupied with other things rather than scrutinize every approaching stranger. Sometimes you can maintain your level of awareness by making a game of it.

Try engaging in "What If?" games to keep you alert to your surroundings. As you walk down the street, stand in an elevator, or wait in a line at the store, imagine different defensive scenarios and plan your responses to them. What if a mugger jumps out from behind that parked car up ahead? What if that young man at the street corner tries to carjack me when I stop for the light? What if a disgruntled employee in my workplace becomes violent? In addition to keeping you alert, this kind of mental exercise also sharpens your awareness of potential threats in your environment.

Never assume you are safe enough to drift into a state of unawareness outside your home. You have probably seen people reading books or magazines, or even napping, while waiting in a bus or train station. Probably you have also seen people listening to a personal



*This person's unaware state makes her an appealing target for a criminal.*

stereo device while walking on a sidewalk or jogging in a park. All of these people have compromised their personal safety to some extent because they believed they were safe enough to let down their guard. As a result, they made themselves vulnerable. A full discussion of awareness can be found in Chapter 4: Awareness.

## PLAN AHEAD

Plan your daily activities, insofar as is possible, to maximize your safety and minimize the risk of having a violent encounter. If you must go to or through a high-crime area, plan to do it during a period of relative safety, when many other people are around, for example, or when police patrols are most evident. If you are going to do laundry at an all-night laundromat, don't put it off until 11 p.m., when you may find yourself alone; do it in the middle of the afternoon, when you will be surrounded by many other people.

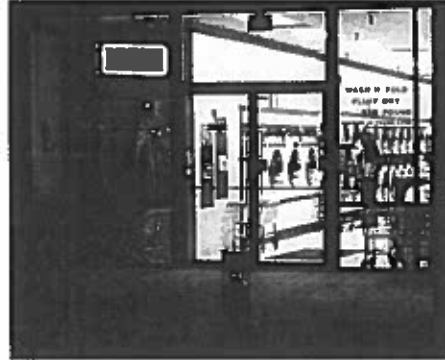
When you plan ahead, coordinate your activities. For example, don't plan to drop off some clothes at a church thrift store in a high-crime neighborhood on the way to a formal dinner: your fancy dress will attract attention in that area, and may make you a target.

You should similarly coordinate your concealed carry habits with your activities. If you opt to leave your gun at home one day—perhaps because you will be spending most of your day in a federal building, or because you will be traveling into a jurisdiction in which firearms are not allowed—don't choose that day to also make a business trip into a high-crime area. Wait until the next day, when you will again be wearing your defensive firearm.

## AVOID DANGEROUS PEOPLE

Avoiding dangerous people may seem an obvious, even self-evident way to keep out of violent confrontations. Certainly if you avoid criminals, you will avoid crime. However, to maximize your safety in situations outside the home, "avoiding dangerous people" should be interpreted in a much broader way.

Outside the home, there are many types of people who may constitute a threat.



*Plan ahead to avoid being in a vulnerable situation, such as doing laundry late at night in an empty laundromat.*



*Associating with dangerous or violence-prone persons will increase your likelihood of being the victim of an attack.*

Any stranger, for example, may be a mugger. He may seem to be lost, or in need of a light for his cigarette, or he may be in a car and signal you to his open window to ask directions; but these may be ruses to get you to approach within striking distance. While many potential threats are easily identified as such—for example, gang members wearing their colors—more clever criminals hide their true nature behind normal attire and a pleasant demeanor. As a general rule, any stranger who gets within a certain distance of you and invades your personal space deserves to be regarded with greater vigilance.



*Aggressive persons may unpredictably turn on you for little or no reason.*

Groups of people, particularly teenage boys or young men, are also to be avoided. Studies of social psychology and mob behavior show that the members of a group are capable, collectively, of crimes that no single individual member would commit on his own. During their social development, teenage boys and young men develop a strong group identity that often manifests itself in violence. In areas in which gang activity is prevalent, you should also avoid groups of girls, as they, too, are capable of violent behavior.

Don't assume that just because a person seems to have a good reputation you should trust them with your life. There have been numerous cases of female students at prestigious universities who went to parties at fraternity houses and ended up being assaulted. The members of these fraternities would be regarded by most people as the cream of the social crop: the sons of teachers, lawyers, doctors, bank presidents and so forth. The women who were attacked probably assumed that these fine, upstanding young men—complete strangers in some but not all cases—were not the kind of people to be wary of. They assumed wrong.

Even your friends can be dangerous, at least in some situations. A person who is always noisy or sarcastic, who makes inappropriate or insulting remarks, or who tends to say inflammatory things can get himself and all his companions in serious trouble under certain circumstances. Even in the relatively safe environment of a sports stadium, his disrespectful, caustic remarks about one of the teams can lead to a confrontation with some of that team's fans. If you have a friend such as this, leave him home when you go out in public.

## **AVOID DANGEROUS SITUATIONS**

There is an almost infinite number of situations that are, by their very nature, inherently dangerous. Learn to recognize and avoid these.

**Darkness.** Many criminals prefer to operate in darkness because low-light conditions hide their activities and facilitate their predations. To reduce your likelihood of becoming a target, try to avoid being in, or traveling through, areas such as dark parking lots or





*Avoid deserted areas at night, especially when you're alone.*

parking garages, unlit laundry rooms or hallways, dark alleys or streets with broken streetlamps and the like.

Darkness doesn't encourage crime only at night. Even in daytime, the shadows in an alley, under a stairwell, or in a dark corridor can hide a predator.

Whenever possible, plan your activities to take advantage of daylight. If you must travel at night plan your travels to follow well-lit streets; park in lighted lots or under streetlamps; and stay away from alleys, darkened doorways and other areas in which a criminal may hide. At all times, avoid poorly-lit areas.

**Don't Be Alone.** Criminals tend to target those who are alone rather than those in a group. Being alone, especially at night or in a deserted area, makes you more vulnerable to attack.

Get in the habit of having company, especially when you're going to be in an area in which there are few other people around. For example, you should have a partner or partners when you go hiking, walking in the woods, or bicycling on a trail. If you are working late at night, have a company security guard walk you to your car. Even when you're walking to the store in broad daylight, you will significantly reduce your chances of being attacked if you are accompanied.

Avoiding being out in public alone is especially important for those who the typical male attacker will see, rightly or wrongly, as being easy prey, such as women, the elderly, people with a disability, and those who are of small stature or slight build. If you fall into any of those categories, you should especially avoid traveling alone. Remember, the point is to do everything you can to prevent a confrontation from happening.



*These women increase their safety by traveling in a group.*

**Hitchhiking.** At all costs, avoid hitchhiking, and avoid picking up hitchhikers; there have been far too many cases of hitchhikers disappearing, and of good samaritans being victimized by hitchhikers.

The only exception to this might be in a situation in which a person was completely stranded, with no shelter, in an extreme environment, such as a desert or a blizzard. Some states, in fact, have laws that make it illegal for a person to refuse to pick up a hitchhiker under certain potentially life-threatening



*Hitchhiking can put you at risk for attack from a predator in a vehicle.*

conditions. When there is no threat to life or limb, however, you should always avoid picking up a hitchhiker or engaging in hitchhiking yourself.

If you are stranded as the result of a vehicle breakdown, you should stay with your vehicle with the windows rolled up and doors locked and call the police with your cell phone. Anyone stopping to help should be regarded with suspicion; talk to them only through a small crack between the window and door frame. Refuse all offers of help. If you do not have a cell phone, ask the person to call the police at the first opportunity. Do not leave your vehicle for anyone but a uniformed police officer, or a person known to you whom you were able to call for assistance.



*If you are stranded, stay in your vehicle with the doors locked and windows rolled up, and call for help using a cell phone.*

## AVOID DANGEROUS PLACES

Most people understand that certain neighborhoods or areas are more dangerous than others. Typically, high-crime inner-city areas are perceived as the areas to avoid, especially at night.

In addition to the “bad neighborhoods” that just about everyone knows about, there are usually many more dangerous places you should avoid if you don’t want to become involved in a dangerous encounter. Even in affluent suburban areas, there are certain spots you should stay away from.

Take the time to read the crime reports in your local newspaper; this will often reveal the areas where crime is prevalent. Also, listen to your gut-level reaction. If you sense that something’s not right where you are, it probably isn’t. Avoid places or areas you know nothing about. If you are new in town, or are unfamiliar with a particular area, ask the locals. People often know where you would or would not be safe.

## AVOID MAKING YOURSELF A TARGET

For safety, your goal when you are outside your home should be to blend in with the crowd. Any person who sticks out is more likely to be seen as a target by somebody.

There are many ways in which you can stand out and make yourself a target. Ostentatious behavior—wearing expensive jewelry or clothes, driving an expensive car, or spending large sums of money—often will get you noticed by the wrong



*Wearing a fur coat or excessive jewelry can make you a target.*

people. So, too, will dress or behavior that signifies weakness or vulnerability. An unkempt appearance and a downtrodden, vulnerable look will also attract unwanted attention.

Be aware that any level of alcohol consumption can dull your senses and cloud your judgement, making you an especially tempting target. In addition, after consuming alcohol your slowed reflexes and skewed perception of reality likely will make you incapable of sensing impending danger, or appropriately responding to an attack.



*Avoid performing ATM transactions late at night or at deserted location where a criminal may watch and then assault you.*

To blend in with a crowd and avoid being targeted by a predator, wear clothing that is neither extravagant nor shabby, and project a strong and confident image by walking or standing with your head up and your eyes alertly scanning your surroundings. Like most predators, criminals are much less likely to attack if they know you have spotted them and are watching their behavior.

## **AVOID HAVING A PATTERN**

If you are a person of unvarying habit, you may be making yourself an easier target for a thief, robber, rapist or stalker. Vary your routine; don't fall into a predictable pattern. For example, if you make a night bank deposit after your store closes, vary your route as well as the time of your deposit. Keep in mind that a criminal may observe you for several nights before deciding to rob you. If your routine is predictable, his job is easy; but if he never knows exactly how or when you will arrive at the bank, he'll find it harder to prey on you.

Not everyone has to worry about modifying their life pattern to avoid being targeted. However, those who are the potential victims of stalkers or kidnappers can increase their safety by becoming less predictable.

## **AVOID ANTAGONIZING OTHERS**

Never deliberately antagonize a stranger; you never know who he is, or what he is capable of. However, there are myriad ways in which you can unknowingly antagonize a person and become a target. For example, avoid controversial bumper stickers; they may enrage an unstable motorist, who may try to let you know how he feels about things at the next traffic light. Similarly, T-shirts or sweatshirts with political slogans, moral messages, or even sports team logos can make you the target of an aggressive person with an axe to grind. Wearing unconventional clothing, piercings and other body jewelry, and unusual hair styles can also make you a target of certain people.

Think about how others may respond to your appearance or to any messages on your clothes or your car. You may have to balance your right to free expression with your desire to prevent confrontation.

## DON'T RESPOND TO ANTAGONISTIC BEHAVIOR

Even when you don't do anything to antagonize another person, you may still find yourself targeted by an unstable or violent individual. He may not like a person of your social class or ethnicity in his neighborhood; he may be a paranoid person who thinks you're looking at him. You may simply be wearing a shirt or hat whose color symbolizes membership in a rival gang. In all these cases, you may be faced with an aggressive, angry person who confronts you for reasons you don't even understand. Don't feed into his antagonism. Keep your cool; avoid raising your voice or even arguing with him. If possible, don't even respond to his verbal attacks. Walk away; run if you have to. It may make you look like a coward, but it will keep you out of a situation that may escalate into violence.



*When confronted by an aggressive or angry person, avoid arguing or antagonizing him. If necessary, simply walk or run away. This may keep you out of a situation leading to violence.*

## LOOK FOR ESCAPE ROUTES

Wherever you are—on the street, in your car, in a store, or at your workplace—you should always look for an escape route to avoid a confrontation. For example, when you're walking to your car in a lonely parking garage, make note of the exits, or even any places where you could jump over a wall and escape. Also, when you pull up behind a line of cars, don't ride the bumper of the car in front of you. Leave enough space—say, a half a car length or more—for you to swing out suddenly in the event of trouble, such as a motorist overcome with road rage. Even when you're in a building—particularly in a strange building—be aware of emergency exits, stairways and elevators. You never know when you



might take a wrong turn and suddenly find yourself alone in a darkened hallway, with the sound of stealthy footsteps echoing behind you.

*Whenever confronted by a potential or actual threat, always be aware of potential escape routes (arrow).*



## CHAPTER 7

### Responding to an Attack Outside the Home

Other chapters in this book contain a variety of strategies and steps to deter, prevent or escape a criminal attack. Even when these strategies are observed, however, you may still be forced to come face to face with an attacker. You may be taken by surprise in a parking lot, in an alley, in a shop, or even right outside your home on the sidewalk.

You must be prepared—through training, prior visualization and mentally playing out scenarios—to be in control of the situation and act decisively. You must be prepared to defend yourself if your assailant presents an imminent deadly threat.

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL REACTIONS TO A THREATENING ENCOUNTER

The body responds in a number of ways to being threatened with bodily harm. For example, the parts of the brain that control higher thought processes begin to shut down, relinquishing control to more primitive, survival-oriented brain centers.

Every life-threatening encounter is different, and each person responds to an attack in a different way. There is no way to determine ahead of time how a person will react to a particular situation, even if that person has been in a similar situation before.

When confronted with an attack, you may initially delay responding because of denial—you just can't believe that you are being assaulted. Also, many people have an internal resistance to inflicting deadly force in a face-to-face encounter. This inherent reluctance can be overcome through fear, as well as through conditioning and visualization training.

There are five possible responses to any life-threatening encounter: *freeze*, *submit*, *posture*, *flight* or *fight*.

**Freeze.** The victim of an attack may be so overwhelmed or surprised by being threatened that he or she may freeze and become incapable of any action whatsoever. A momentary freeze resulting from confusion, shock, initial panic or denial of what is occurring is normal and, in fact, should be expected. In some cases, however, the frozen state may persist throughout the encounter.

**Submit.** Submission is simply giving in to an attacker. While it is often said that one should accede to an assailant's demands so as not to antagonize him into further violence, some studies indicate that



*Freeze reaction*



*Submit reaction*



*Posture reaction*



*Flight reaction*

a person using a firearm for self-defense is less likely to be injured by resisting than by submitting.

There may be occasions when submission seems the prudent course of action, such as when you are surprised by an armed assailant who demands only your wallet and not your life. However, it is impossible to predict the outcome of a potentially violent situation, particularly when you are relying upon the good will of a criminal. Crime statistics show that present-day criminals are more willing than their predecessors to maim or kill needlessly, even when the victim is completely compliant. Seemingly pointless murders have been committed to gain status within a gang or to silence or intimidate witnesses.

Thus, the risk of inciting your attacker to greater violence by resisting must be weighed against the danger of putting yourself at the mercy of his or her whims if you submit. Choosing between those alternatives depends upon your moment-to-moment assessment of the situation.

There are some situations you may encounter outside the home in which self-defense experts claim you should never submit. Chief among these is a situation in which you are ordered by an attacker to get into his car. You must resist this at all costs. Police statistics show that persons who comply with this demand quite often end up as fatal victims.

Even under the best of circumstances, submission is never a safe choice. Proper preparation involving training, the defensive mindset, and the development of an effective defensive plan reduces the likelihood of being caught in a situation in which submission seems the best alternative.

**Posture.** Posturing is combat without contact. Words, sounds, gestures and body language are the weapons used to dominate, intimidate and subdue another. Posturing is frequently seen in the animal world when members of the same species growl, paw the ground, make mock charges and otherwise exhibit aggressive behavior that stops short of actual fighting. Such showdowns usually end with the retreat or submission of one of the animals.

Humans frequently engage in similar behavior. Depending upon the circumstances of the encounter, both attacker and victim may attempt to out-bluster each other until one backs down or flees.

*Chapter 7: Responding to an Attack Outside the Home*

**Flight.** Flight, also known as retreat, involves removing yourself from the source of the threat. Flight or retreat is a natural instinct when confronted with danger. In some defensive situations, it will not be possible to retreat without the risk of incurring injury.



*Fight reaction*

**Fight.** In a self-defense context, the fight response involves the use of whatever force is reasonable and necessary to prevent harm from an attacker. In some circumstances, yelling a verbal warning can be a part of the fight response, prior to the utilization of force. Deadly force may be used only when there is an imminent threat of severe harm or death.

Obviously, not every victim of a violent attack will experience all or even most of the above-mentioned psychological reactions. Nor can you predict how you will react in a given situation. It is not uncommon to experience an escalating series of responses—for example, from freeze to flee to posture and finally fight.

Do not forget that your attacker may experience some of the same psychological reactions. If you show determined resistance to your attacker, he may initially posture in an attempt to intimidate you, then eventually take flight. Your attacker very likely has one or more contingency plans for a potential confrontation before he even approaches you on the street. This will give him an advantage over you if you have not developed similar plans.

## PHYSIOLOGICAL REACTIONS TO A LIFE-THREATENING ENCOUNTER

No matter what your level of training or how capable you believe yourself to be in handling stressful situations, you will experience, to a greater or lesser degree, a number of involuntary physiological changes during a serious defensive situation.

**General Bodily Responses to Imminent Danger.** In most cases, there will be a period of time between when you first perceive a threat and an attack actually occurs. This may occur, for example, when you recognize that a mugger or other criminal is stalking you on the street. During this period you probably will experience a number of bodily responses to imminent danger. Your heart rate and respiration will increase (to provide more blood and oxygen to the muscles and brain), your pupils will dilate (to take in more light and see the threat better), and your muscles will be tighter in anticipation of sudden movement.

**Adrenaline Rush.** One of the ways your body prepares you for flight or fight is through the release of the hormone adrenaline into your bloodstream. This powerful chemical heightens the senses and increases strength, increases heart rate and respiration, and can also cause trembling of the muscles. This trembling can make it more difficult to stand or sit still or, more important, to hold the firearm steady. This trembling can be mistaken for fear by both the assailant and victim. In reality, it is a physical reaction to the excess of



adrenaline that has been dumped into the bloodstream in preparation for an attack. This is also what causes the uncontrollable shaking sometimes experienced after a confrontation is over: the body is no longer utilizing all the adrenaline that was released.

Note that although the heightened awareness caused by adrenaline may enable you to more readily perceive a threat, it may also predispose you to overreact to any sudden stimulus.

**Loss of Fine Motor Skills.** Stress—regardless of its source—results in a loss of fine motor skills. This is often experienced in daily life. For example, it is much harder to unlock your front door with a key when you are rushing to get to a ringing telephone inside. In sports, too, it is common for many athletes to perform better in practice than under the stress of actual competition.

During an attack, your loss of fine motor control will manifest itself in many ways. For example, you will find it more difficult to load a cartridge into a pistol magazine or revolver cylinder, or to open your car door with your key. To compensate for this loss of fine motor control, the NRA Personal Protection Outside the Home Course teaches presentation, shooting and gun handling skills that involve gross motor skills only. This is also why well-designed defensive handguns are simple to operate, and feature controls that are easily and naturally actuated by large muscle movements.

## PERCEPTUAL CHANGES DURING A THREATENING ENCOUNTER

Survivors of violent attacks—as well as those who have experienced certain other extremely stressful situations—commonly report that, during the attack or stressful event, their perceptions of visual and auditory stimuli, as well as the passage of time, were altered. These alterations—tunnel vision, auditory exclusion and time dilation—are involuntary, and may have evolved as a survival mechanism to better focus all of one's senses and concentration on an immediate source of danger. While these perceptual changes may have worked extremely well in enabling our ancestors to fight saber-toothed predators, they do not always provide as much of a benefit when dealing with one or more intelligent, determined human assailants.

**Tunnel Vision.** Under the stress of an imminent or actual attack, you will be focused almost exclusively on the perceived threat, and will be virtually oblivious to anything going on elsewhere in your visual field. This phenomenon is known as tunnel vision.

It is important to avoid tunnel vision during a defensive shooting situation, because it can cause you to fail to recognize additional threats (or innocent persons) that may lurk just outside your immediate field of view. To maintain maximum alertness and readiness you must develop certain training habits (such as lowering the firearm and assessing the area, whether you have fired shots or not).

**Auditory Exclusion.** During a violent encounter you will also undergo auditory exclusion, a condition during which extraneous sounds may be inaudible. Sounds emanating from outside your visual perception—and even those from within it—may go

unheard. People involved in shootings often report that the sound of their own gunshots was no louder to them than a popgun.

You can at least partially counteract the effects of auditory exclusion by screaming your commands to your assailant. Not only does this help break through the veil of auditory exclusion; it also serves to intimidate him.

Keep in mind that you will not be the only one suffering auditory exclusion; your assailant as well as any family members, police officers or innocent bystanders who were involved in the situation will also experience it.

**Time Dilation.** Time dilation refers to the perception of slowed time that occurs during extreme stress. You may see the movements of both your assailant and yourself as happening in slow motion, and you lose the ability to accurately determine the passage of time. A few seconds of actual time may seem to you to be much longer in duration. The phenomenon of time dilation is the reason why, when you are first alerted to strange sounds or other early warnings of a potential threat, you should wait much longer than you may initially think is necessary before you relax your guard or emerge from hiding.

**Temporary Loss of Memory.** Highly stressful events can sometimes cause a mental overload that results in a temporary loss of memory. Most often, this is manifested simply in confusion over the details of an incident; occasionally, however, a person may lose all remembrance of the event. The passage of time often restores the accuracy and completeness of the memory.

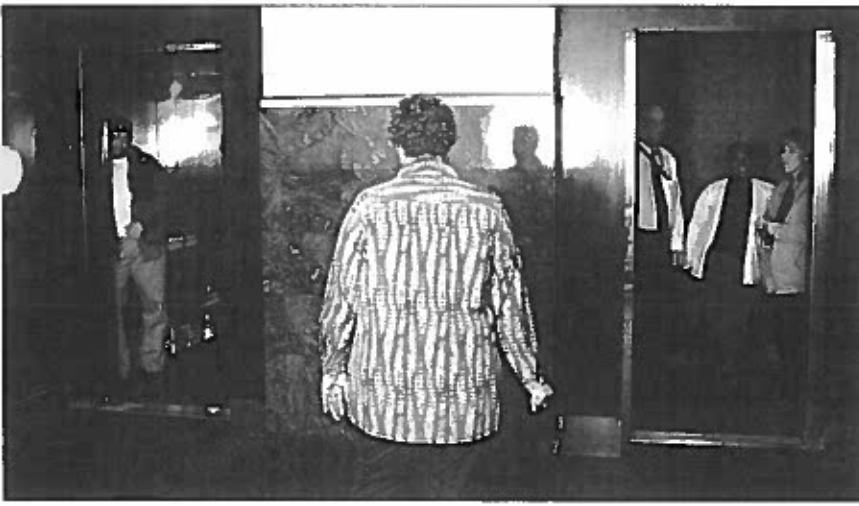
Because of this phenomenon, comments you make immediately after you have been involved in a life-threatening incident may not be accurate. Thus, if you are involved in a defensive shooting, you should generally tell responding law enforcement officers only that you were unlawfully attacked by a violent adversary and had to use force to defend your life. Avoid making any other statements until you have consulted an attorney.

## CONTROLLING AN ENCOUNTER OUTSIDE THE HOME

When you encounter a housebreaker or other intruder in your home, you have the upper hand in certain ways. You are more familiar with the layout of your home; you probably have alarms, deadbolt locks, window bars and reinforced doors to protect you; and, if you have a properly equipped safe room, you have a defensible location to retreat to, in which you may summon help or, if necessary, stop an attack. In a very real sense, if you follow the proper procedure at the first sign of an attack—lock yourself in the safe room, retrieve your firearm and ammunition, and call the police—you can exercise considerable control over a violent encounter.



*A criminal may close the distance to you by appearing to be a panhandler.*



*Safety dictates that you choose an elevator with several people rather than with a single suspicious-looking person.*

Outside the home, however, the situation is reversed. You are on the criminal's turf: he knows his neighborhood, and he makes sure he has the element of surprise. Moreover, there's often no safe place you can run to. Although the odds appear to be on your attacker's side, there is still much you can do to control the encounter.

**Keep Your Distance.** It is hard to maintain a safe distance from every stranger on a busy sidewalk or crowded elevator, but you should at least maintain an awareness of everyone around you. Try to identify people who may be potential attackers, and make an effort to keep a safe distance from them. This alone may prevent an attack, as a criminal may see you as too difficult a target and turn his attention elsewhere.

Use your common sense when you are in a situation in which physical proximity is likely or unavoidable. Often you are most at risk when you are alone with a stranger who is close to you. For example, avoid riding in an empty elevator with a suspicious-looking person; wait for one carrying a number of people. If you see a loud or unruly group of people approaching you on the sidewalk, unobtrusively cross the street. Don't get on an empty subway car; go to one having several riders.

There may be an interval between the time an attacker has made his intentions clear and he actually begins his attack. For example, he may demand your wallet, claiming he has a weapon, but does not actually brandish it or use it against you. Use this time to increase your distance from him. The best way of maintaining or increasing your distance is, of course, to flee, provided you can do so safely. Even when you are faced with an attacker armed with a firearm, increasing the distance between you and him significantly reduces the likelihood that he will hurt you, particularly if you are moving quickly.

If you are about to be attacked, or are actually being attacked, put obstacles between you and your assailant, such as trees, cars, trash cans, dumpsters and the like. Anything that makes it harder for him to reach you or injure you has the same effect as increasing your distance from him.

**Be Wary of Strangers.** During the preliminary stages of a threatening or violent encounter, a potential attacker may attempt to engage you in friendly conversation. This can be used to put you off your guard, or to distract you so that you don't notice a hidden accomplice sneaking up on you. Do not be misled by such behavior. Keep any stranger at a distance. A stranger who seems to be unarmed and friendly may suddenly attack you if you let him get close enough. Also, while he is talking to you, use your peripheral vision to maintain an awareness of additional persons who may be approaching you from the side or the rear.

A potential attacker may attempt to talk his way close to you by asking for a cigarette, the time, or directions to some address. Even when a stranger appears friendly, keep your distance, as well as a high level of awareness. As unfriendly as it may seem, the safest course of action may be to simply walk away from him.

**Yell Your Commands.** Once it is clear that a potentially deadly attack is imminent, you are justified in presenting your firearm. Depending upon the circumstances, however, you may not even have to fire it. Your attacker may suddenly stop approaching you, or may begin to back away, for example.

In such a case, it may be appropriate to issue verbal commands to deter further aggression. When giving an attacker instructions, yell your commands as loud as you can. This will both intimidate him and will help overcome his auditory exclusion (explained earlier in this chapter). Keep your commands simple: STOP! GO AWAY! I HAVE A GUN! DROP YOUR WEAPON! LIE DOWN! Yelling at your assailant also will attract the attention of others who may give you assistance, or later serve as witnesses to the attack.

Do not converse or try to reason with your attacker. He will often attempt to gain your sympathy, to appeal to your good nature, or to convince you that you have made a mistake in suspecting him of any criminal intent. He may even try to approach you slowly, talking softly and reasonably. Do not be fooled by this behavior.

You must remain in control of the situation. If an attacker continues to approach you and you perceive an imminent threat to your life, you must defend yourself appropriately.

**Holding An Attacker At Gunpoint.** It is rare that you would hold an uninjured criminal at gunpoint. Numerous studies show that your attacker will usually flee when you present your gun or after a few shots are fired. Let him go. Do not stand between him and an escape route. It is not your job to catch criminals; that is not why you have a concealed carry permit. All you want to do is eliminate the threat to your life.

Holding an attacker at gunpoint is especially problematic outside the home, where you have little control over the environment and the people in it. While you are occupied with a downed or surrendered attacker, it is relatively easy for an accomplice to approach you



*A person distracted by one seemingly friendly attacker while another sneaks up from behind (arrow).*



*A person using the proper technique to hold an attacker at gunpoint. The defender uses a cell phone to call police.*

unawares and mount an attack. Furthermore, outside the home your action of pointing a firearm at another person may be misinterpreted by other civilians and even the police. It is always better to let an attacker go and let the police capture him later.

In the unlikely event that you do find yourself in the situation of holding an assailant at gunpoint, however, do not approach him or attempt to frisk him. If he has a weapon, have him carefully place

it on the ground (muzzle pointing away from you if it is a firearm). If possible, have the assailant kick the weapon some distance away from him. Also, order the attacker to keep his hands high in the air. Don't let him lower his hands to his head or the back of his neck; some hardened and experienced criminals may conceal a weapon in their hat or collar, or between the shoulder blades. Yell all your commands at him in a loud, clear voice. Seek cover; while doing so, make sure his hands stay visible to you at all times. Have him lie face-down on the ground, away from his weapon, chin on the ground and legs spread apart, with his hands held palms-up and stretched straight out from his shoulders.

While you are holding your attacker for the police, you must also remain alert to any other aggressors you have not detected. If possible, seek cover with your back against a wall, dumpster or other solid structure, or otherwise position yourself so that you can cover the intruder while protecting yourself from surprise attack. Use your cell phone to call the police, never taking your eyes off your attacker, or have a bystander call for you.

Note that any assailant you are holding at gunpoint has three choices: run away, comply with your commands, or attack you and get shot. If he chooses flight, let him go.

## **DEALING WITH AN ATTACK OUTSIDE THE HOME WITHOUT A FIREARM**

There may be occasions when you must respond to an attack outside the home without using a firearm. You may not have your defensive firearm with you, for example, or the attack may not threaten your life, and thus does not justify the use of deadly force.

Of course, the best way of dealing with any confrontation is to evade it, escape it, or flee from it. However, if you cannot avoid an attack and you are unable or unwilling to use

your defensive firearm to stop it, you may still be able to defend yourself by using martial arts, chemical irritants, or alternative non-gun weapons.

**Martial Arts.** There are many styles of martial arts instruction currently available, such as karate, judo, aikido, kung-fu, taekwondo, Krav Maga, Sambo, boxing and so forth. While the different types vary as to the actual techniques employed, they all have certain characteristics and limitations in common. All are used essentially at arm's length, potentially increasing the likelihood of injury from an attacker. While the martial arts can be very effective against a single unarmed attacker, they are of uncertain value against an assailant armed with a weapon, or against several attackers.

Most martial arts require some level of strength, speed, coordination and flexibility, and thus may be difficult to master by those with physical limitations. Most importantly, to use the martial arts effectively for defensive purposes normally requires years of rigorous training. This makes the martial arts less than ideal for those who cannot devote the time, money and effort needed to master them, or who have an immediate need for self-protection.

Despite these limitations, martial arts can be a critical component of a complete self-protection strategy. Given that most attacks take place at close range, and that pistol cartridges generally do not produce instant incapacitation, it follows that, even when shot, an assailant armed with a knife, club or other arm's length weapon will have ample opportunity to inflict injury on an armed citizen. Also, close-range attacks may occur so quickly that there is simply no time to present a firearm, even with an instinctive shooting technique. At such times, the ability to effectively ward off or counter the initial stages of an attack with "empty hand" techniques may prevent a serious or potentially fatal injury. These techniques may also give the armed citizen time to present the firearm, or, if shots have already been fired, to wait for hits to take effect.

Martial arts techniques may also be useful to stop or deflect an attack that is not life threatening, and therefore does not justify the use of lethal force. Some shooting schools teach a few basic techniques that can be used in conjunction with firearm presentation. More extensive training can be acquired at martial arts schools that are more defense- than sport-oriented.

**Chemical Irritants.** Chemical irritants used to deter attackers usually take the form of tear gas or pepper (capsaicin) sprays. When sprayed into the eyes, nose or mouth, these irritants inflame mucous membranes, causing watery eyes, a runny nose, difficulty breathing and an intense burning sensation. Most commonly, these irritants are sold as pocket-size pressurized canisters having a nozzle that can be aimed at an attacker's face.

Chemical irritants can be useful for deterring non-life threatening attacks, or for those persons who do not wish to employ deadly force for self-defense. Unlike martial arts, chemical irritants do not require extensive training for effective use. Chemical irritants can also be effective against non-human attackers, such as aggressive dogs. Nonetheless, they have limitations. In order for a sufficient quantity of irritant to contact the attacker's mucous membranes, he must be fairly close when the spray is activated. This, in turn, can increase the likelihood of receiving an injury from the attacker. Furthermore, in windy conditions, some of the irritant spray can blow back in the user's face. Chemical irritants also vary in effectiveness. According to some estimates, about 10% to 15% of the

population is at least somewhat resistant to the effects of tear gas and pepper sprays, and may not be deterred or incapacitated by these products. Finally, carrying chemical irritants is illegal in some jurisdictions. Even in jurisdictions where they are permitted, they may be prohibited in some areas, such as governmental offices.

**Non-Gun Options.** There are a variety of non-gun options that may be used in lieu of a firearm for self-defense; however, the carry and use of such options is often problematic. Many of these options, such as saps, spring-loaded batons, sword canes and nunchaku are illegal for carry in most jurisdictions, even when firearm carry is permitted. Knives, especially small folding knives, are legal to carry in many jurisdictions, but there are often limitations as to blade length and type.

Some innocuous-looking objects may be used as weapons in an emergency. Canes and umbrellas can be used to ward off an attack, as can a device called a Kubotan, basically an aluminum cylinder about 6" long and 1/2" thick which is used against pressure points and other vulnerable areas of an attacker. Hung from car or house keys, it attracts little attention. As with other forms of unarmed self-defense, training is required for effective employment of this option.

Similar in size and shape to the Kubotan are some defensive flashlights, which are discussed in greater depth in Chapter 27, Engaging Targets in Low Light Conditions. In addition to being used as contact options, they can also be employed to temporarily blind or disorient a close-range attacker in low-light conditions.

Stun guns, which deliver a disabling but normally non-lethal electrical shock, can be effective in disabling a close-range assailant. There are two major types of these defensive options: one having two exposed electrodes which are simultaneously applied to the body, and the other firing needle-like electrodes which penetrate light clothing and stick in the skin. This latter type allows the defender to stay several feet from an attacker, and is also considered by some authorities to more quickly incapacitate. Both designs rely upon direct contact between the electrodes and the assailant's skin, and thus may not be effective when he is clad in thick, heavy clothing. Note that stun guns are illegal or restricted in many jurisdictions.

All non-gun options have some of the same limitations. As with martial arts and chemical irritants, they can only be used when the attacker is at close range, and they vary in effectiveness. Also, training is required to use some of these options effectively. Additionally, some of these items, such as knives and even canes, may be regarded as lethal options by the authorities.

Non-gun weapons have one major advantage, however: they may be carried in a state of readiness that is usually not possible with firearms. A walking stick or umbrella is carried in your hands, and is therefore instantly available; and a Kubotan, canister of pepper spray, or small flashlight can be attached to your key ring, allowing it to be grasped inconspicuously as you walk toward your car or front door. Even a closed folding knife or small stun gun can be held in the hand without drawing attention, unlike a firearm. If you choose to incorporate a non-gun option into your overall defensive strategy, you should train with it as seriously as you do with your defensive firearm.

Because it allows a citizen to stop a threat more quickly, at a greater distance, and with less training than many other tools and techniques, a firearm is the best choice for self-

defense outside the home. Adequate proficiency can be acquired by any person regardless of age, size, strength or physical limitation. However, as pointed out previously, there are confrontational situations in which the use of a firearm would not be justified. There are also those who simply do not want to incorporate a firearm into their personal protection strategy. In these cases, non-gun alternatives for personal defense may be appropriate.





## CHAPTER 8

# If You Must Shoot

As is emphasized repeatedly throughout this book, a firearm is a tool of last resort in dealing with a life-threatening encounter. Whenever possible and safe, it is always preferable to prevent, deter, evade or escape an attack. Unfortunately, there may be times when these options are not available, and you must use whatever means are at your disposal—including your defensive firearm—to stop an attack and protect your life or the lives of loved ones.

There is nothing—no shooting sport, no motion picture or instruction manual, and no training regimen—that can fully prepare you for the experience of using your defensive firearm against a violent assailant. Nonetheless, those gun owners who avail themselves of every opportunity to prepare mentally and physically for a defensive situation will almost always fare better than those who don't. A large part of this preparation involves understanding what actually goes on during and after a shooting.

### ART DOESN'T ALWAYS IMITATE LIFE

Most people in our society have little or no experience with shooting situations. For many, television and motion pictures are the primary source of information regarding the use of firearms. Regrettably, the portrayals of firearm use in these media bear little resemblance to what actually occurs in real life. Knowing the difference between firearms fact and firearms fiction will enable you to better handle a defensive shooting situation.

Perhaps the greatest misconception fostered by the media lies in the effects of being shot. When a character is shot in motion pictures or television shows, the bullet strike produces a large, easily-seen wound and throws the person violently backward. Often a single shot causes instantaneous collapse.

In reality, this depiction is almost completely inaccurate. Both participants in and witnesses to defensive encounters involving firearms typically report an inability to spot bullet strikes. Also, a bullet hit often produces no discernible effect whatsoever—certainly not the violent backward motion we see in the entertainment media. Furthermore, studies show that one shot rarely stops or instantly incapacitates an assailant. More commonly, multiple shots from a firearm are required to stop an attacker.

This last point cannot be overemphasized. Even when the first shot is well-placed in the center of mass, incapacitation usually results only after several shots—and several seconds. Hitting a vital area on your assailant may not immediately cause a cessation of the attack, particularly if he or she is under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or is highly motivated to do you harm or take your life. Even when the heart stops, sufficient fresh oxygen remains in the brain and muscles to continue activity for up to 30 seconds—more than enough time for an aggressor to resume or continue an attack. You should assume that your first shot will not immediately stop an attack. This is one of the reasons you need to continue to fire at the assailant until there is no longer any imminent deadly threat.



*Firing in self-defense at this violent attacker could also endanger bystanders, motorists in passing cars, and others in buildings and roads in the background.*

While there are areas on the body where a bullet hit will produce instant incapacitation, they are very small and unlikely to be hit even by an experienced shooter under the stress and rapid movement of a violent encounter. A solid center of mass hit (or hits) is the surest way to stop an attack quickly.

In television or motion-picture shooting incidents, little concern is given to the consequences of a shot that misses its target. In the media, misses simply splatter against nearby cover or ricochet away harmlessly. In the real world, you must be aware of where every bullet you fire can go—including your misses.

## LIKELIHOOD OF INJURY

As discussed above, the great majority of assaults take place at very close range—often a matter of only a few feet. It has also been pointed out that an attacker is unlikely to be stopped immediately with a single shot. These two facts, plus the possibility of encountering multiple assailants in any confrontation outside the home, create a strong likelihood that you will suffer some degree of injury during an attack.

For example, it has been shown that an assailant wielding a knife even as far away as seven yards—21 feet—can usually get to and injure an armed defender before that defender can stop him with a gun. This is often known as the 21-foot rule. Since most attacks take place at ranges considerably less than seven yards, you can see that an attacker armed with no more than a knife or club (or even his bare hands) often will be able to wound an armed defender.

The probability of being injured while defending yourself from attack should not, however, deter you from exercising your right of self-defense. Some misguided people believe that resisting an attack makes it more likely that you will be injured. U.S. Justice



*Even at a distance of 21 feet, a knife-wielding assailant will likely get to and injure an armed defender before he can be stopped.*

Department studies show that people who resist an assailant do, indeed, suffer a greater likelihood of injury than those who comply—except for those who resist with a firearm. In these studies, armed citizens who used a gun to protect their lives were considerably less likely to be injured than those who did not fight back. Simply put, if you cannot prevent, deter, evade or escape a violent attack, the effective use of a defensive firearm represents your best choice for minimizing your chances of injury or death.

There are several methods by which you can lessen the likelihood of injury from a violent assailant. The use of cover can protect you from an attacker, or at least slow it down. In any defensive situation, you need to create as much distance as possible between yourself and a violent criminal. This may take you out of the range of edged weapons and contact weapons (hammers, tire irons, clubs, etc.), and decreases the probability of being hit by shots fired by an assailant.

Creating distance does not mean, however, that you delay firing upon an approaching aggressor. As discussed above, a determined assailant starting from seven yards away (a distance a little longer than a typical American-made full-size car) will almost certainly reach you before you can stop him, even with multiple gunshots. You must not wait to fire upon an attacker until the last possible moment in the hope that he will have a change of heart. You should fire whenever there is a clear, unavoidable and immediate threat to life.



*When attacked, it is important to put oneself behind cover.*

Combining the use of both cover and distance can give you more time to react and to put obstacles between you and your assailant. These obstacles—cars, mailboxes, trash cans, trees, streetlight poles and so forth—will slow down your attacker, giving you more time to react. Such obstacles, properly used, can also prevent or delay injury from an attacker armed with an edged or contact weapon.

## IF YOU ARE INJURED

Even if you sustain an injury during an attack, it is essential to keep fighting. The indomitable will to prevail is the single most important factor in ensuring your survival in a deadly encounter. Keep in mind that an initial wound from a knife, a club or even a gun is not likely to be fatal. If you stop fighting when you are first injured, however, you likely will receive additional, possibly lethal, injuries. You must always keep fighting, no matter how badly you think you are hurt. The sooner you stop your attacker, the fewer injuries you or others will receive, and the faster medical attention can be obtained for all injured parties.

To help you deal with the possibility of being wounded during an attack, use mental preparation to help strengthen your resolve to prevail. To some degree, you can control how you react emotionally to situations; practice visualizing yourself during an attack and prevailing despite an injury. Remember that an injury may look worse than it really is, and that many survivors who were wounded in violent attacks report that they did not feel pain or otherwise realize that they were stabbed or shot until later, after the attack was over. In many of the cases in which victims were oblivious to the injuries they sustained, it was because they were completely focused mentally on the struggle to survive and win.

## ONCE YOUR ATTACKER IS DOWN

As has been emphasized previously, once you have stopped an assailant's attack, you should do nothing to prevent him from fleeing. It is not your job or responsibility to arrest or detain a criminal. However, if you are forced to shoot an attacker and he goes down, seemingly incapacitated, you may not be able to immediately leave the scene, for reasons of both safety and legality. Under such conditions, you should follow specific procedures to ensure your safety and the safety of loved ones or other innocent bystanders.

**Do Not Approach Your Assailant.** Once your attacker is down, you must not approach him under any circumstances—not to disarm him, to check on his condition, to render first aid or for any other reason. He may be shamming or only partially incapacitated, and if he has a hidden weapon, he may take advantage of your proximity to try to injure or kill you.

**Scan for Threats.** Immediately after you fire shots at an assailant that stop his or her attack, lower your firearm slightly to see the effect of your shots. At that time you should also scan for additional threats.

The scanning technique you would use outside the home is different than scanning for attackers inside your home. In your home, the advantage should be yours. On the street,



*After firing shots that stop an attack, lower your firearm slightly and shift your view from side to side to scan for additional threats. If your assailant is down, keep him in your peripheral vision as you scan.*

you're on your attacker's turf. He knows the alleys, the abandoned buildings and the hidden doorways; he knows how often the police patrol the area, and how likely it is any bystander or resident will hear your cries for help—or even respond.

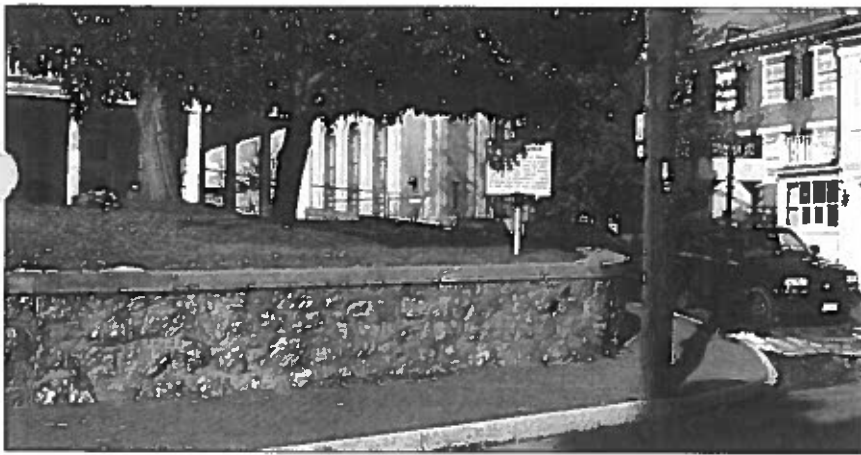
He will often work with an accomplice who will sneak up behind you while you're distracted. You may think you've stopped an attack when you present your gun and an aggressor backs away, but you have simply allowed yourself to be distracted so that his partner can attack you from the rear.

If your assailant is on the ground, whether he is wounded or has simply surrendered, you should scan by lowering the gun and then shifting your eyes slightly from side to side, keeping your assailant in your peripheral vision. Scan by taking quick glances to each side and to the rear, returning your eyes forward before a hidden adversary can take advantage of your momentary look away. This scanning technique is similar to the "quick peek" technique used to scout for danger around a corner or through a doorway. While you are scanning, keep your gun pointed at your assailant.

In the event that your attacker flees, you still need to scan for threats. Lower your gun to the ready position, finger off the trigger, scan to the left, right, and to the rear as before. Be sure to observe the first rule of safe gun handling (**ALWAYS** keep the gun pointed in a safe direction).

**Move to Cover.** Next, move to cover if you have not already done so. Reload your gun if necessary. Although it may seem that the danger has passed once your assailant is down and seemingly incapacitated, it is just as important to seek cover after shooting stops as before it starts. Remember, just because an attacker is down does not mean that he is no longer a threat. Even when wounded and on the ground, an assailant may still have the capability and the will to physically threaten you.

Just as importantly, outside the home you are more likely to be confronted by multiple assailants. Thus, even if you have downed an attacker, you may still have his accomplices to deal with. Getting behind cover will allow you to defend yourself against additional attackers.



*On this street, cover can be obtained behind cars, the masonry wall, trees, telephone poles, building columns, etc.*

**Contact the Police.** After any defensive shooting you must try to contact the police. It is your duty as a citizen to report any violent incident in which you have been involved, as well as to request medical attention for any wounded person.

Even if you believe that a bystander has already called the police, it is still advisable for you to do so as well. You will be able to tell the responding officers your side of the incident right from the start, and give them additional information to minimize confusion and the potential for a tragic error resulting from mistaken identity. Also, by summoning the police you indicate that you are a responsible citizen—not a criminal or a person who recklessly abuses his right to bear arms.

You should notify the police only after you have moved to cover. This can be done in several ways. If you possess a cell phone, dial the police with one hand while you keep your gun pointed at the threat with the other. Don't look at your phone continuously while you're dialing; give it no more than a quick glance or two.



*After a defensive shooting, take cover and use your cell phone to call police.*

You may not always have a cell phone handy, however. If your defensive shooting incident takes place on a street, it is likely that there will be a pedestrian, shopkeeper, homeowner or the like in the vicinity; ask him or her to lend you a cell phone or to summon the police. Actually, if the shooting takes place in a populated area, it is likely that someone will call the police in any event; but it is important for you to inform the police that you are not the aggressor in this situation.

If the incident occurs in a deserted area, you may have to flag down a passing motorist. Don't lose sight of your attacker, or expose yourself to any more danger than is necessary.

Ask to borrow a cell phone from the motorist or, barring that, ask him or her to stop and call the police as soon as possible. In the latter event, make sure the motorist gives the police a good description of you, and emphasizes that you acted in self-defense.

That same point—that you had to shoot in self-defense—should also be emphasized if you are able to talk to the police dispatcher directly. Answer the dispatcher's questions calmly and succinctly. Avoid being excited; not only will your excitement increase the likelihood of garbled communication, but the police officers responding to the call understandably will be leery of dealing with a hysterical person. Do not volunteer any information about the incident other than what is required to answer the dispatcher's questions regarding your immediate safety. Be sure to describe yourself, your attacker and any other people in the immediate area, so that the police will know who is who when they arrive. Also, notify the dispatcher if your attacker still seems capable of posing a threat. Don't forget to mention that you are armed and are holding your attacker at gunpoint. This will give the responding officers advance warning of what they will find at the scene—a much better alternative than having them unexpectedly be confronted by an armed individual.

Stay on the phone if you can. If you are talking to the dispatcher when the police arrive, you will receive precise directions to allow the officers to safely take charge of the situation. Follow any such directions exactly and immediately; even though you know you're not the aggressor, the police only see you as a person with a gun and, therefore, potentially dangerous. However, if the instructions you receive will clearly increase your risk of being killed or injured, inform the dispatcher why you cannot follow them. They will give you an alternative set of directions.

Most difficult are situations in which you are holding a still-dangerous attacker at gunpoint. In these situations, it is essential to apprise the responding officers of the circumstances so that there is continuity of control of the aggressor.

**Wait for the Police.** Until the police arrive, wait in your covered position, continue to observe your attacker, and hold your gun in a ready position. Also, continue to scan for additional threats. Do not talk to your assailant except to yell short, decisive commands as necessary to maintain control over him; don't engage in conversation, as this may distract you. Leave cover only if you must do so to maintain your safety, hail a motorist or use a telephone. Do not abandon cover to flee the scene (as to a store) unless you are absolutely certain you can do so in safety. Remember, your attacker may have an accomplice lurking in the vicinity.

If others are with you behind cover, keep them there. Avoid sending them to summon help or to the presumed greater safety of another location, unless this can be done without exposing them to danger from an unseen accomplice.

It may be extremely difficult for you to remain behind cover and watch the assailant you shot. You must mentally prepare yourself for the situation in which a predatory criminal, who just a few moments earlier was intent upon killing you, is now crying out for assistance. For many, this will be the hardest part of a shooting situation.

Regardless, you must keep your distance from that assailant and remain behind cover until police arrive. Your attacker may be shamming, waiting for you to approach so that he or she may use a hidden weapon against you. Alternatively, your shots may have only



temporarily incapacitated your assailant, and he may suddenly revive when you come close.

**Be On Guard Against a Resumption of the Attack.** Sometimes an assailant you are forced to shoot will go down, seemingly incapacitated, then shortly revive. If the revived attacker again constitutes a threat—produces a weapon, for example, or continues to approach—you may have no choice but to again use your defensive firearm.

On the other hand, if the aggressor recovers and flees the scene, do not fire your gun or attempt to stop or follow him. Let him go. It is not your job to capture criminals; in fact, there may be legal ramifications to pursuing your attacker (see Part VI: Concealed Carry, Self-Defense and the Law). Apprehending criminals is the job of the police. Armed with your description of your assailant, and with the knowledge that he will have to seek medical care, the police will have little difficulty in catching him.

**Maintain the Integrity of the Shooting Scene.** A critical consideration that is often given little thought is the need to maintain the integrity of the shooting scene. When the police arrive, they will commence an investigation that will involve, among other things, all the physical evidence at the scene. It is absolutely essential that all physical evidence be undisturbed. Neither you nor any others at the scene should move or touch anything.

Bystanders who witness the incident may come to look or to help. Some well-intentioned people may want to give aid to the injured assailant; warn them as strongly as possible of the inadvisability of that act.

Also, it may be a temptation for a bystander to steal the attacker's weapon or, even worse, use it against you. When your attacker goes down, always be aware of the location of his weapon, and of anyone approaching it. Warn bystanders against going near your attacker or his weapon, but do not threaten them; that may be misinterpreted later. Encourage bystanders to keep their distance from both you and your downed attacker. Note that friends of your attacker can make your situation highly unpleasant, such as by inadvertently or intentionally disturbing evidence at the scene.



*When a shooting occurs in public and onlookers assemble, it can be difficult to maintain the integrity of the scene.*

**Greeting the Police.** Whether you have contacted the police dispatcher or not, you should follow certain rules when greeting the police to ensure both their safety and yours.

First and foremost, never greet or turn toward a police officer with a gun in your hand. The officers won't know you are the victim; they'll just see the gun swinging toward them.

Also, follow all instructions precisely and immediately. Don't argue, hesitate, stall or give advice. Police officers are trained to take control of situations; if you seem to resist them, they have no choice but to assume you are uncooperative and possibly a threat. All your movements should be slow and precise, and your hands should be visible at all times. The more cooperative and rational you appear to the police officers, the more likely they will be to see you as the innocent victim that you are.

Don't argue with other witnesses at the scene. Some may have an incorrect view of what transpired, or may deliberately give false testimony because they are friends of the victim or hostile to you. Don't protest while the police take their statements; you will have a chance to tell your side of things, and your story will be more readily believed if you stay calm.



*Law enforcement officers arriving at the scene of a self-defense shooting will not know who is the attacker and the victim. Under these circumstances, the armed citizen must obey their commands without hesitation.*

In some situations, you may not have an opportunity to call a dispatcher before police arrive. Perhaps a patrol was right around the corner, heard the shots and responded. Or perhaps you just didn't have a phone or other means of communication at your disposal. When the police arrive on the scene, remember that they don't know that you successfully defended yourself against a threat; all they know is that shots were fired at a particular location and when they showed up, you were standing over a downed man with a gun in your hand. Under those conditions, they have to assume, for their own safety, that you may be a threat. To a police officer, any person with a firearm is a potential threat. Thus, if you behave aggressively, you may survive the criminal attack but still be mistaken for the assailant by the responding officers—with tragic consequences.

The responding officers likely will draw their own guns and order you to put your gun down. Don't argue with them, or try to explain that you were defending yourself. Just comply. You'll have a chance to explain it all later. They may have you lie face down on the ground so that they can handcuff you; don't resist or struggle. The officers' adrenaline levels will be as high as yours. Don't boost them any higher by being uncooperative. No matter what you do, do not point your gun at the officers.

**Leaving the Scene.** You should stay with a downed assailant until the police arrive, just as you are legally bound to remain at an accident scene. There may be occasions, however, when leaving the scene of a shooting may be appropriate.

As a general rule, you are justified in leaving a shooting scene only when your safety would be compromised if you remained there. For example, if you are attacked by several armed men and you disable one of them, you are not required to remain at the scene if the other men continue to constitute a threat and you are able to flee safely. If they temporarily flee, you should retreat. Similarly, if you fire in self-defense in a neighborhood which contains many friends of your attacker, you may find yourself quickly surrounded by a group of hostile people that threatens to become a mob. Under such conditions, it might be prudent to leave the scene of the incident.

Be aware that the authorities will usually not look favorably on persons who leave the scene of a shooting. If you do leave, immediately contact the police. Go to a police station, flag down a patrol car or use a telephone. If you make contact by telephone, tell the dispatcher who you are, what transpired and where it happened, and follow his or her instructions. You will probably be asked to report to the nearest police station, or to stay at your location until a patrol car meets you. Follow the dispatcher's instructions to the letter.

If you must leave the scene of a shooting incident, do not go home, change clothes, or wash up. Doing any of those things may destroy evidence that may support your claim of legitimate self-defense, or may be perceived as an attempt on your part to tamper or hide evidence.

The same procedure should be followed if you are involved in a shooting that does not result in any injury. For example, you may be confronted by an armed attacker at an ATM machine and exchange shots with nobody apparently being hit. Your assailant runs off, but that does not relieve you of your duty as a responsible gun owner. In the first place, just because your attacker did not seem to be hit does not mean he wasn't; bullet strikes can be extremely hard to spot. Furthermore, there is a good chance that a passerby or resident will report your encounter, possibly even with the tag number of your vehicle.

## CHAPTER 9

# The Aftermath of a Defensive Encounter Outside the Home

Complete preparation for defensive firearm use outside the home involves more than practicing the shooting fundamentals and positions, firearm presentation and visualization exercises. True, when you are confronted by an assailant, your first concern is prevailing in the encounter, and the skills you have learned are of paramount importance. When the incident is over, however, you may experience emotional turmoil, social ostracism and even legal sanctions. These are all common aspects of the aftermath of a defensive encounter, and require prior mental preparation just as effective shooting and gun handling require physical preparation. Even when you are justified and forced to do so, shooting an assailant is a distressing experience. Realize this and plan for it in your mental training.

### EMOTIONAL AFTERMATH OF A DEFENSIVE SHOOTING OUTSIDE THE HOME

After prevailing in a violent encounter, you may experience a number of emotions. These emotions often occur in the order listed below, but are not universal; some people may not exhibit any of them, while others will experience some or all of the following emotional reactions, but in varying sequences.

**Elation.** Often there is an immediate feeling of elation at having survived and prevailed in a life-threatening encounter. In today's social and political atmosphere, attack survivors may feel that they should downplay or ignore this emotion. The survivor who feels this elation is experiencing euphoria resulting from both a sense of relief at having survived, and an involuntary biochemical reaction resulting from the release of endorphins and other sensory- and mood-enhancing chemicals into the bloodstream. It is important to realize that there is nothing wrong with a momentary or lasting feeling of elation at having prevailed. Often this emotion is quickly followed by guilt at having felt elation in the first place.

**Revulsion.** After the initial elation at having survived the violent confrontation, there often arises a feeling of revulsion at what has happened. The victorious victim may become nauseous, vomit, or even faint from the emotional shock of seeing the result of the confrontation.

The absence of revulsion does not mean you are a bad or cold person. Your own experiences (such as military combat duty or work as an emergency medical technician) may have given you a greater tolerance for the unpleasant consequences of a shooting. However, in preparing for the aftermath of defensive firearm use, you must recognize that the scene of a shooting contains many disturbing sights and sounds. While you cannot completely steel yourself to what you will see and hear, visualizing potential outcomes may decrease the distress you experience after a shooting.

Although you may not be able to avoid experiencing the emotion of revulsion, you must avoid being overwhelmed by it. Outside the home there are many opportunities for additional aggressors—or even secondary aggressors having no connection to your original assailant—to mount an attack against you after you have stopped an initial assault. If you allow yourself to be overcome by a feeling of revulsion to the point of losing awareness of your surroundings, you will be extremely vulnerable.

**Remorse.** Many survivors experience remorse at having hurt or killed an attacker. This has nothing to do with the moral justifiability of their actions. It is simply a normal feeling of sadness or sorrow at having been forced to defend yourself.

**Self-Doubt.** Those who prevail in a defensive shooting scenario may begin to replay the sequence of events in their minds, and ask themselves questions such as: Did I really have to shoot? Could I have avoided the attack? Was there something else I could have done? Like remorse, this feeling is a natural result of the normal person's aversion to taking a life, even when morally and legally justifiable. Remember, however, that simply by reading this book you are clearly trying to prepare to make such decisions responsibly.

**Acceptance.** This is usually the last of the emotional stages encountered after a defensive shooting. Rationalization is the first step to acceptance, and is often a consequence of the self-doubt described above. As you analyze the circumstances of the shooting, you will conclude that your actions were both justified and necessary.

There is no certainty that you will go through all or any of these emotional stages; nor can you be sure that you will arrive at the acceptance stage. Human emotions are much too complex to encase them in neat psychological boxes, or to arrange them in a simple sequence. Many shooting survivors, in fact, experience residual feelings of remorse and self-doubt, as well as other emotions, such as anger and fear.

As with other traumatic life experiences, you must put a defensive shooting in its proper place and move on. With time, the negative emotions associated with the event usually fade, allowing you to get on with your normal life. Don't dwell on the event, but also do not suppress your feelings about what has occurred. Most mental health experts agree that acknowledging, accepting and expressing your emotions is the first step in dealing with them.

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).** This term has been loosely (and often inappropriately) used in the popular media to describe a wide variety of reactions to stressful life events. Some (but not all) of the symptoms of PTSD include flashbacks, recurrent nightmares, and an inability to function normally (as to hold a job or maintain a stable marriage). Not everyone who has such experiences necessarily has PTSD; that diagnosis can be made only by a trained mental health worker. Nor is it true that everyone who goes through a traumatic event is inevitably afflicted with PTSD. Most people, in fact, who suffer extreme stress—airplane crash survivors, combat veterans, victims of tornadoes and other natural disasters, and the like—do not develop clinical PTSD.

## REDUCING THE EMOTIONAL AFTERMATH OF A SHOOTING OUTSIDE THE HOME

Although you cannot avoid experiencing certain emotions as the result of your justifiable use of deadly force, you can prevent those emotions from taking control of your life. Two methods that many have found helpful are counseling and self-reinforcement.

**Counseling.** Counseling is one of the most effective and widely used ways that human beings have of working out their problems. Although the term may immediately bring to mind formal sessions with a psychotherapist, social worker or clergyman, in actuality counseling goes on everyday in our normal lives. Every time you unburden yourself to another—whether husband or wife, close friend, neighbor, or co-worker—a kind of informal counseling is going on.

Counseling achieves results in several ways. For one who has used deadly force to survive a deadly attack, talking to another sympathetic person about the experience gives the survivor support and affirmation, as well as the viewpoint of a detached third party. This objective viewpoint can be important in helping a survivor deal with overwhelming self-doubt and remorse, and in finally arriving at an acceptance of his or her actions.

Seeking counseling—whether with a professional or a friend or relative—should never be viewed as a sign of weakness. The survivor who obtains counseling is simply acknowledging two basic human truths: that two heads are often better than one, and that one may sometimes be unable to see the forest for the trees. A gun owner who is involved in a self-defense shooting may be emotionally too close to the event to be able to step back and look at what transpired in a calm, rational, evenhanded manner—as could a friend, pastor or psychotherapist. It is no more a sign of weakness for the survivor of an attack to seek counseling than it is for a physician to get a colleague's advice on a particular surgical procedure. In both cases, counseling provides a fresh and objective point of view that may lead to greater understanding.

Counseling may be obtained from a variety of sources, including:

- psychiatrists, psychologists and other mental health professionals;
- clergy;
- your spouse;
- trusted friends; and
- others who have had similar experiences.

Many police forces have counselors for officers involved in shootings. Such law enforcement agencies may be able to refer you to appropriate counseling resources.

Following any defensive shooting encounter, however, the first type of counseling you should seek is legal counseling. Consult with your attorney before speaking to others about the incident.

**Self-Reinforcement.** Self-reinforcement is a technique by which you replace negative, self-destructive thoughts with positive, self-affirming ones. In a sense, you are acting as your own counselor, giving yourself support and validating the actions you took in self-defense.

Self-reinforcement can and should be practiced by anyone who has had to defend himself or herself with deadly force. Self-reinforcing statements should take the following form:

- *I am a good person.*
- *I did not choose to attack another law-abiding citizen.*
- *I did not attack anyone. I was attacked by a criminal.*
- *My attacker was the one who chose a lifestyle and sequence of events that led to his injury or death.*
- *I was morally justified in protecting my life with deadly force.*
- *I have quite possibly saved the lives of others by stopping this predator from harming future innocent victims.*
- *I had no choice but to use deadly force to stop my attacker.*
- *I am a moral person.*

Ultimately, you are the only person who can make it possible for you to put a defensive shooting into proper perspective and get on with your life.

## LEGAL AFTERMATH OF A DEFENSIVE SHOOTING OUTSIDE THE HOME

The legal ramifications of being involved in a self-defense shooting outside the home will vary depending upon the laws applicable in your jurisdiction. In many areas, both the police and the prosecutor's office have some discretion in the way in which a defensive shooting is handled. If you are involved in an absolutely clearcut case of self-defense, you may only have to answer questions at the police station and make a formal statement. However, if the circumstances around the shooting incident are initially unclear, you could be arrested. In a worst-case scenario, it is possible that you could be charged with a felony, arrested, handcuffed and put into a police car; taken to a police station and fingerprinted, photographed, booked and put into a cell; and held in jail until the charges against you are dropped or bail is arranged. Furthermore, your carry permit likely will be suspended or revoked, and your defensive firearm (and possibly any other firearms in your home) could be confiscated by the police. Additionally, you will undoubtedly incur hefty legal bills in your own defense.

Be aware that your local law enforcement agencies, prosecutors and judges may view a defensive shooting outside the home in a different light than one that occurs inside your home. If the police arrive at your home to find that you have shot an armed stranger who

broke into your home, they will be inclined to believe your claim of self-defense: it's the only story that, at first glance, makes sense. If the physical evidence and witness testimony supports that claim, there is a good chance you can avoid arrest. On the other hand, when the same officers respond to a shooting in the street, the situation is much more ambiguous. It may come down to your word against that of your assailant or other witnesses. Some of those witnesses may be friends of your attacker, or may be biased against you simply because you carry a gun. Don't forget, to some people, only criminals carry guns.

Be careful what you say and do immediately after you use your gun in self-defense. Even though you may feel elation, revulsion, remorse and self-doubt—all natural and understandable reactions—you must not outwardly indulge those emotions after a defensive shooting outside the home. Do not hoot or cheer, or display an elated expression, even if that is how you momentarily feel; do not make audible comments about the incident, to yourself or anyone else. In the street or other public place, there will often be witnesses. Act as though your every word and gesture will later be put on display in a court of law or in the newspaper.

Furthermore, you should understand that many police officers and public officials—particularly in big cities—do not like concealed carry laws. Politically motivated officials may try to portray you as a trigger-happy madman in an attempt to discredit concealed-carry laws and to demonize concealed-carry permit holders.

A more complete discussion of the legal issues revolving around the self-defense use of a firearm is found in Part VI: Concealed Carry, Self-Defense and the Law. The defense-oriented gun owner is strongly encouraged to consult a qualified attorney familiar with the gun laws and self-defense laws of the gun owner's jurisdiction.

## **SOCIAL AFTERMATH OF A DEFENSIVE SHOOTING**

In addition to the emotional and legal aftermath that follows the use of a firearm in self-defense, there are social consequences as well. People will see you being questioned by the police, and quite possibly being handcuffed and taken away in a police car. They may also see your assailant lying on the sidewalk, or being carried off on a stretcher. Some of these people may be your friends, neighbors or co-workers. And those among your friends, family and acquaintances who do not actually witness these events will nonetheless read about them in the paper or see them on the 11 o' clock news.

Even if you are eventually fully exonerated, some may still see you as "that trigger-happy nut" or some other unflattering designation. You may be the target of those who hate guns and distrust gun owners, as well as those who can't stand the thought of anyone acting in self-defense. Some of your co-workers and neighbors will begin to act differently toward you, avoiding you, shunning you or treating you with outright hostility.

At work, your act of self-defense may impact negatively on your job advancement if your superiors don't like, or are afraid of, guns. Additionally, your superiors and co-workers will now be aware that you carry a concealed firearm; that, too, may cause you problems. You may be prohibited from carrying your firearm at work, or bringing your firearm onto company property. Even if company management is firearm-friendly, they may have to eventually give in to the complaints of gun-hating employees.



You may even get anonymous threatening notes at work, or crank calls at home from people who cannot accept what you've done. People may stare at you in stores, and shopkeepers you had amicably dealt with for years may now be unexpectedly cold and standoffish. More importantly, you may find yourself targeted by those who identify with, or were friends with, your assailant.

Worst of all may be the effects on your family. Your spouse may find himself or herself socially ostracized, and your children may have to endure cruel taunts from their classmates at school—or even critical comments from their teachers. You may even have members of your own family who cannot understand what you had to do.

There can be substantial unforeseen consequences when you are forced to use your firearm for self-defense outside the home. Your ordeal will not end merely when the attack is stopped; the emotional, legal and social aftermath probably will continue for weeks, months or even years after the event. This aftermath is one more reason why the seriousness of the responsibility of owning a firearm for self defense cannot be overly emphasized.



**PART III**

**CARRYING A  
CONCEALED  
PISTOL AND  
PRESENTING IT  
FROM  
CONCEALMENT**



## CHAPTER 10

# Pistol Carry: Holsters, Holster Purses and Fanny Packs

For people who are properly trained and licensed, there are many ways in which a concealed pistol can be carried. Many of these carry methods involve the use of concealment holsters—devices that are designed to hold a pistol on the body, under the clothing. Pistols can also be discreetly carried in external devices such as handbags, fanny packs, attache cases and the like; many models of these items are available that are specially designed for firearm carry. With such items, the firearm is not concealed under the clothing but inside the device, which outwardly appears to be nothing more than a normal handbag, fanny pack or attache case.

Each specific type of concealment holster or external carry device has strengths and limitations, depending upon the needs and characteristics of the user. What works well for one person in one situation may not be as effective for another person in another situation. Thus, no one device or carry mode is the best for all people. Your selection of the holster, holster purse or other pistol concealment device that is best for you depends upon a careful consideration of a number of factors.

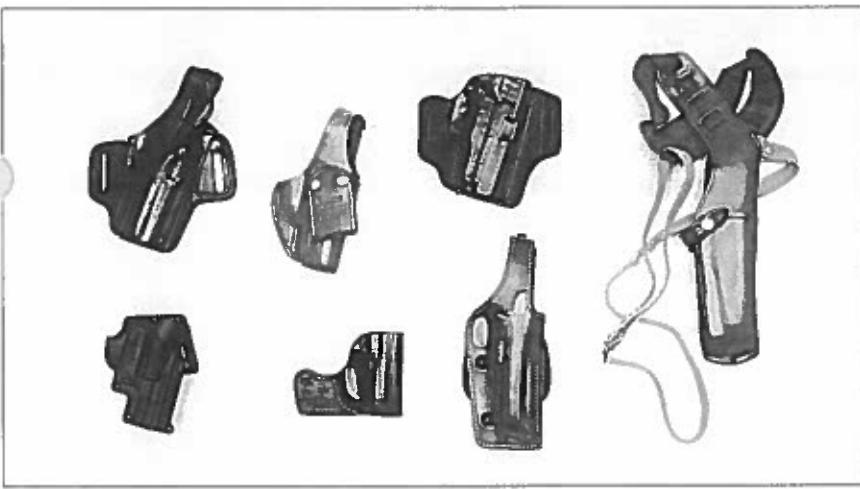
Firearm concealment devices can be judged on the basis of four critical attributes: *concealment*, *access*, *retention* and *comfort*. *Concealment* refers to the degree to which the device hides the gun from observation. *Access* describes the ability of the user of the device to quickly and easily obtain the gun from the device. *Retention* refers to those aspects of design and construction that prevent the loss of the gun in an attack or during vigorous activity. *Comfort* is probably the least critical of these, but is still important: a pistol concealment device that is uncomfortable to wear will probably be left at home.



*This ballistic nylon briefcase has a separate compartment for a concealed handgun.*

## HOLSTERS

Holsters are typically constructed of leather or synthetic materials, or a combination of the two. Synthetic holsters can be made of flexible nylon fabric (often called ballistic nylon) or of stiff polymer materials (such as Kydex) that retain their molded shape. Molded polymer holsters are simple, strong and impervious to moisture and solvents, and offer extremely fast presentation. They can be noisy, however, when the gun is drawn



*A selection of various types of holsters. Top row: pancake holster with safety strap, inside-the-waistband holster with safety strap, open-top pancake holster, vertical shoulder holster. Second row: polymer strong-side belt holster; pocket holster for small handgun; paddle holster with safety strap.*

Leather holsters are also available in both soft (flexible) and hard (rigid) versions. Some leather holsters have thin metal strips sandwiched between layers to stiffen the holster in critical areas. With either material, the more rigid holsters are usually shaped or molded to fit a specific make and model handgun, while the flexible ones will accept a variety of pistols of roughly the same size.

In general, no matter what the material, stiff molded holsters are preferable, as they do not collapse when the gun is withdrawn, and thus allow one-handed reholstering.

Gun retention is achieved in two primary ways. First, the holster can grip the gun snugly. Most often this method of retention is accomplished through molding the holster to closely fit a particular model of gun. Spring steel inserts or elastic straps are also used on some models to increase the holster's grip on a gun. Additionally, many molded holsters are designed to allow the adjustment of holster friction, through tension screws and other devices.

Other holsters—usually those of soft synthetic fabric or leather construction—make use of a second type of retention feature, a safety strap (also sometimes called a retention strap) that encircles the hammer, trigger guard or other part of the gun. Safety straps are not, however, a mark of an inferior holster; some



*The most common type of holster safety strap is the thumbsnap, which is disengaged by the thumb during the draw.*

top quality molded holsters feature them for added retention. With some designs, such as many shoulder holsters, a friction fit is not sufficient to retain the gun; safety straps are an absolute requirement.

Safety straps slow presentation speed, and can be difficult for the support hand to manipulate in support-hand presentation techniques; for these reasons, they are often omitted from "professional" holsters. However, a safety strap can help prevent an assailant from acquiring your firearm in an arm's-length struggle.

Some types of safety straps have closures designed for fast and easy unfastening. A thumbsnap, for example, incorporates a tab of leather or other stiff material that is attached to the snap closure. This tab is positioned on the holster to allow easy unfastening by the thumb during a natural drawing motion.



*Vertical shoulder holster, seen from the side (top), with harness (above).*

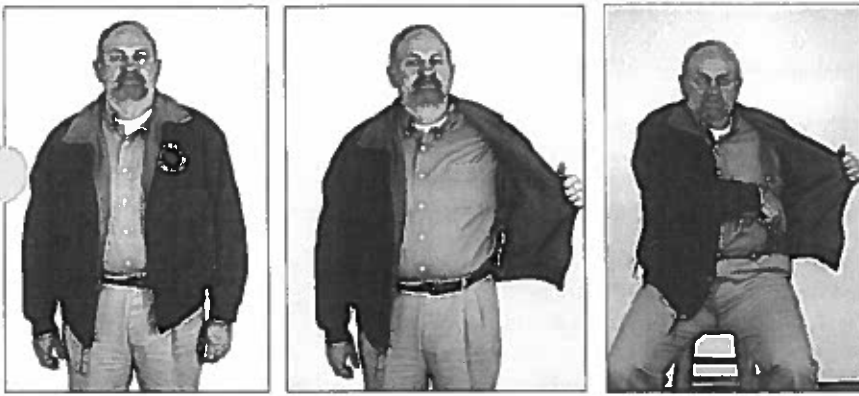
## SHOULDER HOLSTERS

In the mind of the general public, shoulder holsters exemplify the typical concealment holster. There are three basic types of shoulder holsters, all named for the position in which they carry the gun: *upside-down shoulder holsters*, *horizontal shoulder holsters*, and *vertical shoulder holsters*. *Upside-down shoulder holsters* hold a handgun—most commonly a small semi-automatic pistol or short-barreled revolver—under the support-side armpit with the muzzle pointing straight up. Retention is by means of spring steel inserts in the holster, elastic bands or a safety strap. *Horizontal shoulder holsters* hold a gun in a roughly horizontal position under the support-side arm. Depending upon the particular model, the actual gun angle may vary from horizontal to pointing around 45 degrees upward. Thumbsnap-type safety straps are commonly used for gun retention.

*Vertical shoulder holsters* hold the gun with the butt upward and facing forward. Many of these holsters feature a clam-shell design. One or more pieces of spring steel tensions the two halves of the holster together, retaining the gun. Presentation is accomplished by pulling the gun forward between the spring-tensioned holster halves.



*Horizontal shoulder holster, seen from the side (right), with harness (far right).*



*A shoulder holster is excellent for carrying a concealed handgun under a short jacket and allow an un-impeded draw from the sitting position.*

All shoulder holsters feature a harness of leather, fabric or elastic straps to suspend the gun. These harnesses are almost infinitely adjustable, even on economy models, allowing a custom fit for comfort and good access.

Shoulder holsters have the primary advantage of providing good gun concealment when you're wearing a short, waist length jacket that would reveal most belt-mounted holsters. Additionally, they can provide good all-day comfort when you're wearing a large, heavy gun. Moreover, they allow an easy draw from the sitting position—an important consideration if you are attacked in your vehicle.

These holsters have some significant limitations, however. For most people the draw from a shoulder holster is not as fast as from a shooting-side hip holster or crossdraw holster; some people with short arms can find it awkward to reach all the way across the body to access the gun. Concealment can also be a problem. The straps that comprise the harness of the holster can easily show or "print" through light clothing. Also, because shoulder holsters need to be placed far enough around on the body to be grasped by the hand on the opposite side, concealment can be compromised by anything that causes the covering clothing to open, such as a sudden turn or an errant gust of wind.

This across-the-body presentation movement has two other drawbacks as well. First, if you are attacked by a criminal at arm's length, he can easily thwart your draw simply by blocking your arm as it retrieves the gun. With horizontal and vertical models, additionally, the gun butt is positioned in a way that makes it possible for an adversary to take your gun. Moreover, when a gun is withdrawn from a shoulder holster it most often points off to



*Shoulder holsters can allow an assailant to block the draw.*

the side; the gun must be swung in a wide arc to come on target. This movement could endanger any innocent person who is swept by the muzzle. Proper training can ingrain a safer gun movement to the target.

Finally, pretty much all upside-down and horizontal shoulder holsters carry the gun in a position that is technically unsafe. A gun in an upside-down holster points at your own armpit, while a gun carried in a horizontal shoulder rig points rearward, potentially sweeping any person behind you with the muzzle. With the vast majority of shoulder holsters, there is little chance of a gun firing while it is in the holster. However, an overly excited person drawing from such a holster might prematurely engage the trigger and fire the gun just as it is being withdrawn.

## HIP HOLSTERS

Hip holsters are probably the most varied group of holsters available, and for good reason: by positioning the gun on the shooting-side hip, these holsters offer the best balance of concealment, access, retention and comfort for most people.



*From left: polymer belt-loop vertical drop holster; loop/slot belt holster with moderate forward rake; pancake holster with extreme forward rake.*

Hip holsters come in many forms and styles. Much of the variance centers around the way in which the holster attaches to the belt. In general, hip holsters go on the belt via slots in the holster body, or loops attached to the holster. Pancake holsters—so called because many models are roughly the size and shape of a pancake—are among the most popular hip holster. They normally attach by way of slots, which tend to pull the holster closer to the body. Slots are also used on belt-slide holsters, minimalist designs that only encircle the gun in a small area just forward of the trigger guard, leaving most of the barrel or slide uncovered. Many hip holsters make use of both slots and loops to offer a variety of gun positions.

Hip holsters are available in a variety of gun angles. Those that put the bore axis straight



*Inside-the-waistband holster.*



*Paddle holsters have a curved paddle (arrow) that is inserted inside the pants.*



up and down are called "straight drop" holsters. Others tilt or cant the gun butt forward at an angle. These so-called forward cant or FBI rake holsters are generally more popular with knowledgeable gun carriers, as they allow a more rearward (and thus more concealable) position without compromising gun access or draw speed. Some holster models allow adjustment of gun angle. Also popular are high rise or high ride holsters, which carry the gun high on the belt, promoting concealment.

Paddle holsters are a type of hip holster that requires neither slots nor loops, nor even a belt. These holsters have a large curved, stiff, paddle-shaped piece on the back of the holster. This paddle is inserted inside the waistband of the pants, and the holster is held in place by simple friction or by tabs. The primary appeal of these holsters is their ability to be put on and taken off quickly and easily, without the need to undo the belt. Some paddle models allow for adjustment of the holster position and cant. The only drawback with paddle holsters is that they require a tight-fitting belt or pair of pants to prevent the holster from being withdrawn with the gun during presentation.

Inside-the-waistband (IWB) holsters are a high-concealment variant of the standard hip holster. The body of the IWB holster fits inside the pants; outside loops fasten it to the belt. IWB holsters give better concealment under short jackets, coats or shirts, especially when the clothing rises up when the arms are lifted. Some people, however, find that IWB holsters carry the gun so tightly to the body that they cannot achieve as fast a draw as with a conventional hip holster. Comfort is also an issue with some; and those with tight-fitting pants will find it hard to accommodate the extra bulk of an IWB holster. Nonetheless, among those who carry guns as part of their professional duties, such as bodyguards and undercover police officers, IWB holsters are often preferred over other designs.

Hip holsters generally provide the fastest and safest gun presentation of all the holster types. The drawing motion is straight and direct: as the gun is rotated toward the target, the muzzle tends to follow a line that points mostly at the ground, reducing the likelihood



*Hip holsters provide good retention against an assailant's grab. Here the armed citizen merely clamps his elbow against his side to retain the gun.*



*This sequence of photos shows how the muzzle is always pointed in a safe direction when proper techniques are used during presentation from a hip holster.*



*Drawing in the seated position can be awkward with a hip holster.*

that a premature discharge would cause injury to any bystanders. Access is excellent with these holsters; the gun is in a position that can be reached with a minimum of body movement. Retention is also excellent. In a close-range attack, a person can turn the shooting side away from an attacker, preventing him from either grabbing the gun or blocking the draw. In an attack from the rear, with most hip holsters, gun takeaway can be prevented simply by clamping the gun butt to the side with the elbow.

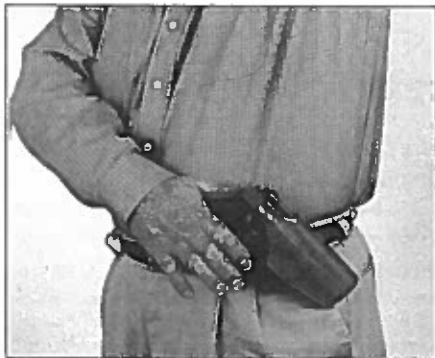
Nonetheless, hip holsters do have a few drawbacks. Comfort is an issue for some, especially with a heavy pistol; some people just never get used to a two-pound weight hung on their belt. With hip holsters that are worn outside the pants, a waist-length bomber jacket will not provide adequate concealment; the tip of the holster will protrude below the waist of the jacket, particularly if the jacket rides up, as when you are reaching above your head. Such

hip holsters require a long jacket or coat. Persons with large hips also may find it harder to conceal the bulge of a hip holster. Finally, the gun position with a typical hip holster makes it hard to draw from a seated position, such as in a vehicle, and also tends to cause the gun butt to audibly hit the hard back of a chair or bench when the wearer sits.

Standard hip holsters may not accommodate womens' waist/hip angle, with the result that the gun butt digs into the shooter's side. Some companies offer holsters that better meet womens' needs by providing an outward-angled gun butt, a greater degree of cant, and a lower position on the belt.

## CROSSDRAW HOLSTERS

Crossdraw holsters are a type of belt holster that is positioned on the support-side hip. Just as with a shoulder holster, drawing from a crossdraw holster requires you to reach all



*Crossdraw holsters often position the gun with the butt angled forward. This facilitates the draw, but also makes it easier for an assailant to grab it.*

the way across your body. Thus, these holsters have the same disadvantages as most shoulder holsters: they can be awkward to draw from and difficult to conceal well, and position the gun in a way such that an arm's-length assailant can easily block your draw or acquire a grip on the gun butt.

Crossdraw holsters offer somewhat faster presentation than shoulder holsters, but they suffer from the same concealment limitation as conventional hip holsters: they must be worn with long covering clothing (except for IWB-style crossdraw models). Despite their drawbacks, crossdraw holsters are still preferred by some shooters.

## ANKLE HOLSTERS

Ankle holsters are gun concealment devices that fit snugly around the ankle or calf area of the leg, usually by means of Velcro® straps or elastic bands. Ankle holsters are available in almost any material; they are limited, however, to small semiautomatic pistols and snub-nosed small-frame revolvers.

Typically, ankle holsters locate the gun on the inside of the lower weak-side leg. To present from such a holster while standing, the leg must be raised and the pants pulled back to allow access to the gun. A somewhat easier draw can be performed in the sitting position.

Ankle holsters can provide excellent concealment—but only with pants having sufficiently loose legs. Gun retention can be a concern, especially with designs lacking safety straps: the gun could potentially fall out of the holster when you are running or jumping. Basically, their awkward draw—and the limited types of guns they can accommodate—makes ankle holsters suitable only for small backup guns of the type used primarily by undercover police officers.



*Ankle holster.*



*Armed citizen drawing from ankle holster, showing its inherent clumsiness.*

## SMALL-OF-THE-BACK HOLSTERS

Small-of-the-back (SOB) holsters position the gun on the belt in the middle of the back, making your gun invisible to anyone scrutinizing you from the front. To present the pistol, the firing hand must go underneath the covering clothing all the way around to the back to grip the gun. SOB holsters come in models affording both a palm-out and a palm-in draw; IWB-type models are also available.

SOB holsters can provide excellent concealment, particularly when smaller, thinner guns are used and the covering clothing hangs straight down, as with a sport coat or suit jacket. With practice, you can learn to draw quickly with such holsters.

However, SOB holsters may be easily spotted whenever you bend down and the covering clothing is pulled tightly across your back. Retention can also be a problem: the position of the holster makes it harder to counter—or even be aware of—an attempt by a criminal behind you to take away your gun. Furthermore, during presentation from an SOB holster, most people will cross their own body with the muzzle as they rotate the gun toward the target. An SOB holster also can be uncomfortable if you sit against a hard-backed chair or bench; and it can loudly thump against such a seat when you sit, potentially alerting criminals within earshot. Finally, if you fall rearward onto the holster, serious back injury could result.



*Small-of-the-back holster.*

## WALLET HOLSTERS

Some manufacturers have made holsters designed to look like wallets with a space inside them for a small pistol, such as a two-shot derringer. A hole in the side of the wallet holster gives access to the gun's trigger, allowing it to be fired from within the holster.

These devices were intended to provide a measure of protection if a robber demanded your wallet. Although used by some police officers as a way to carry an undercover firearm, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (BATFE) has ruled that wallet holsters cannot be legally carried by civilians, so they should be avoided.

## POCKET HOLSTERS

Small guns are often carried in a pants or jacket pocket. Pocket carry, though common, can be problematical; the gun may rotate to an awkward position, and its outline often



*Pocket holster and gun outside pocket (above) and hidden inside pocket.*

prints through the fabric. These problems can be remedied with pocket holsters, flattened holsters that fill the pocket, camouflaging the gun's profile while keeping it in a butt-upward position that facilitates presentation. In use, a well-made pocket holster simply seems to be a thick wallet in your pocket.

Pocket holsters are inexpensive, highly concealable, and comfortable, and provide good retention and reasonably good access. Their chief benefit is that they allow a person to completely conceal a small gun with virtually any type of clothing or in just about any situation. Pocket holsters may be difficult to draw from when in a seated position, however.

## HOLSTER VESTS/HOLSTER JACKETS

Some specialized articles of clothing—typically vests or jackets—feature pockets or compartments containing integral holsters capable of concealing guns of almost any size. In many cases the gun is retained by a Velcro® safety strap, and the holster itself may be removed or exchanged for one of a different size.



*Holster jacket, closed (left) and open to show handgun in pocket.*



Holster vests and jackets afford a reasonable level of concealment, access and comfort. However, you must be careful not to carelessly put the jacket aside or hang it up; for your safety and that of all those around you, it must remain under your direct control at all times. Additionally, in many of the models, the gun is carried in a shoulder-holster position on the weak side of the body. This confers upon these garments all the safety and retention problems that accompany shoulder holsters.

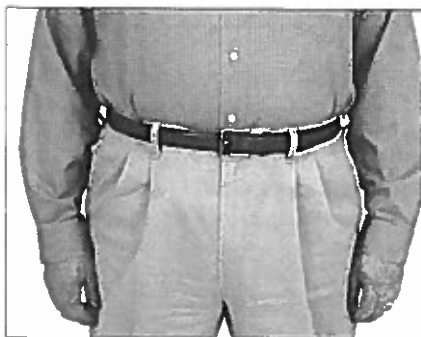
## UNDERWEAR HOLSTERS

Recent years have seen several companies market holsters that essentially fit around your waist over your underwear, with a small pouch in front for a pistol. Concealment can be astonishing with these devices.

While concealment and retention are excellent, these holsters can be difficult to draw from quickly. Like ankle holsters, underwear holsters should be reserved for deep-cover situations or for emergency back-up pistols.

## BELLY BANDS

A simple way of carrying a concealed gun is known generically as a belly band, a wide piece of elasticized fabric that encircles the waist. Fastening is usually by way of a Velcro®



*Underwear holster outside pants with gun (left) and inside the pants, demonstrating concealment.*

closure. The gun—usually a small, flat semiautomatic pistol—is simply tucked into the band, which is then covered with a shirt. Some belly bands have a small integral holster to more reliably position the gun.

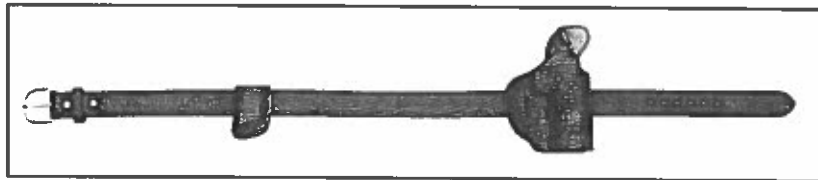
Belly bands can give very good concealment and retention, but access to the gun can be slow, as the shirt and other covering clothing must first be unfastened and swept aside. Additionally, some people find it uncomfortable to have an elastic band constantly pushing a gun against their body. Belly bands, like ankle holsters and underwear holsters, are much better than nothing at all, but should generally be relegated to a back-up gun or situations requiring extreme concealment.



*Belly band with handgun (top), and concealed under sweater.*

## HOLSTER ACCESSORIES

For a holster to do its job properly—to retain the gun, remain in a consistent position on the trousers and freely release the gun when it is drawn—a gun belt is usually recommended. Thin, narrow leather dress belts just aren't up to the task of stabilizing a pound or two of metal on the hip. A thick leather gun belt resists twisting or sagging, and makes wearing a holster more comfortable.



*A complete concealment rig: holster, magazine pouch and gun belt.*

For proper function, the belt width must exactly match the width of the slots or loops on the holster. If the belt is too large, the holster won't go on; too small, and the holster will move around on the waist, and will tend to follow the gun when it is withdrawn. A proper width gun belt provides consistent gun positioning and a crisp gun release.

Another worthwhile accessory is a magazine or speedloader pouch. Not only will this device provide you with additional ammunition; putting it on the side opposite a hip or shoulder holster may help to balance the pull of a heavy gun. Again, be sure to select a pouch having slots or loops of the exact same width as your gun belt.

## HOLSTER PURSES, BRIEFCASES, AND FANNY PACKS

Holsters are simply not appropriate for everybody or for every situation. In business environments, women are often expected to wear a dress; a hip or shoulder holster cannot be used with such a garment. Even when women wear slacks, the waistband often is not stiff enough to support even a small paddle holster.

Moreover, at times men and women both may dress in ways that make holster carry difficult or impossible. For example, it is hard to hide a holster when you are dressed in shorts and a T-shirt, and you're going for your morning run. For such situations, alternative types of firearm concealment devices must be used.

## HOLSTER PURSES AND BRIEFCASES

Holster purses are firearm concealment devices that outwardly appear to be conventional handbags, but which have a pocket or compartment dedicated to concealed carry. Frequently the gun is carried in an internal holster inside the gun compartment: this

ensures a proper grip position whenever you go to grip the gun. No other objects should be carried in the gun compartment.



*A few of the many types and styles of holster purses. Item at top left is leather backpack.*

Access to the gun compartment may take many forms. One of the more popular types features a hidden, Velcro®-closed slit in the end of the bag, whose sides can be separated by inserting the firing hand fingertips between them. This type of bag is typically hung from a strap on the weak side shoulder; the opening giving access to the gun compartment is thus within easy reach of the firing hand.

Other holster purse designs resemble handbags having top flap closures. With these purses, access to the gun is gained through the top of the bag, after the flap has been opened.

Although this discussion of holster purses naturally focuses on women, many manufacturers also accommodate men whose dress or business environment makes holster carry impossible. Most popular are soft-sided attache cases that hang from the support side shoulder. Just as with the holster purses of the same design, a Velcro®, snap or zipper closure on the end of the bag gives access to the dedicated gun compartment. Generally, these devices not only provide good gun concealment; they also are well-designed for use in the office as well. Since the mode of carry and presentation is the same for both types of devices, it will henceforth be understood that the term “holster purse” also applies to gun concealment briefcases and attache cases.



*A ballistic nylon briefcase, which can carry papers as well as a concealed handgun.*

Businessmen can also take advantage of other gun concealment devices, such as day planners and briefcases having separate gun compartments. The access afforded by such devices depends upon the design.

Concealment and comfort are usually quite good with holster purses—as long as they are worn with the appropriate clothing. Carrying an expensive-looking leather bag when you are going horseback riding may draw unwanted attention to your holster purse. Access with these devices varies, depending upon the design; shoulder-strap models probably offer the fastest presentation. Also, for proper access, you must always carry the bag in the proper manner.

The main concern with these firearm concealment devices is retention. In the street, you can have both your valuables and your gun taken by a purse-snatcher. And in a cafe, an



*All the women here are carrying holster purses of different types with handguns concealed inside. A properly selected purse is indistinguishable from a regular purse. The purses are carried on the weak-side shoulder with a hand on the strap.*



office or other relaxed setting, you may let down your guard and hang the purse over the back of your chair, where it can be easily grabbed. Not only does this carelessness invite theft, but your gun does you little good if it's in a purse 30 feet away. Nonetheless, a properly-designed and well-crafted holster purse is unquestionably the best alternative for anyone unable to wear a holster in any formal environment.

## FANNY PACKS

A fanny pack provides the same type of holsterless firearm concealment as does a holster purse—but in a different environment or set of circumstances.

Fanny packs were originally designed to be worn by day hikers over the small of the back—hence the name. They were intended to carry a few small items—perhaps a compass, some first-aid cream, and maybe even a sandwich—for a short outing. Today, they are commonly worn by runners, bicyclists and others whose clothes offer no pockets to carry a wallet and car keys, and they are just as commonly worn to the front or the side as in the back. Fanny packs are also often seen on casually-dressed non-athletes and tourists.



*Fanny pack.*

Like holster purses, fanny packs made for concealed carry feature a separate gun compartment sealed by a snap, zipper or Velcro® closure. The fanny pack is worn approximately in front of the belt buckle. To access the gun, the flap to the compartment is pulled open and the firing hand inserted. Some designs simply offer an empty compartment, while others have Velcro® straps to secure the gun in a consistent position for a faster, easier grip.



*A fanny pack can be used to conceal a handgun when an armed citizen is engaged in outdoor activities.*

The better gun concealment fanny packs look and function just like the models worn by runners, hikers and so forth. Avoid fanny packs with gun company logos; you may want to show your support for your favorite gun-maker, but knowledgeable criminals may pick up on the logo and decide that you've got a gun, and they want it.

As long as your gun fanny pack does not clash with your clothing, it should provide good concealment. Comfort with these devices is also usually quite good, as is access. In fact, fanny packs have an edge over many holsters in that they are relatively convenient to draw from when you're seated in your car. The level of retention a fanny pack provides depends upon the way it is worn and the care the user exercises with it. As with a holster purse, an unbuckled fanny pack hung over a chair or left lying on the ground is an open invitation to a thief. In most instances, however, you should be able to keep your fanny pack around your waist for the entire time you are out.

# CHAPTER 11

## Principles of Concealed Carry

Selecting a suitable carry holster should be only a part of your overall firearm concealment strategy. Your carry holster must be integrated with the proper clothing, and you must constantly be aware of the body positions, actions and activities that promote or hinder gun concealment. Consequently, there are a number of basic principles, techniques and tips to help you better conceal your gun.

### SELECTING OR MODIFYING A CONCEALED CARRY GUN

There are two objectives when selecting or modifying a gun for concealed carry. First, the gun must be easily concealed. Second, and just as important, the gun design should facilitate a smooth draw from under the clothing.

For maximum concealment, select the smallest gun possible in the caliber you've chosen for your carry firearm. However, some gun dimensions are more critical than others. Gun width is the most important parameter: the narrower the gun, the less it will protrude from your hip, the small of your back, or wherever you carry your gun. Thus, semi-automatic pistols are generally more concealable than revolvers. If you do choose a revolver, you may want to opt for a five-shot model over a six-shot gun; a five-shot cylinder is smaller in diameter, and thus is more concealable.

Gun butt dimensions are next in importance to gun width. The gun butt is often positioned by the holster to stick out from the body, so it is the part of the gun that most likely will produce a pronounced bulge in the clothing. The longer, wider and bulkier the butt, the bigger the bulge it will produce. Thus, for concealment purposes, guns with smaller butts (such as round-butt revolvers) are best. Oversize target stocks should be replaced with standard stocks; even better are special minimum-size stocks made specifically for concealment. The best of such models have minimum lateral bulk but are proportioned to fill the hand for a solid grip on the gun.



*All of these handguns can be concealed with the proper concealment device, though some models are more easily concealed than others.*



*A narrow gun butt can stay closer to the body and is thus more concealable.*

Concealment pistol stocks should be made of relatively hard, smooth materials, such as wood or hard plastic. Soft rubber grips, although able to absorb some of the recoil of powerful defensive firearms, tend to stick to the covering clothing. This can both complicate the draw, as well as cause the clothing to fold or bunch unnaturally, revealing the gun. Many wood or plastic grips are sharply checkered; to prevent this checkering from catching on the clothing or abrading the lining, the checkered diamonds should be dulled slightly by flattening their tips.

Although gun length is not as critical for concealment as gun width or gun butt size, it is still important. Clearly, a pistol with a 6" or 8" barrel is going to be harder to conceal than the same gun with a barrel measuring only 2" or so. The importance of barrel length depends upon the manner in which the gun is carried. When the gun is positioned so that its

barrel runs along the long axis of the body (as with a hip holster), a longer barrel is less of a hindrance to concealment than when it is carried in other ways. When carried in a horizontal shoulder holster, for example, even an increase in barrel length from 2" to 3" can seriously affect concealability. Even in a hip holster, a long barrel can be a liability, as it may hit the bottom of a chair, car seat, etc. when you sit. Furthermore, the longer the gun, the longer it will protrude below the belt line. This, in turn, makes it difficult to use short coats or jackets, and limits the range of movement that is possible without revealing the gun below the hem of the covering clothing. Additionally, the longer the barrel of the gun, the higher the gun must be raised to fully clear the holster. This can create a problem for short-waisted people, or those with limited shoulder flexibility.



*A revolver with a dehorned hammer spur (top) compared with a standard hammer.*



*A short jacket can ride up and expose a hip holster.*

With some guns, dehorning is desirable to enhance concealability. Dehorning is the process of removing all sharp edges and corners from the gun so that it will not tear or abrade the clothing lining as it is carried, or catch on the lining as it is drawn. Dehorning, which is usually performed by a gunsmith, also can make fast gun handling easier on the hands. Certain guns can be dehorned even further, by removing the spur from an external hammer or by replacing a spurred hammer with a spurless hammer. Some short-barreled revolvers incorporate a hammer shroud, which not only facilitates a snag-free draw, but also allows the gun to be fired repeatedly in the pocket, if necessary, without danger of the fabric being caught between the gun's hammer and frame.

## SELECTING CONCEALMENT CLOTHING

The proper clothing is an integral part of the total firearm concealment system. Clothing for concealed carry should both conceal the handgun and facilitate the draw. There are certain basic principles to follow when selecting concealment clothing:

**Wear loose clothing.** Loose clothing prevents telltale gun bulges that can signify a gun to an observer. Loose clothing may also make it easier for you to access and draw your gun. However, clothing that is excessively loose can draw attention, and can additionally gather in folds that can actually impede the draw.

Also, if you carry your gun under a jacket, make sure the jacket can be comfortably buttoned or zipped up to keep it from opening on a windy day.

**Wear heavy clothing.** Where possible and appropriate, a coat or jacket of heavy fabric is preferred over one of light fabric. Light fabric will too easily conform to a protruding holster or gun butt, often revealing the gun's outline. A lightweight fabric will also often reveal the straps of a shoulder holster. Heavy, stiff fabric, such as corduroy or tweed, will tend to hang in a way that conceals any irregular shape beneath it, such as a gun. Heavy fabric also tends to be easier to sweep aside to access the firearm.



*A heavy, loose garment such as this photographer's vest provides good concealment for a handgun, as well as excellent access.*



*The outline of this handgun concealed in the pocket easily prints through the light fabric of the trousers.*

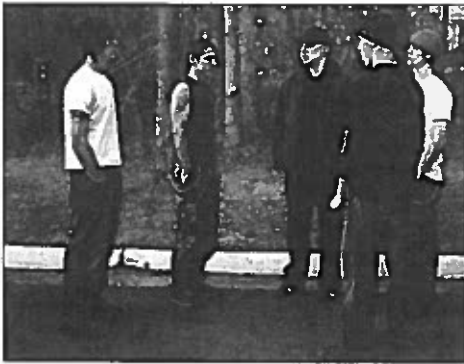
**Avoid very light-colored clothing.** Bulges in clothing caused by a concealed firearm create hollows and shadows. These can be more evident when the clothing is light-colored.

**Don't wear clothing with regular patterns.** Stripes, geometric patterns, plaids and so forth create a visual reference that easily reveals any irregularities in the way the clothing drapes the body. Solid-colored fabric, or fabric with a random pattern, better hides gun or holster bulges.

**Wear clothing that is appropriate.** The clothing you wear when carrying a concealed gun must also blend in with the style and type of clothing appropriate to the weather and the circumstances. For example, a lightweight sport coat worn over a hip holster may fit in an office or on a city street,

but would be totally inappropriate on a beach or a jogging trail. For that matter, any type jacket at all might be out of place on a sweltering summer day. If you're wearing a windbreaker while everyone else is wearing just a T-shirt, you'll certainly attract the attention of any reasonably observant criminal.

Additionally, with certain items of clothing it may be desirable to reinforce the lining in the area that covers the holstered gun. Such a stiffener can prevent the gun from abrading the lining, and also can make it easier for the strong hand to sweep the clothing away to access the gun.



*When everyone else is wearing short sleeves on a hot day, a jacket worn to cover a handgun can make you conspicuous.*

## WEARING A CONCEALMENT HOLSTER

While having a top quality holster is certainly essential for proper gun carry, you must also know how to wear that holster to allow maximum concealment, access and retention.

**Hip holsters.** Avoid placing a hip holster too far to the front or the rear. For best concealment under a jacket or loose open shirt, the holster should generally be no further forward than the point of the hip. The further rearward it is, the less likely the gun can be spotted should the jacket open due to a gust of wind or normal activity. On the other hand, a holster that is located too far back is more difficult to draw from, makes retention more difficult, and usually creates a highly visible bulge.

Many people using hip holsters with a forward or FBI rake find that a good balance



*Proper placement of a hip holster, with handgun butt fairly high and holster roughly aligned with the trouser seam.*

among concealment, access and retention is achieved when the holster is placed so that the gun butt is under the elbow joint. With the holster in this position, the gun can be clamped tightly between the elbow and the side of the body to thwart any attempt at removal by an assailant.

When you've got to pick up an object while you're wearing a hip holster, bend at the knees rather than at the waist. Bending at the waist will make the butt of the gun visibly protrude to the rear under the clothing; the bulge is a dead giveaway to any reasonably observant person.

Be careful when sitting down on a chair, especially one with a hard back; the gun or holster might audibly knock against it.



*Bending improperly to pick up an object (above) can cause a gun in a hip holster to protrude. A hip holster can also place the gun butt in a position to knock loudly against a wood or metal chair back when sitting.*



**Shoulder holsters.** There are many shoulder holster designs, and thus many variations in the way these holsters can be worn.

Virtually all shoulder holster designs utilize some sort of suspension harness. Proper harness adjustment is extremely important to ensure good concealment, easy presentation and comfort. Make sure the harness fits properly not only when you're just standing with your arms at your sides, but also when you're reaching, turning, bending and so forth. Lean to the front and note how far forward the holster hangs; it may be visible if the jacket billows away from the body. Also, be sure the straps of the harness don't twist or turn; twisted straps will clearly show through most clothing.

Be careful not to put the gun too far forward on the weak side; although this may make it easier to draw from the holster, it also makes the gun easier to spot, particularly if the coat opens up. Conversely, putting the gun too far rearward will cause a bulge in the back of the jacket.

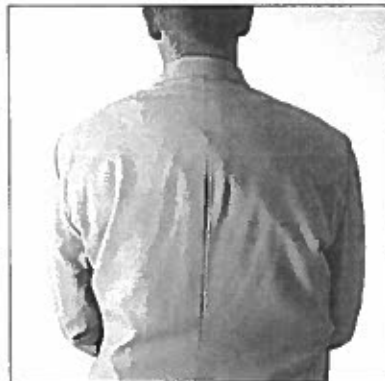


*This shoulder holster puts the handgun too far forward for proper concealment.*

**Crossdraw holsters.** Some of the comments made in relation to wearing shoulder holsters apply to crossdraw holsters as well. Avoid wearing a crossdraw holster too far forward; not only will the gun be less well concealed, it can also be more easily grabbed by an assailant. Worn too far to the rear, however, the holster will create a visible bulge to the side, and will also be hard to draw from.

**Holster Belts.** As mentioned in Chapter 9, an important piece of clothing for those wearing a hip, crossdraw or small-of-the-back holster is a gun belt. The belt's width should match exactly the slots or loops in the holster. Additionally, the type of gun belt you wear should match the style and type of clothing you are wearing. Belts for both formal and casual dress are available.

**Check Yourself In the Mirror.** Your best tool for evaluating the efficacy of your concealed



*A twisted shoulder holster harness (above) can easily print through the fabric of a jacket.*

*Crossdraw holsters may place the gun too far forward for proper concealment or gun retention.*



carry system is a full-length mirror. With your holster and gun in place, covered by the shirt, jacket or coat you're planning to wear over it, first examine yourself in the mirror with your arms at your sides. Use light coming from an angle rather than hitting you straight on; oblique light shows irregularities better. Turn 90 degrees to the left and right; look for telltale bulges, lines, creases and so forth. When your holster side faces the mirror, be especially aware of any bulge resulting from a protruding gun butt. Also make sure that the gun or holster does not peek out from under the covering clothing.

Next, try moving around as you watch yourself in the mirror. Bend, stoop, reach forward, reach upward, lean backwards and so forth. In some positions, you likely will observe bulges from the gun or holster; make a mental note to avoid these positions when out in public. In some cases the jacket or coat may ride up and reveal part of the gun or holster underneath; this is especially common when the jacket barely covers the gun or holster to begin with, and you reach above your head (as when you're in a supermarket and reaching for a product on a high shelf).

Observe how far your jacket can be open before your gun and holster are visible. This will tell you how careful you must be in situations in which your jacket may fly open unexpectedly, such as when you're in a strong breeze or when you're running.

When you're wearing a heavy gun on a hip holster, look to see that it doesn't pull your pants down on one side. A heavy pistol in a shoulder holster can likewise droop, making the harness hang improperly. Counterbalancing the gun with a weight on the opposite side, such as a magazine or speedloader, can help counteract these tendencies.

**Holster Purses and Fanny Packs.** When you carry a gun in a holster purse or fanny pack, special concealment techniques are usually not necessary; adequate concealment is normally provided by the purse or pack itself. However, you should still observe some common-sense suggestions to maximize access and retention.

Always wear the holster purse or fanny pack in the same manner. In the event of a sudden threat to your life, your draw must be an immediate and instinctive reflex. That reflex is possible only if the purse or pack is carried in the exact same way all the time, both during practice and on the street. If you wear a holster purse that hangs from your support side shoulder, make it a habit to always carry the purse that way. Don't occasionally switch it to the shooting-side shoulder, or carry it by its handles. Similarly, don't move your fanny pack around on your waist so that it's in front one time, then to the side or rear the next.



*Checking yourself in a mirror in different positions can help you determine how concealable your carry rig is.*



*A too-heavy handgun, or inadequate holster belt, can allow the pants to droop on one side.*





*A fanny pack looks out of place when worn with a business suit.*

Make sure your holster purse or fanny pack matches or complements your clothing. Different occasions demand different styles of dress, and your holster purse or fanny pack should match that style just as your shoes, hat or any other accessory. Carrying an expensive-looking leather handbag when you're in jogging clothes will draw unwanted attention, and thus will defeat the purpose of concealment.

Use the utmost care and control when carrying a holster purse or fanny pack. Avoid dropping the purse or pack on the ground, swinging it so that it bangs against something hard, or carrying it loosely or carelessly.

There are at least three reasons why you must exercise extreme care and control over your holster purse or fanny pack while you are wearing it. First, it contains more than just a wallet, a checkbook, or some cosmetics; it holds a loaded gun that you may need to save your

life. Dropping it on hard concrete could disable the gun within or, in extremely rare cases, cause it to discharge.

Second, the more careful you are when carrying your purse or pack, the harder it will be for a mugger or other assailant to take it from you—and with it, your gun. Purse-snatchers have been known to cut the strap of a handbag with a razor to facilitate its theft, or to simply yank the bag off the shoulder. A holster purse that is tightly clenched between the arm and the body is harder for a criminal to take, and actually may deter an assault.

Third, it is extremely difficult to draw quickly and smoothly from a free-swinging holster purse, or a fanny pack that is loosely carried around the waist. Not only will such a purse or pack be inconsistently located, making a quick, reflexive draw impossible, but a loosely-held purse or a loosely-mounted fanny pack will also prevent clean release of the gun when it is drawn.



*Carrying a holster purse carelessly makes it difficult to access the gun, and easy for a mugger to grab it.*

## CHAPTER 12

# Presenting the Pistol From Concealment

Presenting the gun safely, smoothly and quickly from concealment is the single most important new shooting skill introduced in the NRA Basic Personal Protection Outside the Home Course. All the other shooting skills you have learned in other NRA courses, such as the Basic Pistol and Basic Personal Protection in the Home Courses, are integrated with that new skill.

Proper presentation technique is critical to responsible gun carry, as poor technique reduces the effectiveness of your gun in defending your life. Your first concern when carrying a concealed gun is safety. Safe technique must be ingrained from the very first practice session.

### PISTOL PRESENTATION STEPS

To foster safety and to facilitate learning, the proper technique of pistol presentation is broken down into sequential steps. These steps are the same whether you are presenting a gun from a holster, a holster purse, or a fanny pack.

Initially in the learning phase, each step should be performed separately, in a deliberate manner, to ensure that the important aspects of the step are learned. For safety, your initial practice should be performed with an empty gun. As your skill grows, each step will naturally blend into the next, until you finally achieve presentation with a single smooth movement. This final stage takes place only after many hundreds or thousands of draws; it cannot be rushed (and in the interests of safety, must not be rushed). Always strive to execute each step properly and efficiently; this will produce smoothness.

There are seven steps to pistol presentation.

- ACCESS** the gun in the holster, holster purse or fanny pack
- GRIP** the butt of the gun with the shooting hand
- PULL** the gun from the holster, holster purse or fanny pack
- ROTATE** the muzzle of the gun toward the target
- JOIN** the support hand with the shooting hand for a two-hand grip
- EXTEND** the gun toward the target
- FIRE** the gun if necessary



*Drawing from concealment.*

These steps may be modified depending upon the type of concealment device used: holster, holster purse or fanny pack. Each device will be covered in this chapter.

It is important to remember that firing the gun after it is presented should not be done automatically, but only if a deadly threat still exists. Thus, during the phases of the draw, and before firing a shot, you must continually assess the target to determine if you are still presented with a threat that justifies the use of force.

**ACCESS the Gun.** In this initial phase, the shooting hand gains access to the gun under the clothing or inside the holster purse or fanny pack. This involves clearing any clothing, purse material, etc. out of the way of the hand that will be gripping the gun.

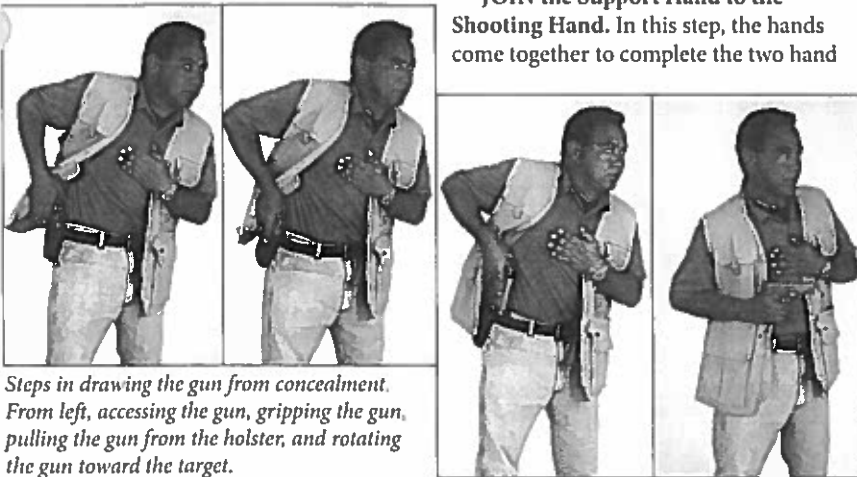
**GRIP the Gun.** Whatever type of gun concealment device you use, the purpose of this step is the same: to acquire a solid, aligned grip on the gun that does not have to be significantly readjusted for the shooting position that will be used. In this step, the trigger finger is straight alongside the frame of the gun, outside the trigger guard.

**PULL the Gun from the Holster, Holster Purse or Fanny Pack.** During this movement your trigger finger remains straight alongside the frame. Also, in this step the support hand is brought to the chest. During the PULL phase you must keep the muzzle of the gun pointed in a safe direction at all times.

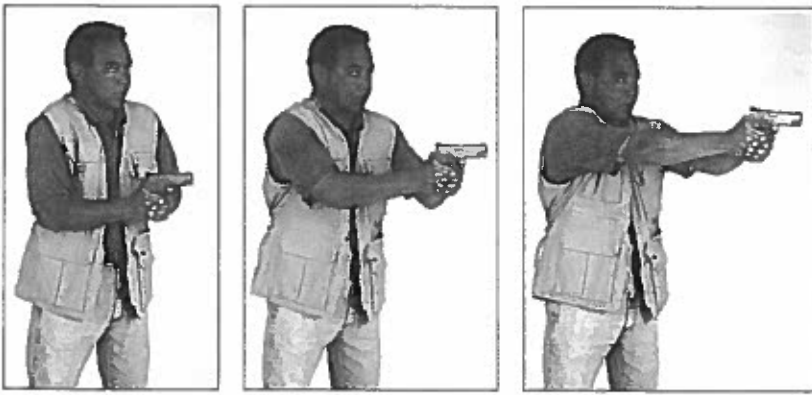
**ROTATE the Gun Toward the Target.** Your gun is turned toward the general direction of the target without sweeping yourself or others with the muzzle. During the movement the support hand is kept close to the body so that it is not crossed by the muzzle. The rotated gun is also kept close to the body. Also, the safety, if any, is deactivated, and the trigger finger can be placed inside the trigger guard once the gun is pointed at the target (except when assuming the kneeling, prone and back positions, as noted in Chapter 19: Presentation and Fire from Different Positions).

If your attacker is at extremely close range, you may fire the gun as soon as it is rotated toward him, if necessary. For this reason, during the ROTATE phase of presentation, you should assess the target to determine if you continue to be faced with a deadly threat.

**JOIN the Support Hand to the Shooting Hand.** In this step, the hands come together to complete the two hand



Steps in drawing the gun from concealment. From left, accessing the gun, gripping the gun, pulling the gun from the holster, and rotating the gun toward the target.



*Steps in drawing the gun from concealment. From left to right, joining the hands to form a two-hand grip, extending the handgun toward the target, and firing the handgun if necessary.*

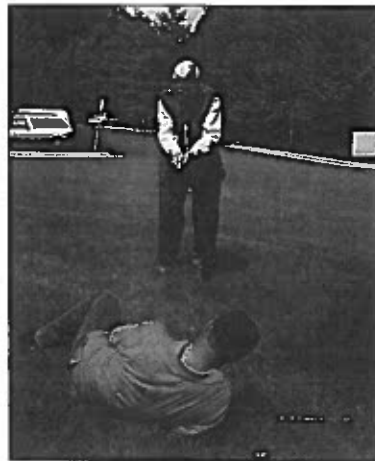
grip. Care must be taken not to bring the support hand in front of the muzzle. The gun is raised somewhat during this movement, so that you effectively assume a two-handed retention ready position; if necessary, as with an arm's-length assailant, the gun can be fired in this position. The JOIN step is omitted in one-handed presentation techniques, such as one-handed point shooting and instinctive shooting. In these techniques, the support hand is normally kept close to the body, in front of the chest (unless it is used to ward off an attack, grip a flashlight, etc.).

During this phase of presentation, you should assess the target to determine if you continue to be faced with a deadly threat.

**EXTEND the Gun Toward the Target.** During this step, the gun is extended fully toward the attacker. If an aimed firing technique is to be used, you will also pick up the sights as the gun is extended forward. With a one-handed point shooting technique, the gun will be extended forward below the level of the eyes; with instinctive shooting, this step is deleted altogether, as the gun is fired from a position close to the body.

During this phase of presentation, you should assess the target to determine if you continue to be faced with a deadly threat. If there is insufficient time, or insufficient distance between you and your attacker, for the gun to be fully extended, it may be fired with the arms partially extended, if necessary.

**FIRE the Gun, If Necessary.** The gun can be fired as soon as the gun is aligned with the target, if no other option is available. Alignment can be determined using the gun's sights, as in an aimed fire technique, or simply by feel, as with instinctive shooting.



*Assessing the threat before firing. If an attacker ceases to present a deadly threat, you must not fire.*

As has been emphasized before, you must continually assess the threat confronting you. This assessment continues even during the process of aligning the sights and preparing to pull the trigger. If your attacker turns and flees, surrenders or otherwise ceases to present a deadly threat, you must not fire.

In addition to these steps, after responding to a threat you should additionally lower the gun below eye level and scan the surrounding area, then, if the threat is completely gone, reholster it.

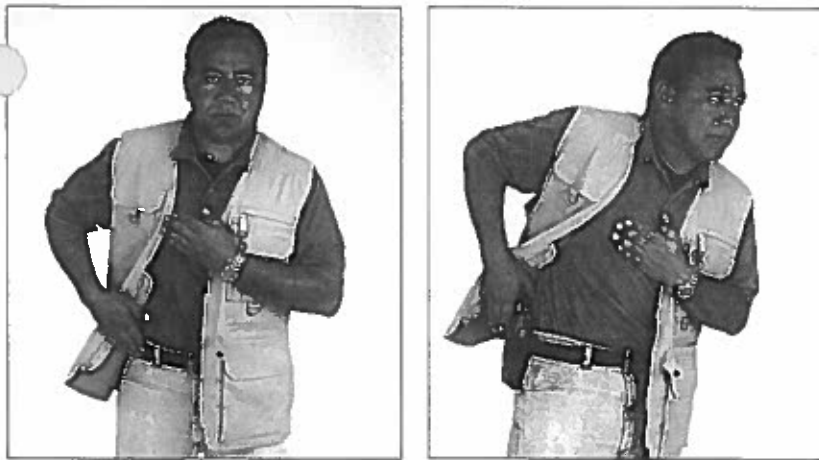
Although the presentation process is depicted here using a hip holster, the steps are similar for presenting guns from holster purses, fanny packs and the like.

## PRESENTATION FROM A HOLSTER

The specific details of the presentation steps for all types of holstered guns are very similar. In the discussion below, emphasis will be given primarily to hip holsters, as they represent the safest, fastest, and most secure type of holster for most people. Additional comments will be made regarding other major holster types, where warranted, to point out variations in technique.

As was emphasized earlier, it is important during all the steps of presentation to continue to assess the threat confronting you. You are not justified in firing at an attacker who has ceased to be a threat.

**Access the Gun.** A holster is almost always concealed under a piece of clothing, such as a jacket, coat, or shirt. A hip, inside-the-pants, or crossdraw holster is usually carried under a jacket or coat, or sometimes a loose shirt, that is long enough to conceal the gun, while shoulder holsters can be carried under short jackets. In all these cases, the article of clothing is usually left open to afford access, or is at most minimally fastened to prevent opening by the wind.



*Accessing the gun. A bladed hand is used to sweep the covering clothing aside (left) to achieve good access to the handgun.*

Accessing your gun involves simply sweeping the covering clothing aside to create a space allowing your firing hand to acquire a grip on the gun butt. If your jacket, coat or other covering clothing is open in the front, you can usually gain access to the gun simply by holding your firing hand with fingers straight, in a knife-blade position, and inserting the fingertips in the slight gap between the clothing and the body. The further movement of the hand toward the gun tends to push or sweep the covering clothing aside.

Sometimes it is helpful to shift the weight away from the holster side of the body as the firing hand reaches toward the gun. This slight, quick movement tends to create a wider gap between the covering clothing and the body, facilitating the acquisition of your firearm. Avoid making this movement before starting the presentation sequence, or you will telegraph your intentions to your attacker. Having keys or some loose change in the holster-side pocket of a jacket used as covering clothing can also assist with access. The inertia of the extra weight in the pocket will create a larger gap when you shift your body to the side, and also will cause the jacket to more widely swing away from the body when your shooting hand pushes it aside to access the gun.

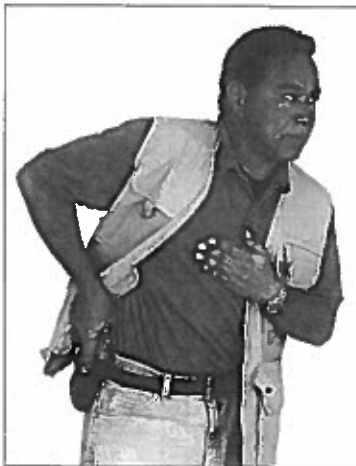
In some situations, your support hand must assist your shooting hand to access the gun. For example, if your jacket has been buttoned, the support hand unbuttons it while the shooting hand prepares to reach inside the clothing. Even when your covering clothing is unfastened and open, certain types of holsters (such as shoulder holsters) are more easily accessed when your support hand pulls the clothing aside. If your garment does not open in the front (such as a polo shirt) use your support hand to pull the garment clear of the gun. An example is a small-of-the back or inside-the-pants holster.

**Grip the Gun.** As much as is possible, the gun must be acquired with a normal shooting grip so that, when it is withdrawn from the holster, the hand, wrist and forearm are all in the proper alignment. With a proper grip, the gun, when raised to eye level, will usually have its sights in rough defensive alignment, facilitating a rapid first shot. Correcting a poor grip takes precious time during presentation; and such a grip, uncorrected, will prevent accurate shooting.

With holsters having a safety strap securing the gun, the initial part of the GRIP step is to undo the strap. Most high-quality concealment holsters having safety snaps are designed so that the strap can be disengaged by a finger or thumb during the act of acquiring a normal grip on the gun butt.

When the gun is initially gripped, the trigger finger is located alongside the frame, outside the trigger guard, and the safety lever (if present) remains on. Note that most carry holsters are designed to prevent the trigger finger from contacting the trigger until the gun is drawn.

Learning to quickly acquire the proper grip each and every time requires both considerable practice and a consistent positioning of the gun and holster on the body. Once you have mastered the ACCESS and GRIP steps separately, combine



*Gripping the handgun.*



With some holsters, the GRIP step may also involve releasing a safety strap or thumb snap.

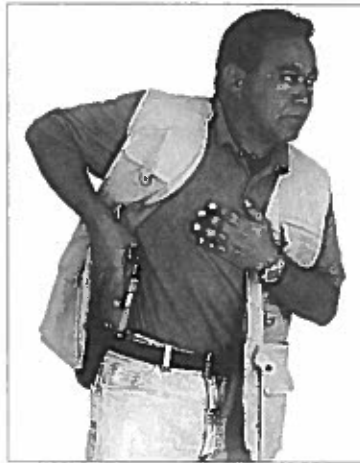
them into one smooth, precise movement. Strive to acquire the gun with the proper grip on the first try, without having to make minor readjustments. Eventually, with much practice, you will be able to feel the gun's location on the body so that you unerringly acquire a proper grip, regardless of your own body position.

**Pull the Gun from the Holster.** Most holsters require the gun to be withdrawn in a specific way. Usually, the gun is pulled straight out of the holster; with a few designs, such as spring-clip shoulder holsters, the gun is pulled out of the side or front of the holster against spring tension. Certain holsters may even

bind or prevent gun withdrawal if the gun is not pulled out of the holster in a particular way. Make sure you know how to pull your gun smoothly from your carry holster; try withdrawing the gun at different angles to see if the holster grabs or binds.

With hip, crossdraw, inside-the pants and small-of-the-back holsters, as well as some shoulder holsters, the gun is pointing roughly at the ground when it is first withdrawn. When the gun is pulled from certain shoulder holsters, most notably horizontal and upside-down shoulder holsters, the gun is initially pointed directly behind you. Learn to direct the muzzle downward, toward the ground, after you pull your gun from either of these holsters.

During the PULL step, the trigger finger remains outside the trigger guard, and the safety remains on. Furthermore, the support hand is brought to the chest, keeping it out of the way of the muzzle during the ROTATE step in the process.

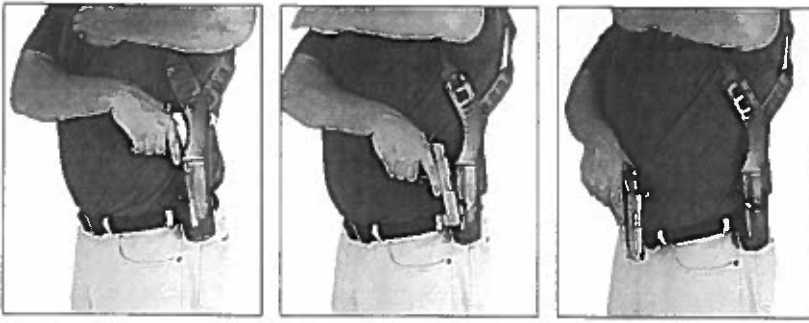


*Pulling the handgun from the holster.*

**Rotate the Gun Toward the Target.** In this step, the gun is brought into a position with the muzzle facing roughly toward the target. The support hand is still held close to the body at the chest, the trigger finger remains outside the trigger guard, and the safety (if present) is taken off when the gun is fully rotated and pointing toward the target.

With each type of holster, the gun's muzzle takes a different path toward the target during the ROTATE phase, usually dictated by safety concerns. The easiest and safest path is achieved with a typical shooting-side hip holster. The gun is withdrawn with the muzzle pointing down alongside the leg, and is simply rotated forward until it is aligned with the target; the muzzle points at the ground during almost all of the rotation movement.

Great care must be taken when rotating a gun drawn from a crossdraw, shoulder or small-of-the back holster. With a crossdraw or shoulder holster, there is a tendency to



*When drawing from a shoulder holster, the muzzle of the handgun must immediately be turned downward.*

sweep the gun across the body with the muzzle held more or less horizontal. On the other hand, a gun withdrawn from a small-of-the-back holster is often rotated toward the target with the muzzle crossing part of the body. Either rotation pattern is clearly unsafe. To rotate the gun toward the target safely, first point the gun toward the ground. Then turn the muzzle forward in a straight line. This will ensure that the muzzle is pointed in a safe direction during the rotation movement, just as with a hip holster.

Be aware, however, that this rotation pattern, though safe, feels awkward to many people. For this reason it is critical to keep the trigger finger out of the trigger guard and the safety on during the ROTATE phase. This technique should be ingrained and reinforced through diligent practice.



*Rotating the handgun toward the target.*

At the completion of the ROTATE step, the gun will be in a position from alongside the strong-side hip to slightly in front of the body, depending upon the type of holster the gun was drawn from. When presenting from a hip holster, the gun, at the end of rotation, will be held close to the body on the strong side, just above the hip. A gun drawn from a small-of-the-back holster, properly rotated forward, will also end up in this position.



*When drawing from a small-of-the-back holster, the gun's muzzle is kept pointing downward, clear of the body, until it can be rotated straight forward to the target.*





*During rotation from a shoulder holster, the muzzle remains pointed downward until it can be rotated directly forward toward the target.*

Rotation from either a crossdraw or shoulder holster will usually result in the gun held in the strong hand, slightly forward of the body toward the strong-hand side.

Once the firearm is pointed at the target, the safety may be disengaged and the trigger finger placed inside the trigger guard. If necessary to stop an arm's length assailant, the handgun may be fired at the completion of the ROTATE phase.

**Join the Support Hand to the Shooting Hand.** When a two-handed shooting position is used, the support hand must be joined to the shooting hand to complete the proper grip. To complete the JOIN step, simply take the support hand from its position in front of the chest, bring it to the shooting hand and assume a solid two-hand grip. This presentation step is not required when one-handed shooting techniques, such as the point shooting and instinctive shooting techniques, are used.

Be careful to keep the support hand from crossing the muzzle as it is brought to the shooting hand. Also, the support hand should move to the shooting hand, not vice versa.

Joining the support hand to the shooting hand not only completes the two hand grip; it also helps promote gun retention. With both hands on your gun, you will better be capable of preventing an assailant from wresting it from you.

**Extend the Gun Toward the Target.** During this step the gun is pushed forward toward the target to complete the desired firing position (Weaver, isosceles, etc.). At the same time, the sights are picked up as the gun comes into the field of view.

Note that the EXTEND step applies to not only two-handed, aimed-fire shooting positions; it is also performed with the one-handed point shooting technique.



*Joining the weak hand to the strong hand.*

**Extend the gun in a straight line.** Don't jerk the gun forward; extend it with a smooth, controlled movement. Also avoid using a scooping or a rising-and-falling motion: such a motion requires you to overcompensate to bring the gun into alignment. With a straight-line extension into an aimed-fire shooting position, your eyes can pick up the sights as the

gun goes forward, allowing you to make small corrections of gun position during the extension. When your gun is extended properly and your body is aligned with your Natural Aiming Area (NAA) in relation to the target, the sights of your gun will be in reasonably good alignment when your arms are fully forward.

**Fire the Gun, if Necessary.** The FIRE step is normally performed when you have assumed your final firing position and there is no other option available to stop the deadly threat. On those occasions when you are using an aimed fire or point shooting technique, the FIRE step follows the achievement of full extension toward the target. When you are using an instinctive shooting technique, you will fire after the gun is rotated up into alignment with the target.



*Extending the handgun toward the target.*

The degree of sight alignment and trigger control you employ will largely depend upon the range and the size of the target. With a full-size target at arm's length, you will likely use instinctive shooting and pull the trigger quickly. With a longer shot on a partially exposed target, on the other hand, you will more carefully align the sights and squeeze the trigger more deliberately.

Be careful in your training not to ingrain the habit of automatically firing at the completion of each presentation; that habit will prevent you from exercising the moment-to-moment judgement that you should use in deciding whether you need to discharge your gun. Your situation may change in an instant—for example, your attacker may turn to flee—and you need the last-second restraint that enables you to hold your fire when such situations present themselves. Often, firing your gun is not needed. Research by University of Florida criminologist Gary Kleck and others indicates that, in most cases, simply presenting a gun without firing a shot is sufficient to stop or deter a violent attack. Morally and legally, it is ALWAYS preferable to end an attack without firing a shot, if possible.



*Firing the handgun.*

Whatever presentation technique you practice, occasionally refrain from taking the final FIRE step to help develop a capacity for restraint. Also, you can structure your training to include shoot/no-shoot situations to simulate real-world decision-making.

**Lower, Scan and Reholster.** After you have deterred or stopped an attack by effectively presenting your gun, you must scan the area for additional threats. Remember that you are probably suffering from tunnel vision as a result of being involved in a violent, life-threatening confrontation; you will

focus on the immediate threat in front of you, to the exclusion of almost everything else. Visually scanning the area around you may alert you to other things you need to be aware of, such as additional assailants or an approaching police officer.

Scanning for additional threats when you're outside the home is different from scanning when you're inside the home. The proper technique for scanning the area when you are outside your home is presented in Chapter 8: If You Must Shoot.

Once you have ascertained that there is no further immediate danger to your front, sides or rear, you may do one of two things. If there is a possibility that the threat will return, or that you may face a threat from another direction or assailant, you should lower your firearm to a low ready position (gun pointing downward at a 45 degree angle) and maintain that position until you are either no longer in danger, or until you must raise the gun to a firing position to protect yourself. Even with the firearm in a low ready position, don't stop scanning for additional threats, and be prepared to seek cover if necessary.

Alternatively, once you establish that you face no further danger, you should reholster your gun. As was discussed in Chapter 8, you'll want to avoid meeting the responding police officers with a gun in your hand.

To reholster your gun, first take your trigger finger out of the trigger guard and place it alongside the frame. Return the safety, if any, to the "on" position. Release the gun with the support hand and rotate the gun muzzle downward toward the mouth of the holster. It is preferable to use a holster with a stiff, molded shape that stays open when the gun is withdrawn, as such a holster allows one-handed reholstering. However, if you must use your support hand to squeeze open the mouth of the holster for gun insertion, be sure not to cross that hand with the muzzle during the reholstering process. Also, be sure not to drag part of the shirt or jacket into the holster with the gun.



*It is important to be able to reholster without looking at the holster to prevent losing visual contact with a real or potential threat.*

Practice reholstering your empty firearm until you can reholster it by feel, without looking. If you become distracted by focusing on the process of putting your gun back in your holster, you may give a hidden

assailant the opportunity to attack you. Some molded leather and synthetic holsters retain their shape even when they are not filled by a gun; with such holsters it is often possible to reinsert the gun with the shooting hand only. Other holster types, such as shoulder holsters, usually require both hands.

If you must see what you are doing while you are reholstering, give the holster a quick glance and then immediately return focus to your surroundings; don't look at it for an extended time. It is better to observe what you are doing with a series of rapid glances than with a prolonged gaze.

## **PRESENTATION FROM A HOLSTER PURSE OR FANNY PACK**

The same sequence of steps used when presenting from a holster—ACCESS, GRIP, PULL, ROTATE, JOIN, EXTEND and FIRE—is used when presenting from a holster

purse or fanny pack. In fact, the technique for performing most of the steps is virtually identical, whatever type of gun concealment device is used.

There is only a minor difference in gun position between a front-mounted fanny pack and a holster purse hanging off the support-side shoulder. With both, the gun hand must reach across the body to access the gun, and the support hand is used to bring the purse across the body to the same location in which a fanny pack is carried, and then to help open the holster purse and facilitate access to the gun. Also, the body position and gun movement during presentation is very similar for the two types of devices. For these reasons, it is appropriate to present the technique for both devices together.

As was emphasized earlier, it is important during all the steps of presentation to continue to assess the threat confronting you. You are not justified in firing at an attacker who has ceased to be a threat.

**Access the Gun.** Holster purses usually have a separate gun compartment that is easily accessed through the forward-facing part of the purse—usually the side. Some holster purses give access to the gun through the top. In either case, access to the dedicated gun compartment is usually achieved by opening a Velcro® or snap closure. Some designs can be opened by the firing hand alone; others require support-hand assistance.

Practice sharply angling or “blading” the shooting hand side of your body away from the direction of the threat as you begin to access your gun. This accomplishes two objectives. First, as with shoulder holster and crossdraw holsters, you must reach across your body to acquire a grip on the gun—a move that can easily be blocked or interrupted by an arm’s-length assailant. Blading yourself away from an assailant makes this harder for him to do, and, in the case of a front-mounted fanny pack, actually increases the distance of the gun from him. Second, when you are turned away in this fashion, your gun will be pointing more in the direction of the target when it is withdrawn from the purse or pack.

To promote better access to your gun when wearing a shoulder-mounted holster purse, use your support hand to pull it across your body to a position close to the centerline of your torso. Combined with the blading movement away from the threat, this will have the effect of pointing the gun at the target. With the purse in this position, you can even fire the gun from inside it to stop an arm’s-length assailant.

**Grip the Gun.** The technique for achieving the proper grip inside a holster purse or fanny pack differs little from that used to achieve a grip on a gun in a holster. The gun must be acquired with a normal shooting grip so that, when it is withdrawn from the purse or pack, the hand, wrist and forearm are all in the proper alignment. With a proper grip, the gun, when raised to eye level, will usually have its sights in rough defensive alignment, facilitating a rapid first shot. Correcting a poor or improper grip takes precious time during presentation; and such a grip, uncorrected, will prevent accurate shooting.

With holster purses or fanny packs having a safety strap securing the gun, the initial part of the GRIP step is to undo the strap. Most high-quality concealment devices having safety snaps are designed so that the strap can be disengaged quickly.

When the gun is initially gripped, the trigger finger is located alongside the frame, outside the trigger guard, and the safety lever (if present) remains on.



*Accessing the handgun in a holster purse. The strong hand fingers are extended, and the weak hand stabilizes the purse and pulls it across the body. Finally, to assist in blading the body away from the threat, the strong-side foot slides rearward.*

Once you have mastered the ACCESS and GRIP steps separately, combine them into one smooth, precise movement. Strive to acquire the gun with the proper grip on the first try, without having to make minor readjustments. With practice, you will be able to feel the gun's location on the body so that you unerringly acquire a proper grip, regardless of your own body position.

**Pull the Gun from the Holster Purse or Fanny Pack.** During the PULL phase, the gun is withdrawn from the holster purse or fanny pack. Usually it is pulled out more or less horizontally.

With some purses or packs, the support hand must open the device, or help hold it open while the firing hand accesses the gun and acquires a grip. Often the support hand must also hold the device steady while the gun is being withdrawn; this is particularly true with holster purses hanging by a strap from the support-side shoulder. Additionally, with some holster purse designs, the support hand must pull the purse rearward while the shooting hand pulls the gun out of its compartment. With all these techniques, you must take care when withdrawing the gun from a purse or pack not to cross your support hand with the muzzle.

When the gun is pulled from many holster purses and fanny packs—particularly when you are unable to blade your body away from the threat—learn to direct the muzzle downward, toward the ground, immediately after it comes out of a purse or pack.

During the PULL step, the trigger finger remains outside the trigger guard, and the safety remains on.

**Rotate the Gun Toward the Target.** The ROTATE step is perhaps the most critical in terms of safety when you are presenting your gun from a holster purse or fanny pack. If your shooting side is sufficiently bladed away, your gun will be roughly aligned with the

target when you withdraw your gun from your purse or pack. The ROTATE step will then involve little more than raising the muzzle of the gun into alignment with the threat.

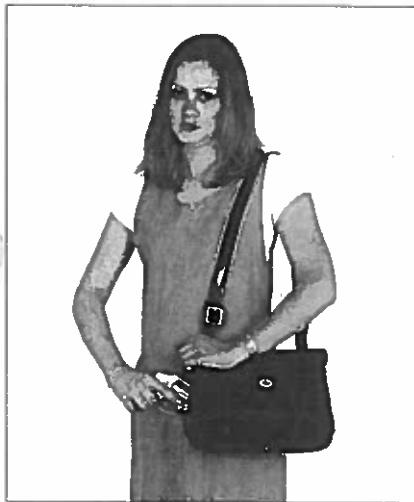
In the real world, however, under the stress of a violent confrontation, you may not always blade yourself away from the threat before you draw the gun. The attack may happen too suddenly, or your back may be against a wall and you can't easily turn your body away. Whatever the reason, in such a situation your gun will typically be pointing somewhat off to the side when you withdraw it from your holster purse or fanny pack. During your ROTATE step you must learn to direct the muzzle downward, keeping it in a safe direction.

To accomplish a safe rotation in this situation, first drop the muzzle so that the gun is pointing to the ground in front of your body. Then turn your wrist and arm so that the path of the muzzle traces a straight line forward, straight to the target.

Initially this may seem awkward, but with practice it will become natural and habitual. Moreover, it will help you develop an instinctive awareness of the position of the muzzle at all times. Remember to keep the safety on, and your trigger finger out of the trigger guard, until the gun is ROTATED toward the target.

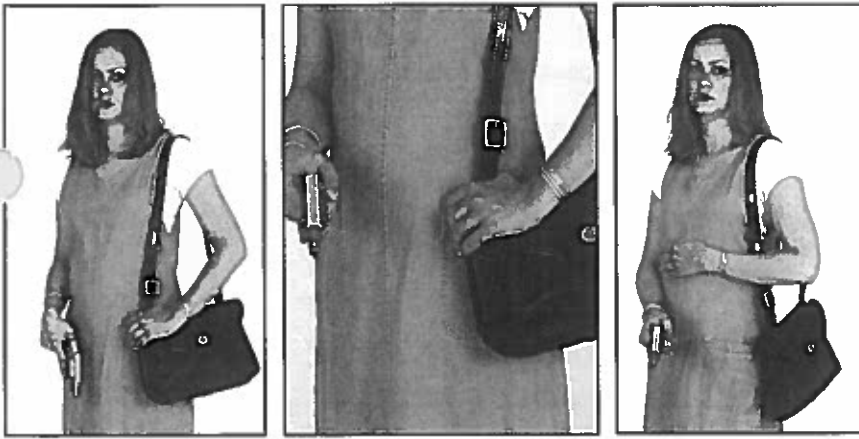


*With the holster purse or fanny pack pulled across the body, the shooting hand acquires a firm grip on the handgun inside.*



*Pulling the handgun from a holster purse. The support hand stabilizes the concealment device, and the handgun is rotated downward immediately after it is drawn.*





*When rotating the gun, the muzzle must be pointed toward the ground until it is aligned with the target.*

**Join the Support Hand to the Shooting Hand.** The JOIN step is performed in essentially the same manner whether you are presenting your gun from a holster, a handbag, or a fanny pack: the support hand moves to the shooting hand and completes the firing grip. Be careful to keep the support hand from crossing the muzzle as it joins the shooting hand.

Joining the support hand to the shooting hand not only completes the two hand grip; it also helps promote gun retention. With both hands on your gun, you will be more capable of preventing an assailant from wresting it from you.

**Extend the Gun Toward the Target.** In this step, the joined hands are thrust forward into a final shooting position. Note that the EXTEND step applies to not only two-handed, aimed-fire shooting positions; it is also performed with the one-handed point shooting technique.



*Joining the support hand to the shooting hand.*

**Extend the gun in a straight line.** Don't jerk the gun forward; extend it with a smooth, controlled movement. Also avoid using a scooping or a rising-and-falling motion: such a motion requires you to overcompensate to bring the gun into alignment. With a straight-line extension into an aimed-fire shooting position, your eyes can pick up the sights as the gun goes forward, allowing you to make small corrections of gun position during the extension. When your gun is extended properly and your body is aligned with your NAA (natural aiming area) in relation to the target, the sights of your gun will be in reasonably good alignment when your arms are fully forward.

**Fire the Gun if Necessary.** The FIRE step is normally performed when you have assumed your final firing position and there is no other option available to stop the deadly threat. On those occasions when you are

using an aimed fire or point shooting technique, the FIRE step follows the achievement of full extension toward the target. When you are using an instinctive shooting technique, you will fire after the gun is rotated up into alignment with the target.

The degree of sight alignment and trigger control you employ will largely depend upon the range and the size of the target. With a full-size target at arm's length, you will likely use instinctive shooting and pull the trigger quickly. With a longer shot on a partially exposed target, on the other hand, you will more deliberately align the sights and squeeze the trigger.

In your practice, occasionally refrain from taking the final FIRE step to help develop a capacity for restraint, and incorporate shoot/no-shoot situations to simulate real-world decision-making. You must be careful in your training not to ingrain the habit of automatically firing at the completion of each presentation; that habit will override the moment-to-moment judgement you should use in deciding whether you need to fire your gun. In the real world, your situation may change in an instant—for example, your attacker may suddenly turn to flee—and you may need the last-second restraint that enables you to hold your fire. Often, firing your gun is not needed. Research by criminologist Gary Kleck and others shows that simply presenting a gun without firing a shot is often sufficient to stop or deter an attack. Morally and legally, it is ALWAYS preferable to end an attack without firing a shot, if possible.



*Extending the gun toward the target.*



*Firing the handgun, if necessary.*

**Lower, Scan and Reholster.** After you have deterred or stopped an attack by effectively presenting your gun, you must scan the area for additional threats. Remember that you are probably suffering from tunnel vision as a result of being involved in a violent, life-threatening confrontation; you will focus on the immediate threat in front of you, to the exclusion of almost everything else. Visually scanning the area around you may alert you to other things you need to be aware of, such as additional assailants or an approaching police officer.

Scanning for additional threats when you're outside the home is different from scanning when you're inside the home. The proper technique for scanning the area when you are outside your home is presented in Chapter 8: If You Must Shoot.

Once you have ascertained that there is no further immediate danger to your front, sides or rear, you may do one of two things. If there is a possibility that the threat will return, or that you may face a threat from another direction or assailant, you should lower your firearm to a ready position (gun pointing downward at a 45 degree angle) and maintain that position until you are either no longer in danger, or until you must raise the gun to a firing position to protect yourself. Even with the firearm in a ready position, don't stop scanning the area for additional threats.





*Reholstering without looking at the holster purse/fanny pack.*

Alternatively, once you firmly establish that you face no further danger, you should reholster your gun. As was pointed out in Chapter 8, you will want to avoid meeting the responding police officers with a gun in your hand.

Practice reholstering your empty firearm until you can reinsert it into your holster purse or fanny pack by feel, without looking. If you become distracted by focusing on the process of putting your gun back in your purse or pack, you may give a hidden assailant the opportunity to attack you. Most holster purses or fanny packs usually require both hands to reholster the gun.

If you must see what you are doing while you are reholstering, give the holster a quick glance and then immediately return visual focus to your surroundings; don't look at it for an extended time. It is much better to observe what you are doing with a series of rapid glances than with a prolonged gaze.

## **TRAINING FOR PRESENTATION FROM A HOLSTER, HOLSTER PURSE OR FANNY PACK**

Initially, you should practice pistol presentation from a holster using an unloaded gun in your designated dry-fire area. Before commencing dry-firing, always ensure that the gun is unloaded, and that there is no ammunition in the area. Start by performing each step separately as you say the name of the step: ACCESS! GRIP! PULL! ROTATE! JOIN! EXTEND! FIRE! Be sure you know and practice the proper technique for each step, being particularly careful to observe the proper safety precautions associated with each step. For example, it is critical for safety to observe the proper rotation technique when presenting from a crossdraw holster, shoulder holster, holster purse or fanny pack.

Once you have mastered the proper sequence of steps, and the technique for each step, slowly increase your presentation speed. The interval between each step will decrease, and each step will blend naturally into the next. After a while—usually several hundred presentations—you will achieve sufficient proficiency with the technique to begin using live ammunition.

Be aware that some ranges do not allow shooters to draw from the holster, and those that do may only allow such presentation from a shooting-side hip holster. Also, some ranges will not permit drawing from a holster under clothing. Discuss your presentation practice with range officials before you start.

At the range, start slow. For the first few presentations, go back to a step-by-step method to review the proper sequence and technique of the necessary steps.

If you are presenting from a holster, begin by presenting the gun without wearing the concealment clothing. As you get more comfortable and proficient with drawing and firing using live ammunition, your control of the firearm will improve and you can carefully reintroduce the ACCESS step at the beginning of the presentation process.

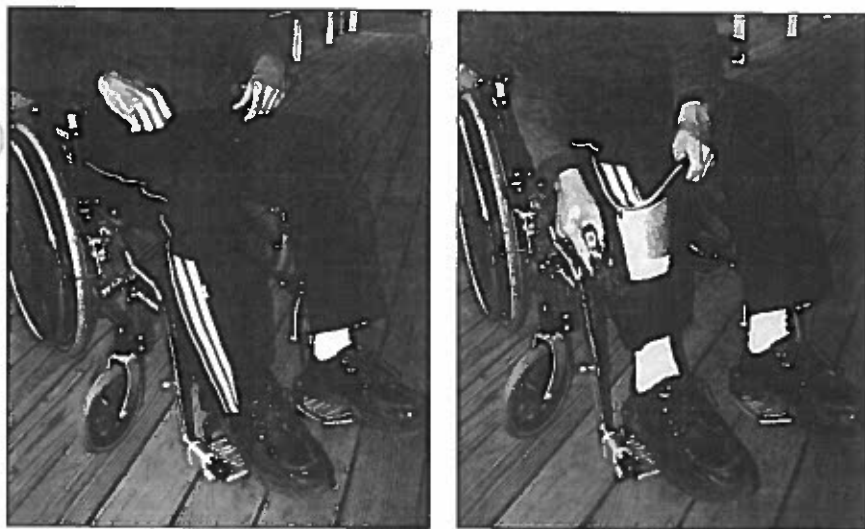
Remember that safety and smoothness are just as important as sheer presentation speed. A slow hit is better than a fast miss; it will do you little good to draw the gun a few tenths of a second faster if you lose control and can't shoot accurately.

## PRESENTATION AND CONCEALED CARRY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The special circumstances of people with disabilities create unusual challenges for concealed carry. These challenges arise from the diversity of individual abilities.

There can be no universal guidelines for the best way for people with disabilities to carry a concealed firearm. The concealed carry needs of a person who uses a cane likely will differ from those of a person who uses a walker. Each may need to modify the standard presentation techniques to accommodate their individual needs, and to ensure that the gun's muzzle is always pointed in a safe direction at all times during presentation. Persons with certain physical limitations may also find it difficult or impossible to assume some shooting positions, such as the kneeling or prone positions, or to move quickly to cover. Common sense and an analysis of each individual's capabilities will dictate the carry mode, presentation method and shooting techniques to be used in each case.

One of the more common situations involves an individual in a wheelchair. As a general rule, concealing the gun on the chair itself is not recommended, as the person may be



*An ankle or calf holster worn under loose clothing give the wheelchair-bound an effective mode of concealment that also promotes safe handgun presentation.*

separated from the chair during the struggle of an attack. For the wheelchair user, presentation from a hip holster or small-of-the-back holster may be extremely difficult or impossible. Other common modes of carry, such as a shoulder holster, crossdraw holster or fanny pack, are not recommended, as presentation will unavoidably involve sweeping the gun in an arc, endangering innocent bystanders, or pointing the gun at the legs before is rotated toward the target.

Many wheelchair users who carry a concealed gun utilize an ankle or calf holster that positions the gun on the lower leg. With this mode of carry, the gun's muzzle travels directly toward the target during presentation, providing a safe draw. In this instance, ankle or calf holsters are especially effective when used in conjunction with loose clothing, such as sweatpants, which can be easily pulled up by the support hand to allow access to the gun.

Other modes of carry will be required for other levels of ability, which are far too numerous to be treated in this book.



## CHAPTER 13

# Special Concealment Situations

As you go about your various daily activities, you will find that there are situations in which normal carry in a holster, fanny pack or holster purse is inadequate. In addition, there will also be situations relating to concealed carry that may have nothing whatsoever to do with self-defense, but are nonetheless problematical.

The discussion below does not begin to cover all the possible special situations you may encounter; however, it is hoped that you will come away with some general ideas and principles that you can apply to a wide range of circumstances.

### CARRY IN A VEHICLE

With the increased number of carjackings in many areas, you may be just as vulnerable in your vehicle as you are while walking on the street. Thus, in your car, you likely will need quick access to your defensive firearm.

However, a holster or holster purse that provides ready access while you are standing or walking may be next to useless when you are seated in a vehicle. Hip holsters and small-of-the-back holsters, for example, are almost impossible to draw from when you are seated in your vehicle. Often, to access your gun in a hip holster you must lean sharply toward the driver's side window, putting you nearer a carjacker, robber or other threat that is approaching from that side. Similarly, if you carry a gun in a holster purse, you don't normally wear the purse while driving; you put it on the seat next to you or some other convenient location. If you are attacked, however, you may find it hard to access and present the gun quickly from a purse lying two feet away on the seat (or even further if it slides off the seat onto the floor during braking). In addition, a purse lying unguarded on a car seat may be a temptation for a robber when you've stopped at a traffic light.

Ideally, your gun should always be on your person, even when you are in a vehicle, and it should also be readily accessible. Some carry devices, such as fanny packs and shoulder holsters, can satisfy both these requirements. If these devices are not your preferred mode of carry, however, you may need to provide an alternative method for carrying your gun in the vehicle so that it is immediately accessible.

Your gun should be in a location that provides easy access, consistent positioning, and concealment from any passing motorist or pedestrian who may happen to look into your vehicle. Some of the more obvious solutions to this problem fail to meet one or more of these requirements. For example, keeping your gun in your vehicle's locking glove box provides concealment, but does not position the gun consistently, makes it difficult to draw conveniently and quickly, and does not afford quick access.

The same problem exists when you put the gun under your driver's side seat. Concealment is good, but the gun may slide around on the floor, making it hard to access quickly.



*Handgun in vehicle between driver's seat and center console.*

If the gun slides all the way to the rear, you may not be able to access it at all.

Some personal protection authorities advocate putting your gun on the seat beside you and covering it with a newspaper for concealment. This does provide reasonably quick access; however, under hard braking, the gun may slide forward off the seat, out of reach. The newspaper may also slide off the seat, exposing the gun. The gun may also be exposed in warm weather, if you drive with your windows down and the newspaper blows away.

Specialized gun boxes made for in-car storage are a better alternative, and have the additional benefit of providing safe gun storage in the vehicle when you are not around. However, most models require you

to manipulate a combination or Simplex-type lock to open them. Under stress, this may be both difficult and excessively time-consuming.

The center console of your vehicle may be effectively used for gun storage. The console is conveniently reached and provides good concealment. If you use the console for gun storage, however, be sure to not store any other object in the compartment containing the gun.

Many experts recommend the installation of a holster in the space between the driver's seat and the center console. This holster should be attached by adhesives, Velcro® strips or other means, and oriented to position the gun's butt upward for fast access. Properly installed, this holster will provide fast access while adequately concealing the gun.

Do not install the holster on the left side of the driver's seat, even if you are left-handed; it will be exposed whenever the driver's door is opened.

Given the difficulty of quickly presenting a firearm in a vehicle from a hip holster or holster purse (probably the preferred modes of carry for most men and women, respectively), some authorities recommend that a second gun be dedicated to vehicle carry. Such a firearm would be kept permanently in the vehicle in a location allowing both good concealment and immediate access from the driver's seat. Drawbacks of this practice include the possibility of a child or other unauthorized person in the vehicle being able to gain access to the gun, as well as the potential acquisition of the gun by a criminal if the vehicle was stolen.

## CHANGING CARRY LOCATIONS

There will be occasions in which you will find it necessary to change the carry location of your concealed gun. You must remove your concealed gun before you enter a United States Post Office, a school, a bar or a government building; and you likely will want to put it back on after you leave. Alternatively, you may have your gun in a holster next to your seat in your vehicle, as described in the previous section, and you wish to put it back in its

holster before you leave your vehicle. In any event, you should do this change both quickly and discreetly.

Your main concern is to avoid observation by others while you are changing your gun from one carry location to another. Most of the time, changing gun location is performed while you are in your vehicle. Be aware of other motorists or pedestrians who are near enough to your vehicle to see inside. If you are in a parking lot, park a little distance away from other vehicles to minimize the likelihood of being observed. Remember that the occupants of many commercial trucks, cargo vans, sport utility vehicles and similar high-riding vehicles can look down into your vehicle, so be aware of such vehicles when they pass. People looking out of the upper-floor windows of nearby houses or office buildings, too, may be able to look down into your vehicle and see you handling a gun.



*Concealed carrier discreetly changing handgun location in a vehicle.*

It is always critical to exercise the utmost discretion whenever you handle your gun in public. Bystanders may become alarmed upon seeing a man with a gun, and may alert the police.

You may also need to change gun carry locations at other times as well. For example, if you carry a small handgun in a coat pocket, you should change the gun's location when you go into an environment, such as your workplace, in which your coat would normally be removed. Change the location of the gun before entering the building, if possible. When that is not practical, change the gun's location in a private area where you will not be observed. A stall in a rest room is ideal for this.

Most situations of this type can be avoided by some simple advance planning. If you know you are going into a business meeting where you will be expected to remove your suit coat, you should not, that day, carry your gun in a shoulder or belt holster, or even in your coat pocket. If the gun is small enough, carry it in your pants pocket; if not, it should be concealed in a day planner, attache case or other object that is appropriate to a business environment.

## **CONCEALED CARRY IN A REST ROOM**

You may not think about being the target of an attack when you are using a rest room at work, in a store or at a gas station. We like to think that others will respect our privacy at such times. However, there have been many cases of people being victimized in public restrooms. Often, the attack occurred when they were most vulnerable—sitting in a toilet stall. Typically, robbers grab the victim's ankles and pull him or her forward off the toilet

and under the stall door. Lying on their backs, the victims of these attacks quite naturally feel both helpless and mortified, making them easy prey. Attacks may also come from adjoining stalls, with an assailant peering over the divider and threatening his victim with a weapon.

If you carry a gun on a belt holster—a crossdraw, small-of-the-back or strong-side hip holster—you must be aware that you can be just as vulnerable to this kind of attack if you leave your gun and holster around your ankles while you are in the stall. Once you are safely locked in the stall, you should remove your gun from its holster and keep it in your lap. This will give you immediate access to the gun if you are attacked. Do the same with a gun carried in a fanny pack. As silly as it may sound, be careful not to let your gun slide off or through your legs into the toilet. Also be aware that even with the gun removed from a belt holster, the holster itself may be visible to anyone glancing at the space under the door to the stall.

A gun in a holster purse need not be removed; however, you should clamp the purse under the support-side arm so that you can quickly acquire the gun if trouble arises. Never hang the purse on a clothes hook on the inside of the stall door, or place it on the floor next to your feet.

Whatever your mode of carry, you may need to experiment to develop a method of retaining the gun so that it is secure and readily accessible.

Men using a urinal may also be vulnerable, as bathroom etiquette generally discourages them from looking around to observe their environment. Maintaining proper awareness, however, is more important than observing this custom. Also, you can discreetly keep an eye on your surroundings by using the reflections off chrome-plated pipes, shiny fixtures, and tile wall. Finally, whenever possible, choose to stand in a location offering the best view of the bathroom, and the greatest protection against attack.

The scenarios described above are just a few of the many special concealment situations that gun carriers may encounter. The proper use of visualization can help you recognize other such situations you may be faced with. In many cases, you may be able to anticipate and avoid problematical situations. Simulating these scenarios with dry-fire practice will prepare you to use the specific techniques required in each instance.

**PART IV**

**DEVELOPING  
BASIC DEFENSIVE  
SHOOTING SKILLS**





# CHAPTER 14

## Defensive Shooting Concepts

Mental preparedness—being constantly aware of your environment and having a defensive mindset that promotes confidence, perseverance, and planning—often allows you to avoid a violent encounter. However, on occasion it is impossible to sidestep, evade, flee or otherwise escape an attack. At such times your life, and the lives of your loved ones, may depend upon your mastery of defensive shooting skills, such as those presented in the NRA Basic Personal Protection in the Home Course.

Before you can begin to master these skills, however, it is important to understand a number of basic defensive shooting concepts. These concepts underlie both your shooting training and practice as well as any actual deadly force encounter you may face in your home.

### RESPONSIBILITY

Owning a firearm for personal protection is a right that must be exercised responsibly and ethically. Gun owners owe it to themselves, their families and their communities to always use their firearms in a safe and prudent manner.

No matter what the situation, you must always observe the three primary rules of safe gun handling: **ALWAYS** keep the gun pointed in a safe direction, **ALWAYS** keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot, and **ALWAYS** keep the gun unloaded until ready to use. (Note that you are “ready to use” your defensive handgun whenever you are carrying it.)

Responsible behavior entails more than merely adhering to the rules of safe gun handling, however. On some occasions, it may be more responsible not to use your firearm, even when faced with a deadly threat. Often, the determination of what constitutes responsible behavior is a matter of individual judgment.

### IMMINENT DANGER

In most cases, to legally use deadly force, you must be the innocent victim of an attack, and the threat of severe bodily harm must be imminent (about to occur, or immediate). This will be discussed in detail in Part VII: Concealed Carry, Self-Defense and the Law.

### TOOL OF LAST RESORT

A firearm is a tool of last resort. It is used only when deadly force is absolutely necessary.

As has been said before, the best way to win a confrontation is to avoid a confrontation. Flight or evasion, if safely possible, is always preferable to the use of lethal force. Legally, in some situations you must do everything in your power to safely flee or evade an encounter before you can resort to your firearm or any other tool of deadly force (see Part VII: Concealed Carry, Self-Defense and the Law.)

## SHOOT TO STOP

The purpose of shooting an attacker is to deprive him of the ability to deliver deadly force. Put another way, you shoot an attacker to stop his life-threatening attack. Even though a firearm is a tool of last resort, your intent when using it against a violent criminal is not to kill, but simply to stop the attack. This is accomplished when the assailant is incapacitated or no longer presents a deadly threat.

Note that you cannot assume your attacker is incapacitated simply because your shots have hit him. Police reports contain many accounts of felons, high on drugs or possessed of an extreme will to live, who continued their violent depredations even after sustaining lethal wounds. You also cannot assume incapacitation just because the assailant has fallen to the ground; he may still be capable of delivering deadly force.

Be aware, too, that a violent criminal may only feign incapacitation to get you to let down your guard. Additionally, an attacker who was genuinely incapacitated at one moment may subsequently (and unexpectedly) revive and again pose a deadly threat.

Sometimes it is not necessary to incapacitate an attacker; he may flee or surrender, no longer presenting a deadly threat. In general, once an attacker no longer presents a threat, you are no longer legally or ethically justified in employing force against that attacker. Consult Part VII: Concealed Carry, Self-Defense and the Law, for a more thorough discussion of the limitations on the application of deadly force.

## VIOLENT ENCOUNTERS: CLOSE, QUICK AND DARK

Contrary to what is portrayed in movies and on television, real-life violent encounters occur at very close range, often in reduced-light conditions, and are over in a matter of seconds. One study of police shootings in a major urban area showed that the majority of encounters took place after dark, at three yards or less, in less than three seconds, and involved the firing of an average of three shots. This compressed time for most deadly encounters requires an acceleration of many of the fundamentals of pistol shooting.

Furthermore, accounts of defensive and police shootings reveal that it is likely that multiple shots



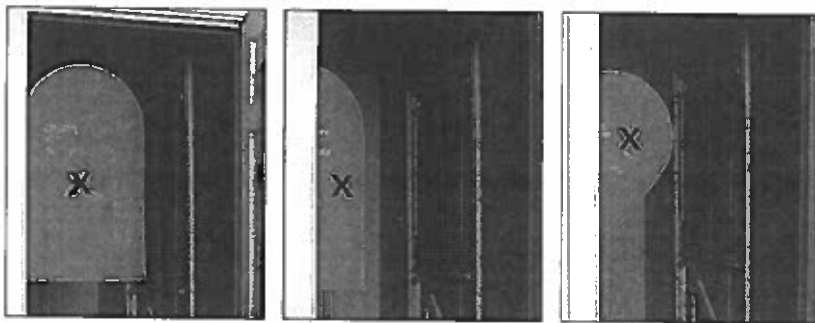
*A typical violent encounter takes place at close range, in reduced light, in a brief period of time.*

will be required to stop a violent aggressor. Again, the Hollywood depiction of a shooting has little to do with reality. On television and in the movies, it is easy to see bullet impacts, and the attacker is almost always incapacitated with a single shot.

In actuality, it is extremely difficult to perceive bullet strikes during a violent confrontation. Things are happening far too quickly, and the target—the violent attacker—is usually moving rapidly, and is in dim light. Often a person does not even show any immediate reaction to being shot, particularly when under the influence of drugs or when in an excited or enraged state. This is why it is important to keep shooting until a deadly threat is no longer present.

## SHOOT AT THE CENTER OF EXPOSED MASS

Under the conditions of the typical deadly force encounter, you may have to shoot quickly, in low light, at a close, rapidly-moving target. Such conditions are not conducive to deliberate pinpoint aiming techniques. The defensive aiming technique taught in NRA courses is called *center of mass of the exposed target*. This simply means that you align your sights not on a specific point, but on the approximate center of the target mass that is presented to you. On a standing target out in the open, the center of exposed mass will be located in the middle of the target. In other cases, such as when an attacker is partially behind cover, the center of exposed mass may be located elsewhere.

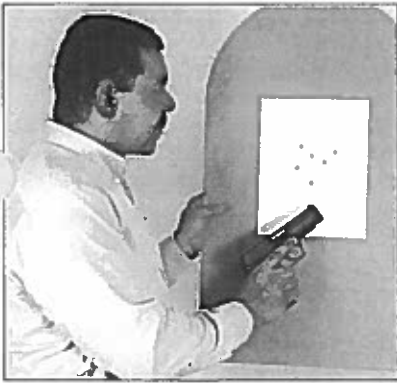


*These photographs demonstrate the "center of exposed mass" aiming point using targets having different degrees of exposure. The "X" marks the center of mass of the exposed target.*

## DEFENSIVE ACCURACY

Closely related to the use of a center of exposed mass aiming area is the concept of defensive accuracy. While the ability of both gun and shooter to group shots tightly is critical in the various handgun sports, the characteristics of most defensive encounters make the attainment of pinpoint accuracy both unrealistic and unnecessary. As noted above, defensive shootings generally take place at close range (less than 21 feet) and in dim light, and are concluded in only a few seconds. Often, either the assailant or the defender—or both—are moving rapidly during the encounter. Such conditions do not permit the careful alignment of the sights on a specific aiming point on the target.

Simply put, defensive accuracy is that level of accuracy that allows the shooter to keep all shots in an assailant's vital area. If a center-of-mass hold is used on a fully exposed target,



*This grouping on an 8 1/2" by 11" piece of paper represents adequate defensive accuracy.*

this area is equal to approximately a nine-inch circle—about the size of an average paper plate or sheet of standard typing paper. This minimum level of accuracy (all shots on an 8 1/2" by 11" sheet of paper at 21 feet) is well within the capabilities of virtually anyone with a quality handgun, given sufficient practice.

This discussion of defensive accuracy should not be construed to minimize the importance of accuracy in a defensive shooting situation. Virtually all self-defense authorities agree that accurate shot placement is the key to quickly stopping an aggressive attack. The accuracy standard stated above should be regarded as the minimum level of accuracy that is acceptable for defensive purposes. The responsible

defensive-minded shooter will endeavor to exceed this standard. In any defensive shooting situation, the more accurate the shooter/gun combination, the greater the likelihood that the shooter will prevail.

# CHAPTER 15

## Basic Defensive Shooting Skills

Like other forms of pistol shooting, defensive shooting is based upon the fundamental principles of pistol marksmanship. These fundamentals are aiming, breath control, hold control, trigger control and follow-through. The special dynamics of aggressive encounters require you to apply these fundamentals in a manner that is more accelerated than when you are relaxed on a range, just plinking at a target.

### FIREARM SAFETY

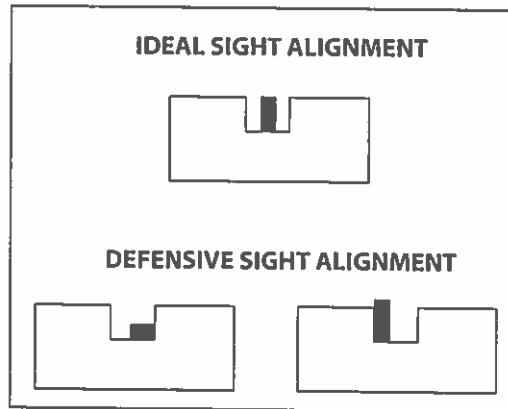
The most basic of all shooting principles deal with gun safety. Whether practicing at the range, cleaning your gun in your workshop, or retrieving your gun from its storage location in your home, the fundamental rules of safe gun handling still apply: **ALWAYS** keep the gun pointed in a safe direction; **ALWAYS** keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot; and **ALWAYS** keep the gun unloaded until ready to use.

Through practice and mindfulness, the basic gun handling techniques will become habits that function regardless of the situation.

### AIMING

*Aiming* is the process of aligning a firearm with a target so that a bullet fired from that firearm will strike the target where desired. In other words, the point of aim will coincide with the point of impact. Aiming is normally accomplished using the gun's sights. Most sights on defensive firearms take the form of a flat-topped front post and a square-cornered rear notch.

Aiming consists of two stages: sight alignment and sight picture. *Sight alignment* refers to the proper positioning of the shooting eye, the rear sight, and the front sight in relation to each other. With the notch-and-post system typically found on defensive firearms, the proper sight alignment for precise shooting occurs when the front post is centered laterally (same amount of space on either side of the front post) in the rear notch, and the tops of both the post and the notch line up. Visual focus is



*This grouping on an 8 1/2" by 11" piece of paper represents adequate defensive accuracy.*

on the front sight. For defensive shooting purposes at close range (9 to 21 feet), however, it is usually sufficient to simply place the front sight post somewhere inside the rear sight notch. This gives an allowable sight deviation that will still keep your shots within the critical aiming area—roughly equivalent to an 8 1/2 inch by 11 inch sheet of paper—at up to about 30 feet, depending upon your gun's sights. Just as in the precision sight alignment used for slower shooting, the visual focus in the sight alignment method used in defensive situations is still on the front sight.

*Sight picture* refers to the relationship between the gun's properly aligned sights and the target. For defensive shooting purposes, the handgun's aligned sights are placed on the center of exposed mass of the target. That is, the sights are placed in the middle of the target area that is exposed.

During an emergency defensive response, your trigger finger should start in motion automatically when your eye sees that the sights are aligned on the center of target mass. The use of a larger aiming area (the center of target mass) instead of a small aiming point on the target allows you to develop this automatic response to an acceptable sight picture. A larger aiming area also helps you stay focused on the front sight and permits smooth trigger control.

## BREATH CONTROL

*Breath control* is the method used to minimize gun movement due to breathing. With each breath, your ribcage expands and your shoulders rise slightly. This movement is transmitted to your arms, causing your aimed handgun to shift position in relation to the target.

In a defensive confrontation, fear for your life, trying to evade or escape an attack, and attempting to shout a warning to your attacker can all leave you gasping. Your heart will be pounding and your lungs will be demanding air. Breath control under these circumstances involves simply stopping breathing and holding it. Breathing should simply cease momentarily while the shot is being fired. This will steady the position and allow for a quick shot or series of shots. While this method works only for a few seconds, it should be sufficient for the duration of a typical armed response to an attack. In some cases, in fact, the armed defender may have to make a conscious effort to resume breathing after shooting has ended.

## HOLD CONTROL

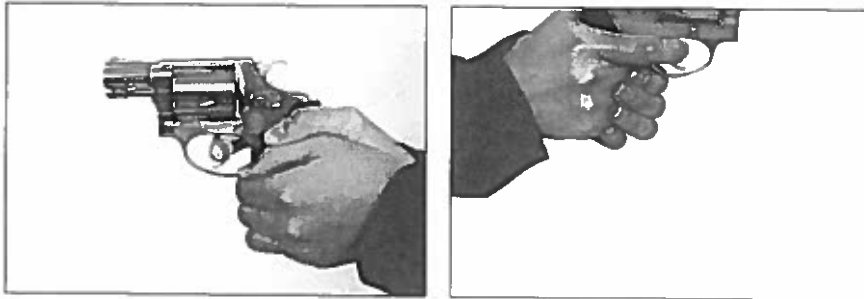
Maximum accuracy is achieved when the firearm is held motionless during the process of aiming and firing. *Hold control* is the method by which both the body and the gun are held as still as possible for the split second during which the shot is fired.

In a defensive shooting situation, hold control is achieved primarily through a well-balanced, stable shooting position that is naturally aligned with the target. More information on these positions and on target alignment is found in Chapter 16: Shooting Positions.

## TRIGGER CONTROL

*Trigger control* is one of the most important of shooting fundamentals. The term refers to the technique of pulling the trigger without causing any movement of the sight alignment.

In most basic firearm training courses, beginning shooters are taught to apply gradually increasing pressure to the trigger until the shot is fired. The brief duration of a defensive encounter makes such a slow, gradual trigger squeeze impractical. Nonetheless, trigger control is still critical; poor trigger technique can easily cause a shooter to completely miss even a large target at close range.

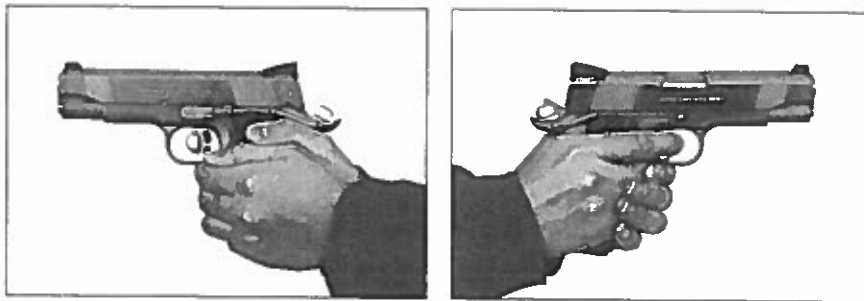


*Proper defensive shooting trigger finger placement on a revolver.*

Trigger control in a defensive shooting environment involves speeding up the process of squeezing the trigger without jerking or flinching. The smoother the trigger is pulled, the less the gun's sights will be disturbed during the firing process, even when the time period is compressed.

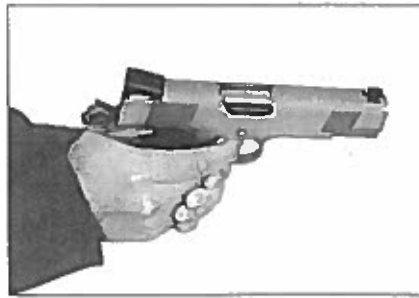
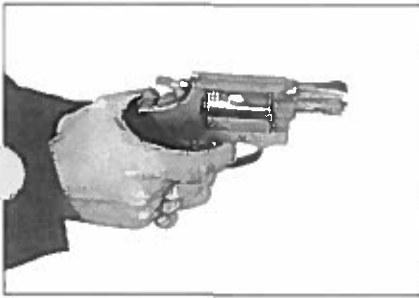
Good trigger control also involves the proper placement of the trigger finger on the trigger. A properly placed trigger finger allows the force of the pull to be directed straight to the rear, minimizing a tendency to jerk the gun to the right or left. Proper placement also allows the gun to be fired by moving only the trigger finger.

For single-action shooting, the trigger should be pulled using the middle of the last pad of the trigger finger. For double-action shooting, the trigger should be placed approximately on the joint between the last and middle pads of the trigger finger. The ideal trigger finger placement can be achieved through dry-fire practice at a sheet of white paper. Adjust your finger position until there is no movement in sight alignment when the



*Proper defensive shooting trigger finger placement on a semi-automatic pistol.*





Photos showing the proper gap between the trigger finger and the frame of a revolver (left) and a semi-automatic pistol.

trigger is pulled and the hammer or striker falls. Note that the proper contact point on the trigger finger may change from gun to gun and firing position to firing position.

If possible, you should also leave a small gap between your trigger finger and the frame of the handgun to prevent the finger from contacting or dragging on the frame and thus disturbing sight alignment as the trigger is pulled.

## FOLLOW-THROUGH

The concept of *follow-through* is common to many sports, such as golf, tennis, baseball, bowling and archery. In shooting, follow-through is the effort made by the shooter to integrate, maintain and continue all shooting fundamentals before, during and immediately after the firing of the shot.

It is true that any alteration in the gun position, stance, sight alignment, and so forth that occurs after the bullet has left the muzzle has no effect whatsoever on accuracy or shot placement. Nonetheless, it is important to consciously maintain the shooting fundamentals for a brief time after the shot has been fired because only by doing so will you be certain that those fundamentals are applied before and during the firing of the shot. Thus, proper follow-through minimizes gun movement as the shot is fired. A shooter who fails to follow through and applies the fundamentals only up to the breaking of the trigger will (in anticipation of the shot) inevitably abandon one or more of the fundamentals just prior to firing, resulting in errant bullet flight.



Proper follow-through, as well as good recoil control, combine to allow this shooter to fire several accurate shots in rapid succession.

Proper follow-through does more than just ensure adherence to the shooting fundamentals through the firing of the shot. Follow-through also sets up any successive shots

that may be necessary. As mentioned above, in defensive encounters it is likely that you will have to fire multiple shots to quickly stop an attacker. By following through, you can maintain your position, alignment with the target, breath control, hold control and sight alignment, allowing easy recovery of the proper sight picture and the fastest possible follow-up shot. During follow-through, you also relax trigger finger pressure, allowing the trigger to reset, but still maintain finger contact with the trigger face.

The follow-through used in defensive shooting is highly compressed to last only a fraction of a second. You can also use this period of time to recover the sights after the shot, assess the effects of the shots fired, and prepare for additional shots if necessary.

All of the basic defensive shooting skills are integrated in the firing of a shot in self defense. The shooter aims (maintaining both sight alignment and a center-of-mass sight picture) while momentarily stopping respiration (breath control) and movement (hold control). Only the trigger finger, properly placed, is moved to fire the shot (trigger control). Before, during and after the shot is fired, the shooter observes all the proper shooting fundamentals, and recovers the sights and aligns them back onto the target immediately after firing the shot (follow-through).



## CHAPTER 16

### Shooting Positions

As presented in the previous chapter, the fundamentals of pistol marksmanship are still observed in a defensive shooting situation, albeit in a modified manner. Effective shooting takes more than just adherence to these fundamentals, however. An effective shooting position is the platform from which the fundamentals are applied.

#### ELEMENTS OF A SHOOTING POSITION

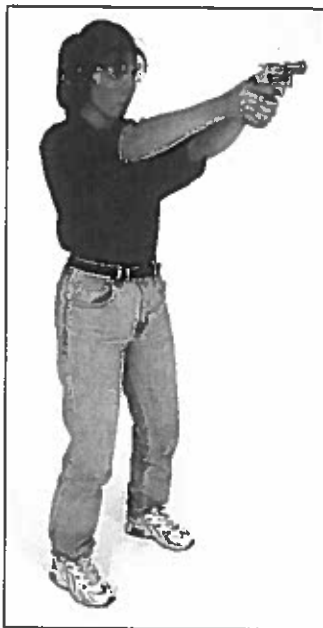
Although there are many effective shooting positions for different situations, all share a number of common characteristics: consistency, balance, support, natural aiming area and comfort.

Consistency is critical because variations in position produce variations in impact point and/or group size. You must strive to assume each position in the same exact way every time. In the training phase, this is accomplished by conscious attention to each aspect of the position and each step taken to assume it. With repetition, this process of developing a position "by the numbers" will become ingrained in your subconscious, eventually enabling you to flow into the position quickly, effortlessly, naturally and consistently. The "muscle memory" thus developed through rigorous practice will allow the position to be assumed automatically in an emergency situation.

Balance is also an essential component of a proper firing position. Balance is usually best achieved in a stance with the feet spaced at shoulders-width, even weight distribution, and a slightly forward lean with the majority of the weight on the balls of the feet.

A position that is balanced provides the most stable shooting platform, one that absorbs recoil and facilitates both movement and accurate follow-up shots. A balanced position with the head upright and level also is important for controlling body movement. The brain senses body position by a number of mechanisms, including a structure in the inner ear known as the labyrinth. An upright, level head position will maximize the ability of the labyrinth to promote body equilibrium and efficient body movement.

A good position also offers support to minimize gun movement while aiming. Support can be provided by the skeleton, muscle tension or an external object, such as a table or trash can providing cover or concealment. A two-handed grip, for example, efficiently uses muscle tension to provide more support than a one-handed grip. Generally, standing



*A balanced shooting position.*

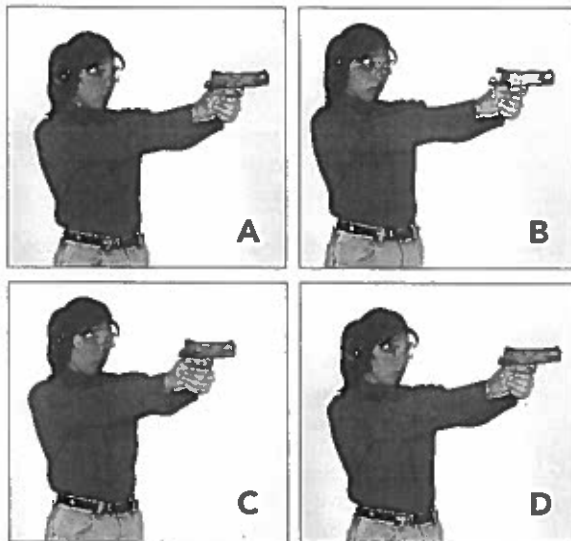


A good shooting position offers support. The shooter above makes use of skeletal support by bracing her support arm on the knee. The position of the left foot directly below the knee relieves the leg muscles of any support role; support is provided only by the rigid bones of the lower leg, ankle and foot. At left, below, the shooter uses the object providing cover or concealment to support her shooting position. Note that her arms, and not the pistol, rest on the supporting object.

positions offer less support than kneeling and prone positions. Even the support offered by one-handed positions can be maximized, however, by ensuring that the stance is balanced, the grip is firm, and the shooter is properly aligned with the target.

All effective firing positions incorporate the shooter's natural aiming area (NAA). NAA refers to the natural alignment of the shooter and the gun in any position. To determine your NAA, first assume your position, with your eyes open and your gun aimed at a target. Next, close your eyes. With your eyes still closed, settle into the position that feels most stable and comfortable, and take several breaths. Then, open your eyes and observe where your gun's sights are pointed in relation to the target. The sight picture should be in the middle of the target. Often the sight picture will be aligned to the right or left or slightly high or low, requiring you to modify your foot position or some other aspect of your stance to achieve the proper sight picture while taking full advantage of your body's NAA.

In the NAA (Natural Aiming Area) exercise, the shooter (A) first assumes a position with gun aimed at a target. Then (B) the eyes are closed, and (C) the shooter settles into the shooting position that feels most stable and comfortable. Note the shift of the gun position from (B) to (C). When the shooter's eyes open (D) and she observes where the gun's sights are pointed in relation to the target, her foot position or some other aspect of her stance can be modified to achieve the proper sight picture while taking advantage of her body's natural aiming area.



Repeat the NAA exercise until your stance is adjusted for the proper natural alignment. You should make every effort to adopt this same alignment each time the stance is assumed in order to take advantage of your NAA.

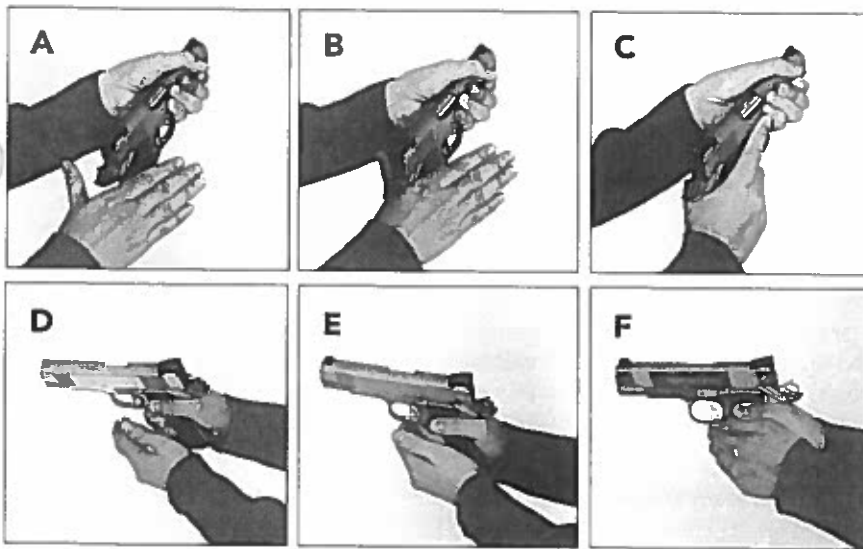
Finally, a proper position should be comfortable. A stance that is not comfortable—one that is forced, awkward, strained or painful—is unlikely to be consistent or stable, and thus will not contribute to effective shooting. When practicing shooting positions, you should be conscious of how natural and comfortable each position is. Positions that do not feel comfortable must be modified as necessary. However, in some cases discomfort may be the result of the lack of joint flexibility or muscular strength. In such cases, a minimal amount of physical training is usually all that is needed to allow the shooter to comfortably assume a proper shooting position. Of course, any shooter should consult his or her doctor prior to starting any physical training regimen.

## THE TWO-HANDED GRIP

Under most conditions, you will grip the gun with a two-handed grip. For the vast majority of shooters, such a grip provides more control of the firearm, steadier aiming, better recoil absorption, and stronger gun retention.

To assume the grip, first grasp the gun behind the muzzle in your support (non-firing) hand. Make a "Y" of the thumb and fingers of the firing hand (A), and place the gun's backstrap firmly in the web of the thumb (B). Then wrap the fingers of the firing hand around the gun's grip (C).

Next, bring the support hand around the front of the grip (D) so that the support hand fingers overlie and overlap the firing hand fingers (E). The first joint of the support hand



The steps in assuming a proper two-handed grip on a handgun. Letters refer to steps described in text.

fingers should be approximately aligned with the knuckles of the firing hand, and the support hand thumb will lie directly forward of and below the firing hand thumb (F). Gripping the firearm with tension from both the support and firing hands creates a steadier hold on the pistol, and makes it extremely difficult to take it away from you.

Grip consistency is essential for accurate shooting, whether in bullseye competition or a defensive encounter. Use dry-fire practice to check and reinforce the correct trigger finger placement (see Appendix C: Opportunities for Skills Enhancement). Note that the proper grip for one specific firearm may not be appropriate for another firearm; your grip may vary depending upon the shape of a gun's grip frame. Also, your grip may vary slightly from position to position.

## READY POSITIONS

In some defensive situations, you may not immediately go into a firing position. You may hold your firearm in a ready position for extended periods of time, in anticipation of use. Two ready positions are presented in this course: the low ready position and the retention ready position.

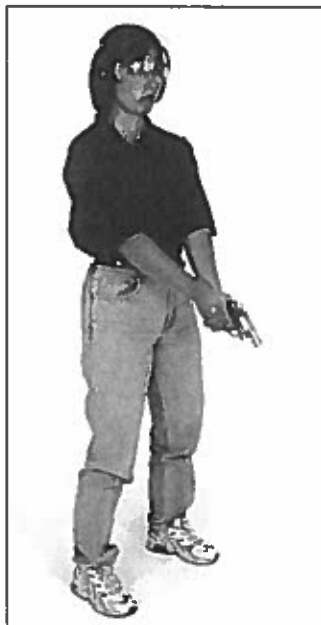
**Low Ready Position.** To assume the low ready position, take the proper grip on the gun and extend the arms outward and downward at approximately a 45-degree angle. The firearm will be oriented toward a point on the ground several feet in front of you. Your knees should be slightly bent and the weight slightly forward, in anticipation of either movement or the sudden acquisition of a full firing position. Your foot and shoulder position should reflect the firing position that you plan to assume (e.g., isosceles, Weaver, etc.).

Another way of visualizing the low ready position is to adopt the shooting position and then simply lower the extended arms approximately 45 degree downward.

The simplicity of the low ready position, and the unobstructed view it gives of the target, are two of its primary advantages. The position also permits easy assumption of the shooting position. With the arms already extended, the wrists already locked and the feet and shoulders already aligned, the gun is simply raised to eye level to acquire the sights and fire.

The low ready position puts the firearm away from the body, which can allow a close-range adversary to block the rise of the gun to a firing position. However, in this situation, the defender is usually still able to take shots at the attacker's lower body.

**Retention Ready Position.** The retention ready position gets its name from the way it places the firearm close to the body, almost tucked into the armpit. The retention position can be visualized by assuming



*The low ready position.*



The retention ready position.

the normal shooting position and then simply pulling the firearm to the rear, to the body directly in front of the shooting-side armpit. The two-handed grip is retained, and the firearm is pointed forward, toward the target with the barrel parallel to the ground.

The retention ready position has several advantages. First, by keeping the handgun close to the body, it promotes gun retention—physical control of the firearm—and hinders an attacker's efforts to block or grab it. You can easily go from the retention position to the full shooting position by simply extending the arms forward. Additionally, since your firearm is kept pointed at the target in the retention position, a shot may actually be fired from the position if necessary (for example, if an attacker lunges at you at arm's length).

Do not raise the muzzle of your gun or point it upward as it is brought in toward the body. Not only does this negate the advantages of keeping the firearm pointed at the target, but a muzzle-upward orientation can actually be hazardous if you are suddenly startled and reflexively fire the firearm.

## TWO-HANDED SHOOTING POSITIONS

Two basic shooting positions are taught in this course: the *isosceles position* and the *Weaver position*. In addition, a modified version of each basic position is also presented.

**Isosceles Position.** The Isosceles position is so named because in this position your extended arms, when seen from above, resemble an isosceles triangle. In the isosceles position, your feet are placed at about

The isosceles position, seen from (A) the front, (B) above and (C) side.





shoulders width, and your feet and shoulders are square with the target. Your knees are slightly bent and your weight is slightly forward, on the balls of the feet. The pistol is grasped in a normal two-handed grip, and is held with both your arms extended fully forward. Your elbows are straight but not locked. Your head is erect, not hunched; your shoulders are at their normal height, not raised; and your firearm is lifted to the level of your eyes for aiming.

The isosceles position is a very natural shooting position. Under the stress of an actual defensive shooting situation, many shooters instinctively adopt a modified "instinctive" form of this position. The ease with which you can pivot laterally in the isosceles position facilitates the engagement of multiple targets. The primary limitation of the position is that, at very close range, the arm's length position of the gun may facilitate an attacker's block or grab.

**Weaver Position.** The Weaver position is named for former Los Angeles County Sheriff Jack Weaver, who is credited with originating it in the 1950s. To assume the Weaver position, place your body in a rough boxer's stance, your knees slightly flexed and your body weight carried slightly forward, on the balls of your feet. Grasp your gun in a normal two-handed grip, but bend the support-hand elbow (pointing downward) to bring the gun closer to the body than in the isosceles position. The location of the gun often requires that your head tip slightly to properly view the sights. Tension between the two hands is perhaps the most functionally significant feature of this position: the firing hand is pushed forward into the support hand, which simultaneously pulls rearward. This push-pull tension creates great stability and steadiness.

The Weaver position gives considerable support to the firearm, and by pulling the gun in closer to the body, affords better gun retention and better maneuverability in tight quarters. Also, the bent elbow and asymmetrical foot position enhance recoil absorption. When a shot is fired, the bent elbow acts as a spring, bending to absorb recoil forces and then returning the gun to its original position. With heavy-recoiling handguns, the Weaver position affords fast shot-to-shot recovery for many shooters.

**Modified Isosceles Position.** This position incorporates the natural, fully-extended arm position of the isosceles position with the stability of the asymmetrical boxer's stance foot placement, which allows better recoil absorption. The head is level and the body leans forward. Often the shoulders rise reflexively, resulting in the instinctive stance referred to above. The modified isosceles position also represents the stance that would result when a shooter in the standard isosceles position pivots sharply to the side.

## ONE-HANDED SHOOTING POSITIONS

The well-rounded defensive shooter must be as comfortable with one-handed firing positions as with the more familiar two-handed ones. There are many situations in which one-handed firing may be necessary. For example, an injury to a hand or arm might make a two-hand hold impossible to assume. Alternatively, it may be necessary to use one hand to ward off blows or the thrusts of a knife, hold a flashlight or telephone, feel for obstructions in a darkened room, shield a child, and so forth.

The one-handed shooting positions used in defensive situations—the *reverse punch* and *forward punch* positions—are similar to stances used in the martial arts.

**Reverse Punch Position.** In this position, you assume a boxer's stance, with your foot on the support-hand (non-firing) side forward, your firing-side foot back, and your upper body bladed away from the target (that is, your upper body does not directly face the target, but is angled away so that your firing-side shoulder is somewhat to the rear). Your non-firing arm is drawn in toward the middle of the chest to keep it out of the way of the muzzle, and your non-firing hand is held palm-out to ward off an attacker. With your hand in this palm-out position, you can push an attacker away with the powerful triceps muscle of your upper arm.



*The reverse punch position.*

Your firing arm is bent slightly at the elbow, and your firing hand is canted inward at a natural angle—the same natural angle created when you form a fist in this position. [Note that, under most firing conditions, canting the firearm is detrimental to accuracy, and thus is generally discouraged. However, at the short distances typical of a violent attack, canting has little detrimental effect.] Your upper body leans slightly forward, with most of your body weight on your forward (support-side) leg. Your firing-side leg acts as a brace to support an aggressive, forward-leaning stance, with your weight carried on the ball of your firing-side foot.

The reverse-punch position can be easily assumed from the retention ready position, simply by pushing the gun forward. When practicing this position, be careful to keep the support hand drawn in toward the middle of the chest, clear of the muzzle. Note that it may not always be possible, when struggling with an attacker, to keep the support hand clear of the muzzle.

The reverse punch position is particularly suited for close-quarters confrontations, as it puts the defensive hand forward to more effectively ward off an assailant, and positions the gun closer to the body, promoting gun retention.



*The forward punch position.*

**Forward Punch Position.** The forward punch position is similar to the reverse punch position, except that the foot, hand and shoulder on the firing side are now forward, toward the target. Your body still assumes a forward-leaning stance, and your support hand is still drawn in toward the middle of your chest, in a defensive, palm-out position. Aside from the defensive position of the non-firing hand and the aggressive body position,

there is a degree of similarity between the forward punch position and the one-handed stance used by bullseye shooters.

## KNEELING POSITIONS

To take advantage of cover and concealment (see Chapter 18: Utilizing Cover and Concealment Outside the Home) it may be necessary to adopt firing positions other than the standing positions previously presented. The kneeling positions presented in this handbook—the high kneeling, low kneeling, supported kneeling and double kneeling positions—allow the shooter to take advantage of low cover or concealment, such as a car hood, mailbox, fence or trash can.

Kneeling positions have other advantages, too. Even where there is no cover or concealment, a kneeling position makes you a smaller target. Kneeling positions are also generally more stable than standing positions, thus enhancing shooting accuracy.

A kneeling firing position may also allow you to remain undetected by an assailant and thus avoid confrontation altogether. An attacker who expects to see his or her victim at normal standing eye level may be unprepared to respond quickly to a defender below normal eye level. In fact, a defender effectively using low cover or concealment in a kneeling position may not even be seen by an aggressor, especially under low-light conditions.

For most shooters, kneeling positions are quick to move into and out of, and thus are frequently used in defensive shooting situations. The serious defensive shooter should practice the various kneeling positions until they are achieved easily and naturally.

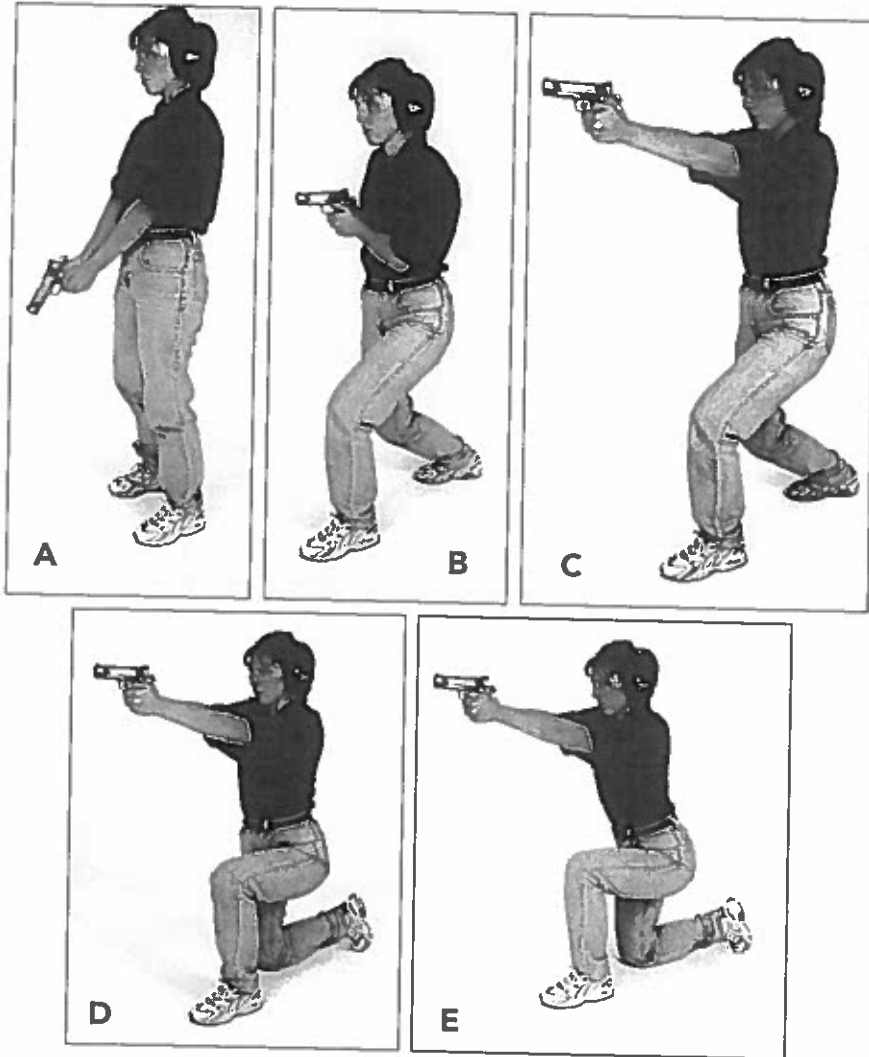
**High Kneeling Position.** In the high kneeling position, the upper body position is essentially the same as that of a standing two-handed position, the support-side leg is bent and serves as the support leg, and the firing-side knee is placed on the ground. The body leans slightly forward to counter recoil. For maximum stability, it is important that the firing-side foot rests on the toes and forward part of the ball of the foot, the line between the knee and hip of the firing-side leg is vertical (perpendicular to the ground), and the support-leg knee is directly over the toe. These

specific foot and leg placements are essential to ensure that the position is balanced and stable, and to allow you to efficiently move into and out of the position as necessary. It is also important to keep your firing-side lower leg directly behind your thigh.

The high kneeling position may be assumed in two ways; in either method, the pistol must point in a safe direction at all times. First, you may step forward with your support leg at the same time your firing-side knee is lowered to the ground. In this technique, the firing-side foot remains in place. Alternatively, you may step back with your firing-side foot and then



*The high kneeling position.*



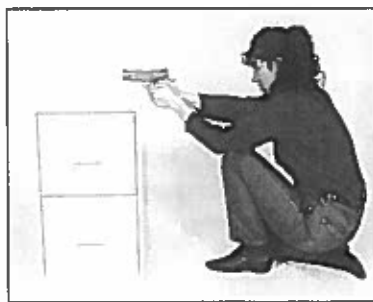
*Assuming the high kneeling position. From the low ready position (A), the shooter steps back with the strong-side foot (B) and extends the gun (C). The shooter then drops straight down onto the firing-side knee (D), making sure that the support-side knee is directly above the foot. Finally, the shooter leans toward the target slightly to provide better balance and to counteract recoil (E).*

drop your firing-side knee straight down into position. The former procedure may be used when you are approaching cover, or where there is sufficient space to allow the forward step. When you are already close to the object providing cover, or wish to distance yourself from it, the second kneeling technique is used.

While assuming a high kneeling position using either technique, the muzzle must be kept pointing in a safe direction. If you go into a kneeling position from a ready position, a retention ready position is preferable to a low ready position. For many shooters, the retention ready position provides better balance while dropping into a kneeling position.

and keeps the muzzle pointing toward the target. Your arms are extended forward into a firing position as your knee contacts the ground.

**Low Kneeling Position.** The low kneeling position allows both a lower shooter position as well as greater stability than the high kneeling position. In terms of leg position it is essentially identical to the high kneeling position, with the exception that the firing-side foot may rest on the ball of the foot or may be placed flat along the ground, for a lower profile. The upper body position differs considerably. Instead of the relatively erect posture of the high kneeling position, the body is bent forward until the support-side arm rests on the knee of the support leg, with the contact point of the arm located above the elbow. The greater degree of forward lean results in both a lower position as well as better recoil absorption.



*The low kneeling position. Note the effective support for the weak hand.*

The increased stability of the low kneeling position results from both its lower shooter posture as well as its effective use of bone structure to provide support. It is therefore a particularly good position when accuracy is required. However, it is slower to get into and out of than the high kneeling position. The low kneeling position can be assumed either by stepping forward with the support leg or stepping rearward with the firing-side leg.

The low kneeling position is preferred when cover is low, when increased stability is needed to hit a smaller target, or when there is sufficient time to assume the position. Even when cover is sufficiently high to justify a high kneeling position, a low kneeling position may expose less of your body to an attacker, and its recoil-absorbing qualities may allow you faster follow-up shots.

**Supported Kneeling Position.** In the supported kneeling position, the gun is supported on the object providing cover or concealment, such as a trash can lid, car hood, or mailbox. In this position, your lower-body positioning is similar to that used in the high kneeling and low kneeling positions. Your upper body leans forward, both to absorb recoil and to enable you to get as low as possible.

Note that only your hands, wrists or arms, and not the gun itself, make direct contact with the object providing cover or concealment. A gun that is fired when its grip is resting on a solid surface likely will place its shots in a different location than when fired from an unsupported or *offhand* position, and may also produce larger groups. Furthermore, supporting some semi-automatic pistols on their magazine baseplates can cause a stoppage. In addition, allowing your gun to contact a hard object may produce a sound that gives away your position.

If the supporting object is very low, it is preferable to sit back into the position slightly rather than bend too far forward at the waist. By sitting back, the weight of your upper body is still centered over your lower body, giving better balance and allowing rapid movement if necessary. Excessively bending the upper body forward shifts your balance too far to the front to allow quick changes in position.



*The low (left) and high double kneeling positions.*

**Double Kneeling Position.** The double kneeling position is probably the quickest of all the kneeling positions to get into. Simply bend both knees simultaneously, dropping them to the ground. Your body leans slightly forward to absorb recoil and the line between your hip and knee is not perpendicular to the ground but angled slightly to the rear, for better balance. The lower your position, the more you will have to sit back in the position to keep the body weight centered.

While the double kneeling position is fast and simple to assume, it may not be appropriate for older, less flexible shooters, or those with knee problems. Also, there is a possibility of knee injury if the knees are driven hard into an unyielding concrete or asphalt surface. In addition, for heavier or older shooters, the double kneeling position may present more of a challenge to move from.

## SQUATTING POSITION

In some situations it may be necessary to quickly minimize exposure to an adversary, but it may not be possible or desirable to assume a kneeling position. This might be the case when the surface underfoot is uneven, strewn with broken glass, poorly seen (as in very low light) or likely to make a telltale sound that would give away your position. Under these conditions, you can simply squat straight down behind any convenient object providing cover or concealment.

The primary advantages of the squatting position are simplicity, quickness and silence. Some people may have difficulty maintaining balance while in this position; stability may be improved by widening the stance and placing the firing-side foot slightly to the rear of the support-side foot. Additional stability may be acquired by supporting the extended arms on the object providing cover or concealment. Even with such support, the squatting position is not as stable as any of the kneeling positions. Also, older persons or those with knee problems or weak leg muscles may find the squatting position taxing to maintain or move from. Even young and fit persons will likely experience leg



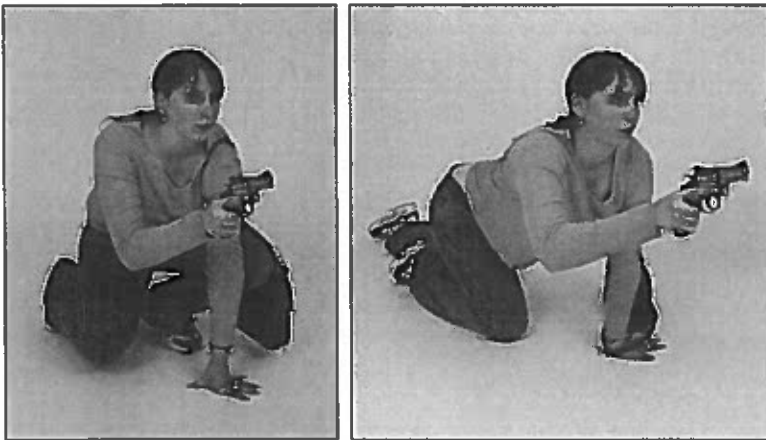
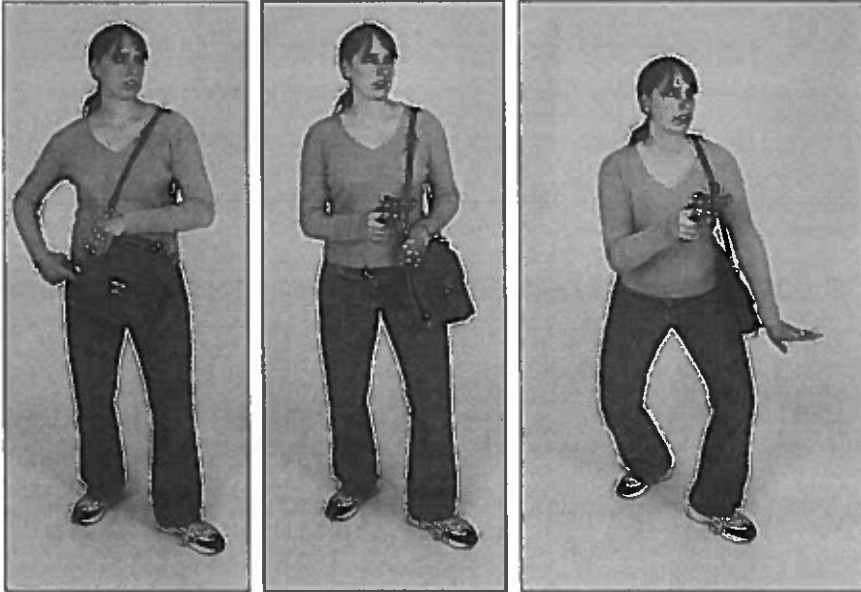
*The squatting shooting position is perhaps the quickest position to assume from a standing position, and is achieved by simply squatting straight down.*

muscle tremor after a minute or so in this position; the squatting position should thus be considered a temporary position.

## ROLLOVER PRONE POSITION

A prone firing position may be preferred in situations in which there is no ready cover, only very low cover, such as a curb, and you must present as small a target as possible. Prone positions also generally allow very stable gun support, and thus may be used when greater accuracy is desired.

The prone position that is universally taught by defensive shooting instructors is called the rollover prone position. To assume this position, first face toward the target. The





*Rollover prone position showing body weight rotated to strong side, and weak-side foot crossed over strong-side leg.*

shoulders may be square to the target, or the firing side may be angled slightly rearward. With the firing hand, the gun is drawn from the holster and rotated and extended toward the target, and the trigger finger is located alongside the frame, out of the trigger guard. The support hand is held to the chest, clear of the muzzle. When the muzzle is rotated toward the target and the gun is well out in front of the body, drop to both knees. From a kneeling position, go forward and down, supporting the weight of your upper body with your extended support hand. During this movement, keep the gun's muzzle pointing at the target and out in front of your support hand. If this movement is performed smoothly, you should be able to see the sights as you go forward, achieving a rough sight picture that requires only minimal refinement after you have completed the position. You should come to rest on the firing side of your body, with your firing-side arm supported by the ground. Finally, join your support hand to the firing hand to complete the two-hand grip, bring your support-side leg up toward your abdomen to shift more weight onto the firing side of your body, and rest your face on your firing-side shoulder. Your firing-side arm will be extended straight out, and both arms, as well as the firing hand, will be supported by the ground.

Rolling the body onto the firing-hand side accomplishes two things. First, it takes weight off the diaphragm, making it easier to breathe and reducing the amount of sight disturbance that occurs with each breath. Second, it creates a steadier platform for accurate shooting than would be afforded by a flat prone position. Note that some people gain additional stability in this position by crossing the support-side foot over the firing-side leg.

Avoid dropping heavily to the ground when assuming the rollover prone position. In addition to potentially causing injury, a hard impact with the ground will disrupt your view of the sights. The additional time it will take you to regain sight alignment will more than offset any time you save by dropping to the ground a fraction of a second more quickly.

Also, avoid supporting the gun on the ground. Contact of the magazine basepad with hard ground can cause erratic accuracy, and can, in some pistols, increase the likelihood of a stoppage.

While the rollover prone position minimizes the exposure of the body when there is no cover, and allows accurate extended-range shooting, it may be difficult for persons with certain physical limitations to get into and out of. Also, with this position it may be difficult to obtain an unobstructed sight picture on terrain that is uneven, strewn with debris or overgrown with tall grass.

It is impossible to predict how an attack may occur, or what shooting position may have to be used to counter it. For this reason, it is important for the citizen who carries a concealed firearm to know how to assume, and fire effectively from, a variety of shooting positions.





# CHAPTER 17

## Aiming and Firing Techniques

Mastering the fundamentals of pistol shooting and the various defensive shooting positions only partially prepares you to use a handgun effectively to protect your life. It is also essential to understand and apply other defense-related skills and concepts, such as defensive accuracy, flash sight picture, point shooting, firing multiple shots, facing multiple assailants, and scanning to assess for additional threats.

### Defensive Accuracy

Violent encounters typically take place at a distance of only a few feet and are completed in a few seconds. Thus, a high level of pinpoint accuracy is not required of the individual, the gun or the ammunition. A good general estimate is that the ability to keep all shots on a standard 8 1/2" by 11" sheet of paper at 21 feet, hitting in the center of exposed mass, is sufficient for most defensive purposes.

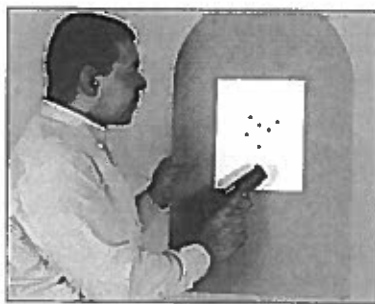
Experienced shooters will recognize that this is an extremely modest level of accuracy, well within the capabilities of virtually any firearm even in only moderately skilled hands. However, what can be easily attained in a well-lit practice range, firing at a stationary target using a stable two-hand grip, is far different than what can be expected during the stress of a sudden attack.

In the vast majority of defensive encounters, once the need to shoot becomes unavoidable, it is essential to fire as fast as you accurately can. Both a proper shooting position and good execution of the shooting fundamentals are essential to accurate, rapid fire.

Inevitably, there will be a certain degree of shot dispersion around the center of mass. This is not the result of deliberately aiming at different spots. All shots are aimed at the same area—the center of exposed mass. The shots are spread out due to the speed with which shots are fired and the less-than-perfect alignment of the sights.

Note that if you are shooting ragged one-hole groups in the center of the exposed target mass during practice, you should probably be shooting faster. If your shots are spreading to the edge of a large target, beyond the maximum allowable group size (an 8 1/2" by 11" sheet of paper) at 21 feet, you should slow down.

Probably more than any other factor, the effects of stress are responsible for the deterioration in accuracy often observed during defensive shooting situations. Studies of



*Adequate defensive accuracy as reflected by this group fired on an 8 1/2" by 11" sheet of paper at seven yards.*

## MULTIPLE ASSAILANTS

Crime statistics indicate the growing prevalence of attacks involving more than one assailant. Although the same basic defensive shooting skills are used whether you are facing one violent criminal or several, successfully defeating multiple adversaries involves slightly different kind of threat assessment.

When confronted with multiple assailants, the primary rule is to engage the targets in the order of the greatest threat. For example, if you encounter two intruders in a parking garage, one armed with a gun and one with a piece of pipe, you would normally engage the gun-wielding criminal first. Factors involved in threat assessment include:

- the distance of each attacker;
- the type of weapon possessed by each attacker; and
- the mobility of each attacker.

The attacker armed with a gun may not always represent the greatest threat, however. An intruder with a baseball bat, running at you from only a few feet away, may be more of an immediate threat than his accomplice, 20 feet away with his gun stuck in his waistband.



*In the case of multiple assailants, you may have to assess the relative threat posed by each assailant, and respond accordingly. Here, the closer of the two attackers is wielding a knife, while the other attacker has a gun. In this case, the attacker closest to you may represent the greater threat, even though he is armed with a seemingly less effective weapon than his partner.*

In assessing any threat, whether single or multiple assailants, train yourself to always look at the hands of your attackers; that is where the threat will come from. Be suspicious of hands kept where you cannot see them, such as in pockets, alongside the thigh or behind the back. For example, an attacker armed with a knife may hide his weapon by hanging the hand down naturally, just out of sight behind the thigh. In this fashion it does not appear that he is hiding anything, but the knife can be brought up in a deadly



*A casual pose can conceal a deadly threat. At left, the individual lounges against a wall, his hands seemingly empty. However, when his right hand is rotated forward (right), a large folding knife is shown to be concealed in his palm.*

thrust before you can react to it. Always assume that hands that are out of sight may hold a weapon.

When visualizing a multiple-adversary attack, or when practicing at the range using multiple targets, keep both the target distance and your gun's magazine capacity in mind. Both affect how you decide to engage the targets. If all targets are close, it may be preferable to engage each target with one round and then assess the remaining threats, rather than put two shots on each threat. If you try to engage each of three targets with two shots, for example, you may be vulnerable to the last threat while you are firing at the first two. Also, if your firearm has a very limited capacity, you may run out of ammunition before engaging all targets if you choose to fire two shots at each threat.

## TUNNEL VISION

During a life-threatening confrontation, you likely will be affected by tunnel vision—the tendency to concentrate on the target to the exclusion of everything else around you. This phenomenon is made worse by high stress levels. Tunnel vision can persist for several moments even after the encounter has been resolved, whether that resolution involves the assailant fleeing, surrendering, or being shot. In all of these circumstances, you will tend to keep focused on the area from which the threat came. While you are experiencing tunnel vision, you are vulnerable to attack by additional, unseen assailants.

To maintain maximum alertness and readiness, you must train to first lower the gun and then scan the area to the left and right of the direction of the threat. The scanning



To maintain maximum alertness after an attack is stopped, first lower the gun and then scan to the left and right. If your attacker is incapacitated or has surrendered, the gun remains pointed at him and the eyes scan quickly left and right, keeping him in the peripheral vision, as shown above.

technique used depends upon the situation you find yourself in. If your attacker is down on the ground in front of you, either as the result of your shots or because he has simply surrendered, keep the gun pointed at him and scan by moving your eyes and head only slightly to the left and right with rapid movements, quickly returning to a forward-looking position. Keep your attacker in your peripheral vision at all times.

On the other hand, even if the assailant has fled, you should scan the area for additional threats. Lower your pistol to the ready position, finger off the trigger and assess the area to the left and right of the original threat 180 degrees, then scan a full 360 degrees. You need to visually locate any persons in the vicinity, but without sweeping them with your gun's muzzle.

In situations in which your attacker has surrendered, you should minimize the period of time your eyes are off him. Removing your eyes from the surrendered assailant to scan the area behind you may give him the opportunity to resume the attack on you. When you are covering a surrendered attacker, back up against a wall to eliminate possibility of being attacked directly from the rear by an unseen assailant, and then scan as far left and right as possible without losing sight of the surrendered criminal in your peripheral vision. In this way, you will be aware of any movement the attacker makes. If it is not possible to back up to a wall, you must scan the area behind you. This scan should be performed as quickly as possible to minimize the time the surrendered assailant is out of your view.



When you are covering a surrendered or downed attacker and are waiting for police assistance, back up against a wall and be sure to keep your assailant in view at all times.



**PART V**

**DEVELOPING  
CONCEALED CARRY  
SHOOTING SKILLS  
FOR USE OUTSIDE  
THE HOME**