

# Emotional Healing After An Attack

By Susan Bartelstone, Crime Prevention Specialist

Crime Prevention 101  
Keeping Yourself  
Safe! Series



☑ Also consider taking ongoing martial arts training (at least for a year or two). This is also extremely effective in overcoming the "freeze factor." See [www.nwmaf.org](http://www.nwmaf.org)

☑ Another alternative would be to join a survivor support group for on-going reinforcement and also consider taking up a spiritual practice like meditation.

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No absolutes exist in crime scenarios and no advice can address every variable. Sometimes nothing can be done to prevent an undesirable outcome.

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## Dear Susan:

I'm a 36-year-old female living in the Midwest. Having survived an attack by both a stranger and an acquaintance, I would like to know how one goes about finding any sense of security in one's life. I have taken two self-defense courses, both of which were very good. I feel more confident in my physical ability to defend myself, but I haven't found that they addressed the problem I have dealing with the intimidation and the psychological component that attackers use in a sexual assault. Even if I am physically able to defend myself, it doesn't benefit me if I can't get past the intimidation and fear factor. Also, I was one who "froze" during my assault and was unable to fight back. I want to know if there's a way to combat that "freeze" reaction. **Mary M.**



**Dear Mary:** No right or wrong responses exist in a crime scenario, so never berate yourself for freezing during the assault. The ONLY important thing is that you survived. Please know that it's COMMON to feel fear, intimidation and shame afterwards; and also, to blame yourself for what happened, even though the only person to blame is the perpetrator of the violence. These feelings, and other psychological residue, are symptoms of what's called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (or PTSD).

Most people need more than one therapeutic modality to come to terms with PTSD. You didn't mention in your e-mail whether you've had counseling to address your fears and symptoms; but it takes time, patience and much effort to heal from any kind of trauma and therapy is an ESSENTIAL first step. If you haven't taken that step, please contact a rape crisis center or woman's organization in your area immediately for a referral to a therapist who specializes in treating sexual assault survivors and PTSD.

If you've already had some so-called "traditional" counseling, maybe a different approach is in order. There's an innovative and highly effective therapeutic approach called **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy**, referred to simply as **EMDR**, which is known for uncovering buried trauma and memories very quickly and resolving them.

It might make sense to consult with an EMDR specialist and you can check with the EMDR International Association ([www.emdria.org](http://www.emdria.org)) or the EMDR Institute ([www.emdr.com](http://www.emdr.com)) to see if any therapists in your area are trained in this procedure.

Finally, self defense training **IS** the best way, a proven way, to prevent a future "freeze" response should another assault (or stressful situation) befall you. I don't know what type of self defense courses you've taken; but the best ones involve realistic attack scenarios and a padded attacker to practice on that you can strike and kick at with full, primal force. And, take at least one course per year, of any kind, to get the most long-term benefit.