**Empowerment Self Defense as a Healing Modality**

Empowerment Self Defense (ESD) is a unique form of self-defense developed over the last 40 years by feminist practitioners worldwide. Empowerment Self Defense:

* Rejects victim-blaming.
* Addresses violence by partners, acquaintances, and other known assailants.
* Debunks “stranger-danger” myths.
* Examines gender socialization.
* Teaches awareness, boundary setting, & verbal skills.
* Teaches accessible physical defense skills.
* Is trauma-informed and survivor-centered.
* Encourages healing and community organizing.

ESD contributes to the healing of survivors of sexual and other violence by:

* Creating an **enriched environment** that is **explicitly safe.**
* Giving participants opportunities to make **active choices and express personal boundaries** that are respected by others.
* Engaging in active coping by simulating situations through role-plays and exercises.
* Using mind/body techniques to promote **interoceptive awareness** (recognition of the signals within the body).
* Providing an opportunity to **learn and practice personal safety skills**, such as awareness of danger cues and generation of active responses.
* Offering experiences of **social connection** as safe and comforting.

Research demonstrates that training in ESD lowers rates of victimization or re-victimization, decreases self-blame and victim-blaming, and increases feelings of self-efficacy and the tendency to seek help (Sanquist et al. 2014, Hollander, J. A. 2014). Training in ESD increases self-confidence, assertiveness, physical competence, and disclosure. It also decreases anxiety, fear, feelings of helplessness, and self-blame (Breklin 2008 and Hollander 2014).

ESD can be presented in a variety of formats including half or full day intensives, multi-session courses, and multi-week groups for people who have experienced trauma.