



## Trauma-Informed Self-Defence Programme

### About the Programme

Our Defence4Women trauma-informed programme is an introductory 8-week course in self-defence and kickboxing offered to small groups of women who have suffered trauma, assault and/or abuse in all its forms.

The classes are for a maximum of 6 women at a time, and are taught in person by female martial arts coach and facilitator Tamsin Davis.

Each weekly class is 1hr in length, and involves activities such as mindful stretching, effective striking, kickboxing movements and grounding techniques using exercise to simulate the physical and physiological symptoms of arousal in a safe manner.

There are 2 levels of programme:

- **Level 1** is the recommended place to start as physical contact is limited to striking pads only, something we gradually build up to over the weeks.
- **Level 2** builds on the skills learned in Level 1 and introduces more contact in the form of partner role play, involving person-on-person contact simulating different types of attack. This is recommended for those who are ready to progress from Level 1.

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### ***What makes a trauma-informed programme different?***

- *Emphasis on choice for the participants*
- *Interoception as a means to reconnect brain & body*
- *Grounding techniques to stay present*
- *Instructor awareness of symptoms & responses to trauma, & potential triggers*
- *Programme is only open to female survivors of trauma & abuse*

## About the teacher

Tamsin has been training in taekwondo for 19 years, teaching martial arts and self-defence for over 5 years and runs a thriving women's taekwondo club in Leicester. After seeing the increase in confidence and self-esteem that learning a martial art brings to many of her students, she was inspired to research the positive effects physical activity can have specifically on survivors of trauma.

Understanding that trauma can be stored in the body, and that many of its symptoms manifest themselves physically, she wanted to pass on the benefits of learning an empowering skill such as self-defence within a framework for aiding trauma recovery.

In addition to teaching, she currently volunteers for domestic abuse charity Living Without Abuse which has given her extensive training in the effects of trauma and experience in working with survivors of abuse, and she has run martial arts and self-defence workshops for women's counselling charity Quetzal.

Tamsin has also completed teacher training with the Conscious Combat Club, the world's first training programme in trauma-informed martial arts.

Her women's club, Taekwondo4All, offers a yearly Pink Belt Project scholarship to a survivor of domestic abuse.



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## Why trauma-informed self-defence?

'Bottom-up' therapies such as trauma-informed yoga, dance or painting are already recognised as complimentary therapeutic accompaniments to more traditional 'top-down' talk-therapies such as counselling and CBT. In therapies such as somatic experiencing for example, clients do not directly address traumatic memories but instead pay attention to their arousal signals and learn how to deregulate using awareness of the body's feelings and sensations. The goal of such therapies is to monitor the signs of hyper- and hypo-arousal in order to remain within the 'window of tolerance'

Trauma-informed martial arts and self-defence builds upon this by also teaching skills to empower a client (self-defence and striking techniques), thus challenging their current self-perceptions, and boosting confidence and self-esteem at the same time. Physical activity in itself is a proven enhancer of mood.

Trauma-informed self-defence offers clients a distinct alternative to current therapies like yoga or dance, which might not appeal to every client. Moreover, I have had many clients ask about learning self-defence after suffering an assault or abuse as a way to feel safer, yet many are not ready to join a mainstream class or work alongside male students or instructors because of past experiences. This programme allows clients to access the skills they want to learn, whilst respecting their trauma needs.

## ***What makes this programme trauma-informed?***

*The programme is designed to reflect the following principles of a trauma-informed approach:*

- 1. Safety*
- 2. Trustworthiness & Transparency*
- 3. Peer Support*
- 4. Collaboration*
- 5. Empowerment, Voice & Choice*
- 6. Respecting Cultural, Historical and Gender issues*

### **Safety**

The training space is private and secure, a calm oasis in which to train, and participants are limited to 6 per course. Each client is invited to an initial one-to-one assessment in which their trauma needs, triggers and goals are discussed so that these can be accounted for when delivering the sessions.

Clients are given choices at every opportunity, such as alternative exercises, a safe space to sit out, or by using invitational language that makes opting out a perfectly acceptable option.

### **Trustworthiness & Transparency**

The 8-week course is planned and shared with the clients in advance so they know what to expect. Each session follows a similar pattern of warm-up, technique, cardio and grounding exercise, finished with mindful stretching, so it feels familiar to the client each week.

Exercises such as pad work (that involve striking the pads) are gradually introduced, allowing clients to get accustomed slowly to contact. Initially the strike pad is held by the instructor, before clients are invited to hold them for their own partner work.

All information shared by clients before and during a session is kept confidential, and clients are reminded of this at the start of each session.

## Peer Support

The small group size means that every client feels heard and valued, and we can develop a strong sense of community within the group. As the programme progresses, participants will be invited to partner up with each other for exercises which further promotes friendship and camaraderie in the group. Although we do not share traumatic stories, clients understand that each group member has experienced trauma and this helps to reduce the isolation that many survivors can feel, as well as the stigma that often accompanies responses to trauma.

At the end of each session, clients are invited to share any positive developments to remind them of their progress and build group cohesion.

## Collaboration

Clients have the opportunity to suggest their own grounding techniques, stretches and group rules, and to regulate the intensity of each exercise. At registration, care is taken to listen to the client's viewpoint and to implement their wishes during the sessions (for example, a client might feel safer with the doors open).

Unlike in a traditional martial art where the instructor is very much seen as separate to the student, the programme facilitator participates alongside clients to reduce the power imbalance often found in martial arts and other instructor/student activities.

## Respect

We recognise that the client is the best authority on their own body and knows when to slow down, change an exercise or stop. Clients are given choices at every opportunity, such as varying the intensity of a strike by starting low and working up, or by having a quiet space to sit out if needed. Invitational language is used to reinforce those choices so that a client feels comfortable saying 'no' or opting out of a particular exercise. Clients' feelings and emotions are validated and comments welcomed in a non-judgemental environment.



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