



HORIZON OF SAFETY, RESILIENCE AND EMPOWERMENT FOR WOMEN

2025-1-FR01-KA220-ADU-000351314



WORK PACKAGE 2
DIGITAL STORYTELLING
& RIGHTS AWARENESS PLATFORM



Co-funded by
the European Union

HERizon

Digital Storytelling & Rights Awareness Platform

Project Partnership

- ASSOCIATION LES MILITANTS DES SAVOIRS (MLS) , France
- UNIVERSIDAD REY JUAN CARLOS (URJC), Spain
- Netzwerk für Fortgeschrittene Bildung und sozialen Wandel (EduChange), Austria
- Internationella Kvinnoföreningen (IKF) , Sweden
Autonomous Women's House Zagreb - Women Against Violence Against Women (AWHZ), Croatia



Universidad
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Module 5

Physical Self-Defense Skills

1. Module Overview

Module title: Physical Self-Defense Skills

Target Group: Adult women, including women with fewer opportunities, women with prior experiences of discomfort or harassment in public spaces, and women interested in learning simple physical safety techniques.

Estimated Duration: 90 minutes total (can be delivered as 2 × 45 min if needed)

Delivery format:

- In-person group session recommended for trust building, 6-10 participants/pairs, small group
- Blended: live session platform and anonymous reflection.



2. Learning Objectives

After completing this module, learners will be able to:

- Understand the purpose and limits of physical self-defense within a broader safety strategy.
- Identify simple body-based skills that increase balance, stability, and confidence in everyday situations.
- Practise basic physical techniques that support escape, disengagement, and protection of personal space.
- Recognise when physical self-defense may or may not be appropriate, prioritising safety over confrontation.
- Strengthen awareness of the body, posture, and movement as preventive tools.
- Know where to seek further training or professional support if desired.

3. Safety Note

This module provides introductory, preventive, and educational information. It does not replace professional self-defense training, security advice, emergency services, or psychological support.

Participation in this module is entirely voluntary. You may go through the content at your own pace, skip any parts that do not feel right for you at this moment, or stop at any time. Participants are encouraged to try only what feels physically safe. All activities are optional, and movements should be adapted to one's own physical abilities, health, and comfort. The focus is on building awareness and simple skills, not on practicing force or engaging in risky simulations.

If, during or after completing the module, you feel discomfort or distress, it is important to remark that participants may pause, skip, or stop at any time.



4. Trainer / Facilitator Notes

This module is best delivered in calm and safe settings with enough space for light movement.

Physical contact or role-play should not be required; demonstrations should be non-intrusive and never simulate violence.

In group settings, facilitators should:

- Respect different physical abilities and offer adaptations.
- Avoid pushing participants to perform movements outside their comfort zone.
- Remain attentive to emotional reactions, especially for participants with trauma histories.
- Refrain from analysing past experiences or encouraging disclosure.
- Provide pauses or grounding exercises as needed.

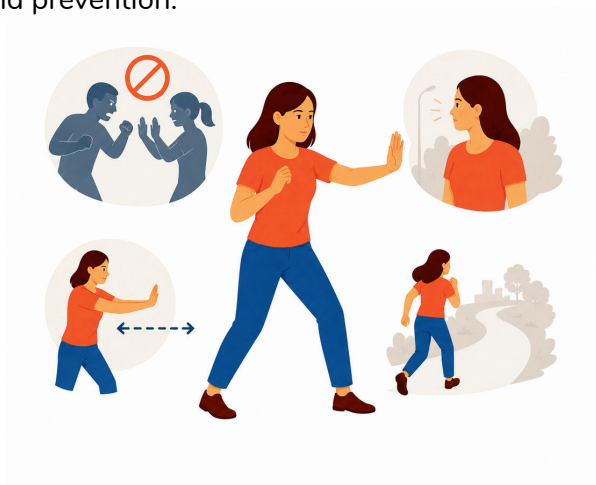
The aim is empowerment through knowledge, not performance or confrontation.



Introduction

Responses to potentially violent physical behaviour do not always have to be violent. In many cases, a response involving physical violence can lead to a spiral of physical violence with very serious consequences for the person attacked.

Physical self-defense is not only about fighting. It is about using simple movements, posture, awareness, and distance to protect yourself and create opportunities to leave unsafe situations. This module introduces basic skills that support confidence and personal safety in everyday life, aligned with HERizon's principles of empowerment, dignity, and prevention.



6. Key Messages

1. Your safety is the priority, leaving or escaping a situation is a valid and strong choice.
2. Self-defense begins long before any physical technique: awareness and posture matter.
3. Simple movements can help create space, stability, and opportunities to move away.
4. Self-defense is not about strength; it is about technique, timing, and boundaries.

7. Educational content

See Annex 1.



8. Practical tools

See Annex 2.



9. Rights awareness & support

Relevant rights include:

- Right to personal safety and bodily autonomy
- Right to physical integrity.
- Right to refuse unwanted contact.
- Legal protection from assault and harassment.

Information on rights and available forms of support is addressed at the level of the overall platform and is not part of this module. Country-specific contacts will be provided in the platform's dedicated support section.

If you feel overwhelmed during or after completing the module, seek support. Information on available support options can be found in a separate section of the platform.

10. Reflection prompts (for facilitators)

This module is primarily designed for self-guided online use. If used in a facilitated setting, the following questions may support professional reflection:

- How do I ensure that all demonstrations feel safe and non-pressuring?
- Are the physical activities accessible to all participants?
- How can I maintain emotional and physical safety while teaching movement-based skills?
- Where might participants benefit from additional explanation or adaptation?

11. Evaluation

Below are several questions related to the content of this module. Their purpose is to support understanding of key concepts and distinctions covered in the module, such as self-defense, autonomy and prevention, creation of safe spaces, and, in some way, psychological resilience, coping with stress, calming, and recovery. The questions are not intended to assess you personally but serve as a short conclusion to the module and an opportunity to reflect once more on the main messages you have explored.

See Annex 3.

12. Ethical & safety checklist

The content follows an ethical and safety-centered approach. The language used throughout is empowering, respectful, and non-violent, ensuring that participants feel supported rather than judged or pressured. No physical contact is required at any point, allowing individuals to engage comfortably and maintain personal boundaries.

All movements suggested are low-risk and entirely optional, making the experience accessible to people with different comfort levels and physical abilities. There is no graphic or potentially triggering material included, and the tone remains trauma-sensitive, prioritizing emotional safety and awareness.

Where appropriate, relevant support resources are provided so participants can seek additional help if needed. Additionally, the content has been reviewed by peer partners to ensure it aligns with shared ethical standards and community expectations.

13. Three real-life micro-scenarios

Scenario 1: Feeling crowded in a public space

Situation:

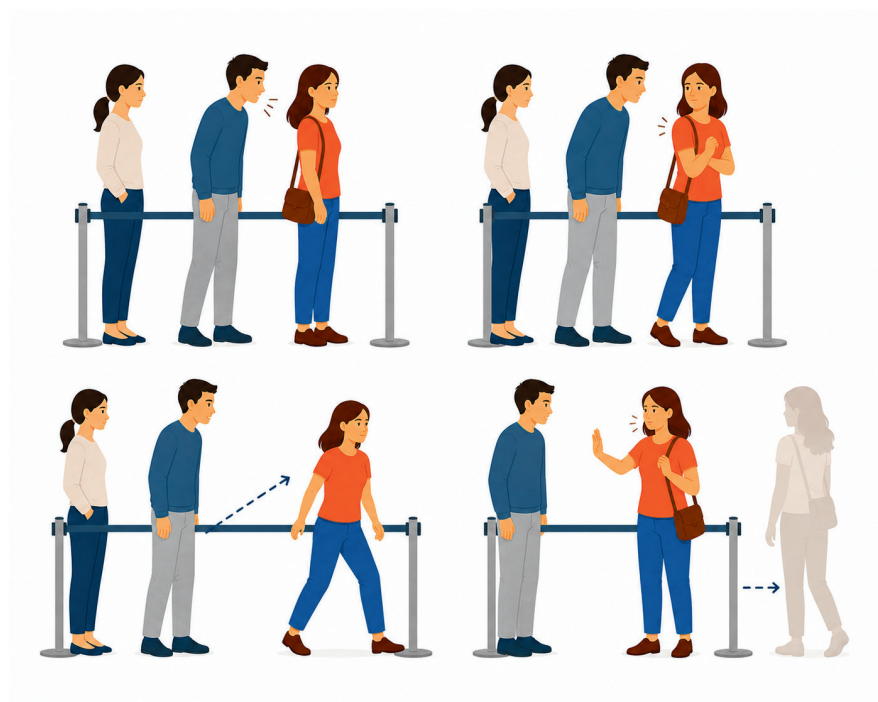
A woman is waiting in a queue. A person behind her repeatedly steps too close, ignoring subtle shifts of her body. She feels uncomfortable but unsure what to do.

Reflection question:

What small physical or verbal actions could help her create space safely?

Safe response options:

- Adjust posture into a stable stance
- Step diagonally forward to increase distance
- Use a calm boundary sentence ("Please allow me some space")
- Move to another position if possible



Scenario 2: Unwanted arm grab in a familiar environment

Situation:

During a group discussion, someone lightly grabs a woman's arm to guide her. The contact is unexpected and unwelcome.

Reflection question:

What simple movement might help her regain autonomy?



Safe response options:

- Rotate the wrist toward the weak point of contact
- Step back to increase space
- Use a calm verbal boundary
- Seek support from a trusted person if the behaviour continues

Scenario 3: Needing to leave an uncomfortable situation

Situation:

At a social event, someone repeatedly touches her shoulder, or any other part of the body, despite subtle attempts to move away.

Reflection question:

What combination of voice, posture, and movement could help her leave safely?

Safe response options:

- Turn the body slightly to reduce access
- Use firm verbal boundaries
- Step toward a safer area or another group
- Ask a staff member or friend for assistance



14. Instructional video

When people find themselves in situations that feel uncomfortable or unsafe, it is common to notice changes in the body, tension in the shoulders, quicker breathing, or a sense of alertness. These reactions are natural signals that the body is preparing to protect itself. They do not indicate weakness or overreaction; they reflect the body's effort to stay safe and aware.

In this context, physical self-defense is not about fighting or confronting danger, but about understanding how the body can support safety through simple, intentional actions. Small adjustments, such as grounding the feet, softening the knees, turning slightly sideways, or stepping diagonally, can make it easier to maintain balance, create space, and move toward safety. These movements are not dramatic or forceful; they are practical and accessible tools that help restore a sense of control.

This module and this video highlight how posture, distance, and movement work together to support safer choices. There is no single "correct" way to respond in every situation, and what feels possible may change depending on the context. What matters is learning to recognize your own signals, noticing when something feels off, and using simple techniques to create space or leave when needed.

The goal is not perfection, but awareness. The stance you adopt, the way you shift your weight, or the moment you decide to step back can create valuable opportunities to disengage. These small decisions are part of personal safety and do not require strength or advanced training.

As you watch the video, take only what feels useful to you. Move at your own pace, try techniques gently, and adapt them to your body and comfort level. Respecting your limits is part of self-protection. If at any point you feel uneasy, you are encouraged to pause, step away, or revisit the content at another moment.



Annex 1

1 What Physical Self-Defense Means

Physical self-defense consists of simple, accessible techniques to be applied during stressful moments to:

- Protect personal space
- Break free from unwanted contact
- Increasing safety
- Restore a sense of choice.

Techniques aim to interrupt momentum or destabilize a situation briefly to enable escape. Actions include:

- Maintaining or creating distance.
- Escaping grips.
- Moving out of reach.
- Placing an object between oneself and another person.

Body mechanics (like turning the wrist toward a weak point or shifting weight) make techniques more accessible.

The main goal is disengagement, creating time and space to move toward safety. Self-defense does not necessary involve neither fighting, nor a physical confrontation.

Activity / Example:

Participants observe three simple images (or facilitator demonstrations) showing stable stance, hands-up boundary position, and step-back movement.



Reflection questions:

Which of these movements feels most natural to you? Would you feel confident in adopting a different posture when feeling uncomfortable?



2 Awareness and prevention through body language

Before any physical technique is needed, posture, movement, and presence can communicate confidence and reduce perceived vulnerability. Situational awareness involves:

- Noticing surroundings and exits
- Changes in behavior without becoming tense or hyper-vigilant.
- Calm, steady movement with natural awareness helps a person think clearly and notice potential concerns early.
- Maintaining this composed, self-assured demeanor supports making proactive choices, such as changing direction or leaving a space when needed.
- An upright posture is one of the most immediate nonverbal signals of confidence, it reflects grounded presence and stability.



- Creating distance early is another key preventive strategy. Just, taking a small step back or repositioning the body can reestablish boundaries before a situation escalates.



- Using the voice clearly is equally important. Practicing verbal boundary-setting helps build confidence so that, if needed, the voice becomes a reliable tool for reinforcing safety.



Together, awareness and body language serve as the first layer of self-protection. They support prevention, reduce risk, and empower individuals to maintain control over their personal space with calm confidence.

Key elements:

- Upright posture
- Aware but calm movement
- Creating distance early
- Using the voice clearly

Activity:

Participants practice a “boundary posture”: feet hip-width apart, hands open at chest height, voice ready.

Reflection questions:

How does your posture affect how confident you feel?

Would you be able to raise your voice in case of risk?

3 Stable stance and balance

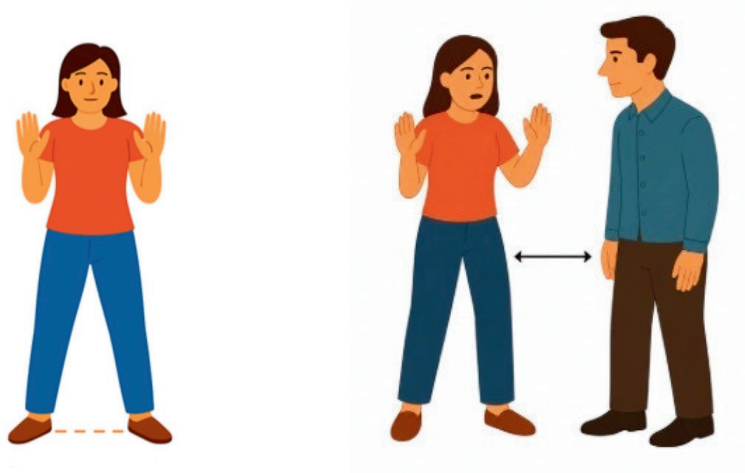
Balance plays a central role in personal safety because:

- helps maintain physical control
- reduces the risk of falling during sudden movement,
- allow to shift direction quicker
- makes stepping away easier.

A basic self-defense stance as shown in the image:

- Widens the base of support.
- improves stability in multiple directions.
- It also naturally prepares the body to move or escape.
- It is not aggressive or confrontational, but practical and prepared.





The key elements of that position are:

- **Knees soft:** Slightly bent knees absorb movement and allow the body to adjust smoothly if pushed or if weight shifts suddenly. Soft knees also reduce strain and make transitions into stepping or turning more fluid.
- **Weight centered between both feet.** In this position, the body remains grounded yet ready, promoting control and quick responsiveness. Leaning too far forward or backward can reduce stability.
- **Hands visible and non-threatening:** typically held at chest level with palms open. This placement communicates boundary awareness without escalating tension. At the same time, it keeps the hands ready to protect the head, create space, or gesture clearly if needed.

Activity:

Participants try basic self-defense stance shifting weight gently from front to back foot and raising hands at chest level, keeping a distance between 40 and 70 cm.

Reflection question:

Which stance feels more stable for you?



4 Creating distance and escape movements

Creating space is one of the safest and most effective forms of physical self-defense:

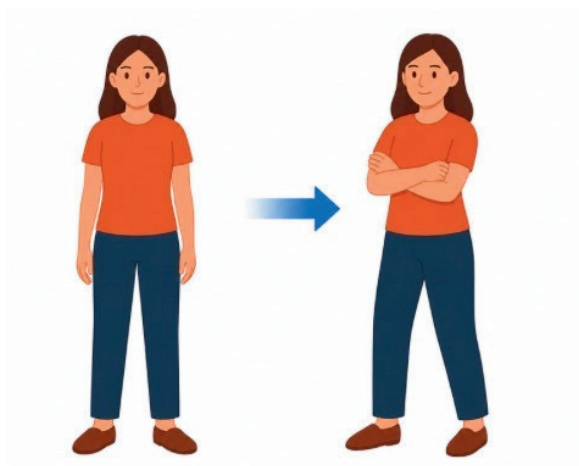
- Reduces immediate risk.
- Increases available options.
- Allows more time to assess the situation.
- Sets boundaries.

One simple action is stepping back diagonally instead of directly backward.



This angle can make it more difficult for someone to follow immediately and often opens a clearer path for leaving.

Turning the body slightly sideways can also reduce vulnerability, by narrowing the front of the body. In this position, sensitive areas of the body are protected.

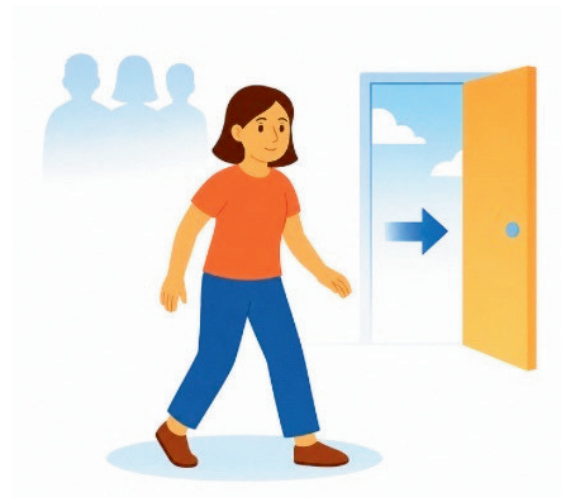


Using the hands to create a “non-contact barrier” is another practical strategy. Holding the hands up at chest height with palms open and visible communicates a boundary without aggression.

This gesture can signal “stop” or “I need space” while physically reinforcing personal distance.



Moving toward open or populated areas further increases safety.



Well-lit, visible spaces with other people nearby reduce isolation and may discourage continued intrusion. It supports the primary goal of self-defense: creating an opportunity to leave safely. Together, these actions emphasize that space is protection. By prioritizing distance, visibility, and exit pathways, physical self-defense remains grounded in prevention and safe disengagement rather than escalation.

Activity:

Practice a single step-back plus angled turn.
Identify possible scape ways around you.

Reflection question:

How could distance help you regain control in an uncomfortable situation?



5. Simple release techniques

Self-defense trainers often teach minimal-force release techniques, using natural body mechanics, that prioritize safety, efficiency, and escape over confrontation. These techniques are designed to help someone disengage from unwanted contact quickly, without escalating the situation.

a) **Wrist release.** Instead of pulling directly against a grip, which often strengthens the hold, the person rotates their arm toward the weakest point of the other person's fingers, typically where the thumb and fingers meet. By aligning the movement with the natural opening in the grip and stepping back at the same time, the wrist can often be freed with minimal effort.



b) **Shoulder turn** used to break free from a light hold. Rather than resisting head-on, the individual pivots their body, turning their shoulders and hips in the same direction. This rotation shifts alignment and reduces the other person's ability to maintain control, making it easier to step out of reach.



c) **Using body weight** rather than muscle strength to pull away is another key principle. This approach reduces reliance on upper-body strength and supports a smoother, more controlled exit.



All movements should be rehearsed gently and without pressure. Practice should be slow, cooperative, and focused on understanding positioning rather than simulating force. The goal of rehearsal is to build familiarity and confidence in the mechanics of the movement, not to recreate stressful conditions.

Activity:

Participants practice moving their own wrist in a circular motion to visualise how a release would work (no partners needed).

Reflection question:

What makes a release movement easier or harder for you?



6 Using the voice as a self-defense tool

The voice is one of the most immediate and accessible self-defense tools available. It can significantly influence a situation. A clear, steady voice used intentionally:

- Communicates awareness.
- Establishes boundaries.
- Can shift the dynamic of an interaction.
- Reinforces personal agency.
- Can prevent escalation before physical contact occurs.

One important function of the voice is to set boundaries.

Direct statements such as “Stop” or “That’s enough” clearly define limits and reduce ambiguity.

- Clear language removes uncertainty about consent or comfort and communicates that a boundary has been crossed.
- Practicing simple, direct phrases helps make them easier to access under stress.

The voice can also alert others. Raising volume when necessary:

- Can draw attention from people nearby.
- Increase visibility.
- Can potentially discouraging further intrusion.
- Is a signal seriousness and readiness to act.
- Interrupt an escalating situation.

That moment of interruption may provide the opportunity to step back, reposition, or leave.



Finally, using the voice supports internal confidence and reinforces the sense of self trust and control.

- “Please, I don’t want this” communicate personal choice and autonomy.
- “Please, allow me some space”, it conveys that someone's excessive closeness makes you feel uncomfortable and suggests a more balanced approach when communicating with them.



Activity:

Participants practise saying one short boundary sentence in a firm, steady voice. If your voice is not loud enough, practise breathing in and out quickly through your mouth at least five times. Then repeat the previous exercise to check the volume of your voice.

Reflection question:

How does it feel to express a boundary clearly?

Annex 2

8. Practical tools

Participants receive simple, practical tools they can continue using after the session to reinforce learning and support ongoing safety awareness. These tools are designed to be easy to remember, adaptable to different environments, and grounded in prevention rather than confrontation. The intention is to help individuals check in with their surroundings and their bodies in a structured but accessible way.

1st Tool.

Short safety checklist centered on body positioning.

The guiding question, “Is my body in a safe position?” encourages moment-to-moment awareness. Participants are invited to reflect:

- Are my feet stable? This supports balance and readiness to move.
- Do I have space to move? This reinforces the importance of distance and exit pathways.
- Are my hands free and visible? This ensures both preparedness and non-threatening communication.
- Can I step away? This keeps the primary goal — safe disengagement — at the forefront. The checklist functions as a quick internal scan that can be used in everyday situations.

2nd Tool.

Mini-Guide built around a clear 3-Step Safety Response: Awareness, Distance, and Movement.

- Awareness involves noticing early discomfort, shifts in tone, or changes in proximity before a situation escalates.
- Distance emphasizes creating space, repositioning, or identifying an exit as soon as possible.
- Movement refers only to simple, low-risk techniques used to protect the ability to leave, not to engage or overpower.

This structured sequence helps participants think in steps rather than reacting impulsively under stress.

3rd Tool.

Participants are also introduced to decision paths that encourage flexible thinking. For example: “If someone comes too close → What are my options?” This prompt shifts focus from feeling trapped to identifying choices. Options may include using the voice to set a boundary, adjusting posture to appear more grounded and confident, stepping back to reestablish personal space, moving into a safer or more populated area, or seeking help. By rehearsing these possibilities in advance, individuals build mental readiness and reduce hesitation.

Together, these practical tools extend learning beyond the session. They reinforce awareness, emphasize choice, and support calm, proactive responses that prioritize safety and the ability to leave.

Annex 3

Evaluation questions

The following questions are designed to review key concepts from the module and reinforce understanding of its core principles. This evaluation focuses on safety-centered thinking, prevention strategies, and practical decision-making rather than physical strength or confrontation. The goal is not to test perfection, but to encourage reflection on how awareness, balance, distance, voice, and personal choice contribute to safer outcomes. Participants are invited to select the answer that best aligns with the module’s emphasis on empowerment, accessibility, and the ability to disengage safely.

1. Physical self-defense is primarily about:

- A) Fighting an attacker
- B) Strength and aggression
- C) Simple skills that support safety and escape
- D) Advanced martial arts

2. A stable stance helps because:

- A) It intimidates others
- B) It improves balance and ability to move
- C) It stops all risks
- D) It replaces awareness

3. Creating distance is useful because:

- A) It guarantees safety
- B) It increases time and space to leave
- C) It provokes confrontation
- D) It is only for trained athletes

4. The voice can be a tool of self-defense when it:

- A) Sets boundaries clearly
- B) Shouts aggressively
- C) Is silent
- D) Is used only in emergencies

5. Participants should perform all physical movements in the module:

- A) Even if uncomfortable
- B) Only if the trainer insists
- C) Only within their own comfort and abilities
- D) As fast as possible

Situational Awareness (Please self-reflect if you would be able to take the right action)

1. You are standing in a queue and someone repeatedly steps too close despite your subtle repositioning. What would be your safest first action?

- A) Push the person away
- B) Turn aggressively toward them
- C) Step diagonally to create space and use a clear verbal boundary
- D) Ignore the discomfort

2. Someone lightly grabs your wrist during a conversation and you want to disengage safely. What aligns with the module's approach?

- A) Pull forcefully against the grip
- B) Rotate your wrist toward the weakest point of contact while stepping back
- C) Freeze and wait
- D) Grab the other person in return

3. At a social event, someone keeps touching your shoulder despite subtle attempts to move away. What should be your priority?

- A) Endure it to avoid conflict
- B) Confront them physically
- C) Create distance, use a firm verbal boundary, and move toward a safer area
- D) Wait until it escalates

4. You notice tension in your body when someone approaches too closely. According to the module, this reaction means:

- A) You are overreacting
- B) You should ignore the feeling
- C) Your body is signaling awareness and readiness
- D) You must immediately confront the person

5. You sense a situation becoming uncomfortable but no physical contact has occurred. What reflects the module's principles?

- A) Stay to prove confidence
- B) Leave early as a preventive action
- C) Wait until the situation escalates
- D) Confront the person to assert dominance

Self-reflexion exercise

Please indicate how much you agree with the statements below using the following scale

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

Respond to each statement below	Assessment				
I feel confident using my voice to set a clear boundary if	1	2	3	4	5
I am more aware of how posture and stance can	1	2	3	4	5
I feel capable of using simple movements (e.g., stepping	1	2	3	4	5
I recognise that choosing to leave a situation is a strong	1	2	3	4	5
I feel that I can practice these techniques while respecting	1	2	3	4	5



 <https://herizon-project.eu>

Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership in Adult Education
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