



# Instinct and Knife Attack Defense



**When officers are attacked with edged weapons they will naturally react. One of the keys to a proper defense is to incorporate that instinctual response.**

It is ridiculous to think that an officer could take a single defensive tactics course that teaches specific techniques for knife defense and then be prepared for a knife attack. In fact, learning specific techniques for specific knife attacks from specific directions such as angle 1, angle 2, angle 3, and so on—with the exception of setting the context for the training—is useless unless the officer has the opportunity to hone these techniques continually.

Police officers are far better off learning concepts as opposed to techniques given the intermittency of their training.

The concepts of instinctual response to knife attacks are simple:

- Avoid the attack and get to your handgun
- And/or control the attacker's weapon and get to your handgun.

## **Avoiding the Attack**

Some basic concepts or movements are important to know for keeping away from the weapon. You should not think of this as a technique, but simply as a movement.

Sweep the attacking hand away and create distance between the assailant and yourself. If your first reaction is to naturally stay away from the threat, then practice using the assailant's momentum to make him or her miss and pass by you.

Practicing getting away from the attacker will build confidence in your ability to avoid being cut. If your natural inclination is to get away from the threat, practice gaining distance after the threat has been passed.

Again, this is not a technique per se; this is a concept: Get as far away from the threat as possible. Once distance has been created, retrieve your handgun.

## **Control the Weapon and Counterattack**

Some officers more instinctively try to control the attacking hand/arm. If that is your natural response, then you need to practice trapping the attacker's arm and counterattacking. During drills, you must maintain control of the attacker's knife hand and either practice natural attacks to disable the attacker or disengage and gain time to draw your handgun.

In a best case scenario, you will be able to take the attacker into custody without using deadly force. But if you face continued deadly threat from your edged weapon-wielding attacker, you may have to react decisively with lethal force.

You can discover how you will naturally react to a sudden knife attack through basic dynamic training. Simple drills involving one "attacker" and one officer are very useful for determining what move you will instinctually take.

Once you know how you will react to a knife attack, you should practice repeatedly that move and how you will follow up on it to seize the advantage from your attacker.

## **Situational Awareness**

Knife attacks happen suddenly, but usually not without some prior indications. Noticing these indicators can help you prevent the attack or gain time to respond.

Make it a habit to stay focused on what is happening around you. Keep your hands up, weapon side back, and maintain a safe distance. Remember, distance buys you time. The greater the distance between you and a potential threat, the more time you will have to react.

Be attentive to the suspect's words and actions. The best defense against an attack is to be aware that an attack is coming.

There are both verbal and physical clues that indicate someone is about to attack you. Your safety depends on your awareness of these "tells." The problem is that since you are not attacked frequently, it's easy for you to begin to think that each person is either going to comply or possibly resist.

Some phrases said by a suspect may be obvious indicators that you are about to be attacked. These include such classic criminal declarations as "I'm not going to jail," "I'm going to kick your ass," or "You can't take me."

However, I'm sure you are aware that some arrestees getting ready to attack will not be so blatant. They may even say nothing at all. Therefore, trust your instincts.

Experienced officers know that saying nothing is as dangerous, if not more dangerous, than those arrestees verbally threatening us.

It is important to be attentive to all the body movements of the suspect or arrestee. The arrestee will often telegraph what he or she is about to do. There are many movements to watch for and be concerned about. Examples include suspects rolling up their sleeves, stepping one leg back, and clenching their fists. It is important to watch the suspect's entire body peripherally, while looking him or her in the eye.

Suspects' eyes tell us much. If they are looking around, they may be looking for an escape route or for witnesses before they attack. If they look at your handgun, they may be preparing to attempt to disarm you. If they are looking at your legs, they may be preparing to initiate a takedown. If they are clenching their fists while looking at your face, they may be preparing to punch you.

Regardless of whether you recognize these things happening, trust your instincts. Address whatever behavior makes you think the arrestee is preparing to attack or run. And most importantly, watch his or her hands. It is the suspect's hands or items in the suspect's hands that are most likely to injure you.