

Harassment & Anti-Social Behaviour Strategies for Coping & Taking Action Part 2

By Chris Denwood

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In part 1 of this article, I explained a little about anti-social behaviour and bullying. I also identified that in many instances, dealing with anti-social behaviour or certain types of bullying will require strategies that most martial artists are not trained in. In the final part of this piece, we will discuss some of the ways in which you can combat these types of threat, without having to resort to violence or escalating the severity of the situation.

Communication

Sometimes a simple friendly chat is all it takes. Let's face it, there may be circumstances that you happen to be unaware of and a little talking can often go a long way towards clearing the air. One thing to watch out for though is that you don't get inadvertently 'roped' into an argument. There are of course cases where no amount of fair discussion will alleviate the situation, but at least you will have tried and if the situation does escalate, then you will more likely be seen by others as a responsible citizen. Some individuals have simply zero respect for others and in these cases, talking would be a complete waste of time. If the tension does start to rise, then it would be best to remain calm, cut the dialogue with an assertive (not aggressive or submissive) statement and then leave.

An example of being assertive would be confidently stating something like, "This is going to stop now" before you leave. It is straight to the point and informs the other party exactly what you want and when you want it. By comparison, "Stop this now or next time I'll come round here and knock you out" is clearly a threat and far too aggressive. Although at times we may feel like saying something like this, it would probably only end up making things worse and being ultimately used against you. In addition, saying something along the lines of, "please just leave me alone" would sound too weak and submissive. Dialogue like this will just end up acting as fuel for the other party and in most cases, increase the torment even further. It's therefore important to create a balance.

By acting in an assertive manner, you will have put across a confident image. Remember, it's not only first impressions that last. A word of caution here – make sure that you assess the situation and determine beforehand that engaging in any type of conversation with the other party is a safe option for you, as sometimes it may not be. It would also be beneficial to inform someone close to you your intentions.

Records

Another useful idea is to keep a record of events in a diary. This should include times and dates, plus as much information about the incident as possible. The more detailed the entry is, the more useful it will be as evidence if the situation does happen to escalate in the future. If you honestly believe that you may not have heard the last of a particular confrontation, then note it down. It may only take a couple of minutes, but could become potentially invaluable. Most events are likely to occur without credible witnesses being present and in these cases, recording the details would naturally be the next best thing.

Sending an 'articulate' letter to a disruptive neighbour for instance may also be a worthwhile option, especially if dialogue is out of the question. You then have evidence that you have approached the situation in a sensible and responsible manner. Again there's no guarantee that the other party won't just laugh and throw it straight in the bin (that is if the letter is even opened to begin with), but at least you will have added another positive 'tick in the box'.

If a particular situation happens to go on for some time, then it would be advisable to start making records and filing everything related to the circumstances. Keep a record any phone calls, letters, e-mails and any other such correspondence. Don't forget to personally sign everything you send out and make sure that you also record any help or assistance you may have asked for. This may seem a little over the top, but believe me, being in a situation like this is no joke, especially if no one is prepared to do anything about it.

Help From Others

There is absolutely nothing wrong with requesting and obtaining help from others. It certainly does not make you any less of a person and if anything, shows initiative. We often request the help of others in many aspects of our lives and I would go as far as to say that our lives would simply not function without the help of others. As martial artists, we simply have to have assistance throughout our training in order to achieve our goals. This is not seen as cheating though or admitting to defeat. It is simply a means to a better, more desired outcome. Nowadays there are lots of people who can help in bullying, harassment or anti social behaviour incidents, which I suppose just goes to show how much of a real problem this is. I've listed some examples below (not necessarily in order of preference or priority) that may help you understand the potential options at your disposal:

- Websites/forums: There are many websites on the internet that deal with various types of anti social behaviour. They provide hints and tips, articles similar to this, message forums, chat rooms and helpful contact addresses or phone numbers.

- Home insurance: Believe it or not, some building and contents insurance companies provide help lines for advice and legal cover. These are often free of charge and included within your policy (check first though). To find out more, contact your insurance company. This is often useful to check if you are planning to contact a solicitor – it may save you a few pennies!

- Mediation: There are numbers of conciliation groups around that focus primarily on anti social behaviour and may be able to provide some sort of mediation service. By contacting these groups in the first instance, you are displaying a responsible character and showing a frame of mind that just wants the situation resolved as amicably as possible.

- Local council & landlords: Especially with neighbour related incidents, your council has a duty towards you to try to resolve problems and to take the appropriate action. In addition, if your neighbour is in rented accommodation, then the landlord will have a similar obligation. You may in fact find that your disorderly neighbour has in fact breached their tenancy agreement!

- Legal advice: This could turn out to be a very costly, timely and stressful option, but one that may have to be employed in certain extreme situations. In most cases, a legal dispute should be avoided at all costs; however, some solicitors offer a free legal advice scheme, therefore at your disposal and a helpful point of contact.

- The Police: If you feel genuinely concerned, call the police. That's what they get paid for. You will be able to talk to a police or community officer and discuss your situation. Again, as

I keep reiterating, this is building up a sound picture of you. Not the sort of person that goes in with all guns blazing, but a member of the community who is trying their best to lead a peaceful life and will do whatever they can to keep it that way. This can only go in your favour if the overall situation escalates.

In our day and age, responding in a physical way to that, which makes us uncomfortable (harassment) is more often than not the least favourable outcome and one that can lead to all sorts of retaliations and ugly aftermath. To be (and remain) on the moral high ground we have to resort to using an amicable mind, coupled with a strong determination to keep the peace so long as it's safe to do so. As martial artists, we all have to accept the fact that although we tend to focus particularly on physical action, a much wider scope of strategies are required for everyday self-protection encounters and that statistically, we may never need to be dependent on our skills to protect against an immediate danger to our personal wellbeing, or the wellbeing of those close to us.

As traditional martial artists I believe that we should always proactively prepare for the harsh reality of combat, since this is by far the hardest part of self-protection to control; and with this intense practice we learn to respect peace, crave for it and inherently build a real apprehension for the absence of it. If we only ever equate to a physical response as the ultimate conclusion though, then arguably, we are morally no better than those thugs who only find the answer to their problems with a raised, clenched fist. Actually, in fact it makes us worse – because we will not only become a thug, we will end up become a thug in possession of a wealth of potentially dangerous knowledge and experience!