

# High school girls get lesson in self defence — UPDATED (4:53 p.m.)

Posted By Michael Purvis

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A jab, a punch, maybe a knee to his testicles? Perhaps. But first, women, be aware.

If you can do that, you stand a better chance of avoiding violence before it happens, says a self-defence expert who gave a talk Friday to local high school girls.

"When you think of self-defence, you think of something physical: fighting back, what do you do if somebody grabs you, what do you do if somebody tries to hit you, or grab you, or slap you," said Paul Henry Danylewich, self-defence expert. "Women can do a lot to protect themselves, and a lot of it is just being aware and assertive, and acting on instincts, and understanding how testing behaviour happens on the street, how it happens in a relationship, and some of the warning signs of an abusive relationship."

Danylewich is a martial artist and trained educator who runs White Tiger Assault Prevention, a Montreal-based organization that travels the country teaching women and girls how not to be victims of violence.

Danylewich said women's self-defence used to be only about physical defence, but has changed in recent years.

"When I wrote my book, I had the opportunity to interview some sex offenders and we saw some parallels there – between common street criminals, sex offenders – they're not that confident to just grab a victim, assault a victim," said Danylewich. "They want to test the victim, they want to see if she is an easy target, if she is somebody who's passive, if she is somebody who's easily intimidated, and if the answer is yes, then that's a good target."

"But if the answer is no, if it's somebody who isn't afraid to speak up, is aware of their personal space and doesn't want to let somebody into their personal space and speaks up, makes eye contact, appears strong, then they're more likely to avoid that kind of assault," said Danylewich.

Charity Fleming, a sexual assault and abuse crisis counsellor with Algoma's Women in Crisis, spoke during Danylewich's seminar.

"Most rape victims know that something bad is going to happen before it happens," said Fleming.

She said she hopes the girls who attended Friday's seminar go away knowing better "how to set boundaries."

"How exactly to say, 'Hey, this is my space, that is your space, don't cross over into my space,'" said Fleming.

If you can recognize the danger signs, and react instead of being passive, you stand a lot better chance of getting away before being assaulted or raped, said Danylewich.

Danylewich taught the local girls, some of whom travelled from as far away as Wawa for the day-long seminar, a few simple escape moves, but put more emphasis how to be assertive, and that it's "always better to overreact," verbally and assertively, than to be passive.

He said self defence is more about fighting first, than it is about fighting back.

"We suggest women not wait until they get their hair pulled, or their grabbed. As soon as you feel you're about to get hurt, you need to fight back," said Danylewich.