



ASSOCIATION OF ESD PROFESSIONALS

# HOW TO GET RETURN PARTICIPANTS

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# HOW TO GET RETURN PARTICIPANTS

## MOTIVATE YOUR STUDENTS TO COMMIT TO LONGER ESD CLASSES



Are you struggling to find ways to get your students to come back after their first “Intro to ESD” class? You may be wondering, “If they loved their first class, why can’t I get them to come back?”

We get it. Many Empowerment Self-Defense (ESD) professionals have been in your shoes. For the longest time, martial artists have offered free, one-off self-defense classes as a way to bring new students to their martial arts schools. Because many ESD professionals come out of the martial arts field, this practice has set a precedent for the field of empowerment self-defense, with one-time self-defense classes becoming a norm when it might not be the best model for ESD (there is so much more to teach!).

This can be frustrating for ESD instructors who understand the value of ongoing classes. Longer ESD courses that develop over days, weeks, or months foster deeper connections between participants, create opportunities for more in-depth conversations, and provide space for repeated training of both physical and verbal techniques. You simply can’t fit everything into a short, one-off training (Trust us, we’ve tried!).



So then how do you get repeat students? How can you structure your classes (or your communications) so that your participants will stay committed and keep coming back to ongoing classes?

In this How-To, we will explore some essential steps to help you build your ESD practice in a way that encourages students to return as many times as they want or need.

## Ready?

Ready to leave frustrations about one-time students in the past and rock your ongoing ESD classes? Let's get started!

# WHAT ARE RETURN PARTICIPANTS?

When we refer to return participants or repeat students, we aren't talking about the one-off student who appears again ten years later for another one-off session. While that is technically a return participant, with this guide we want to support you to build your core group of students who are motivated to come back on an ongoing basis to work with you regularly over a relatively short stretch of time (think a few weeks or months).



One of the benefits of working with repeat students is that you have the opportunity to support them through several stages of their empowerment journey. There is nothing quite like witnessing someone grow over the course of a multi-part ESD course, integrating the principles and strategies into their life as they go.



## STUDENT OR PARTICIPANT?

In this guide, we use the terms “return participants” and “repeat students” interchangeably, as we know that some ESD professionals prefer the term “student” while others just as strongly prefer the term “participant.”

# IT STARTS WITH FOLLOW UP



As is the case for so many ESD instructors, it is likely that you really love the Empowerment Self-Defense methodology. Maybe ESD impacted you so deeply when you first encountered it that your entire life path shifted, and you decided to become an instructor. When you love something so much, it can be hard to understand that the philosophy, “if you build it, they will come” doesn’t necessarily translate to getting return participants.

Even if they loved everything about the class. Even if they had a transformative experience. Even if you’re the best instructor in the world (nicely done). Yes, even then, you will have to follow up if you want to see that student again. We suggest getting your students’ contact information before class (it is generally good practice to send an intake form ahead of a workshop—the form can include some basic questions about the students’ medical and personal history, contact information, and you could even include your liability and photo waivers). And we highly recommend following up afterwards. Check in to see how your students are feeling, if they have questions, and invite them to sign up to your next multi-session workshop or training.





## KEEP IT FRESH!

At the end of a one-off ESD class, consider offering incentives for people to sign up for new courses right away.

- “Just letting folks know, we have some up-and-coming specialty trainings...” (For example, Trauma-Informed Training, Bystander Intervention, Self-Care Workshop, Women of Color ESD Training, etc.).
- “For those interested in signing up now, we have specials available...” (Such as, Buy one, bring a friend for free. Special 3-session package. Pay for two classes get one free. Pay one class get the next half off.)

## KEEP THEM COMING!

For ESD professionals teaching for free or minimal cost to participants but wanting participants to return just the same, such as from the local domestic violence shelters or through a community organization... At the end of a one-off ESD class, consider following up with inspirational, comforting, practical, or encouraging incentives for people to sign up for new courses right away:

- “We hope our class [helped you/motivated you/inspired you/fortified you/gave you courage]. We would love to continue our work together and help you make a real difference in your life. We have some up-and-coming specialty trainings...”
- You could add: “And remember, there is no charge.” Or, “And remember, you pay only what you can.” Or “Don’t let a tough financial situation keep you away, no matter your situation, you are welcome.”

You have many options. Try a few out, see what works for you.

Once you are in touch with your past participants, there are several routes you can take to follow up.

## Try Incentives.

It is fairly safe to assume that your past participants are interested in your ESD offerings. When you open up a new class or training, they should be the first to know! You can offer former students the specials or inspirations we've outlined in above boxes.



### IT'S ABOUT ACCESSIBILITY

"Sales" can be a problematic undertaking for many ESD instructors. Rather than looking at these follow-up offers as "selling," consider that you are making your offerings more affordable for those who may love to come back to learn more from you and for those who really want and need to participate.

You may want to further incentivize repeat participation by offering a bonus private session to anyone who attends every session of a one-week or one-month course, for instance (this works for non-profit and for-profit practices). Even when someone truly wants to participate on an ongoing basis, sometimes they need that extra nudge. They could be hesitant for financial reasons, because they have a busy schedule, or because they are nervous about it (after all, they've only taken a couple hours of ESD so far). Get creative with your incentives. You know your participants best; what would they love to receive as a special bonus?



## REQUEST FEEDBACK.

Another way to follow up with class participants is to ask them for their feedback through a survey. You can ask them what they liked, what they did not like, what they learned, what more they would like to learn, and for any comments or questions they may have. Include a link to your website and/or scheduling app (and you can either suggest they sign up for more classes or leave that unsaid).

## NOTHING BEATS REFERRALS.

Let your former students know that their friends can also get in on your special offers for the next 24, 48, or 72 hours. Time limits can do wonders for motivating people to take action.

You can encourage referrals in material ways, such as giving discounts to students who bring a friend, but it could be that the suggestion alone is enough. You could ask participants at the end of your class to share information about future classes. And your participants will likely take the initiative all on their own, too. If they have a great experience learning ESD, they will want to tell their friends about it!



## BE DIRECT.

If a former student reaches out to you asking about upcoming courses, there is no need to beat around the bush. You know that they are interested! So, dive right in and let them know you have some special offers available right now on your multi-class packages, longer ESD courses, etc.

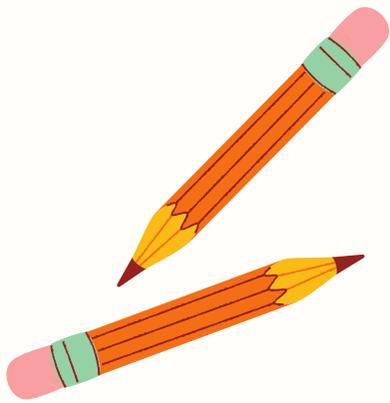
The easier you can make it for someone to sign up, the more likely they are to do so. When a student has to wade through multiple webpages, wait days for an email reply or a call back, or fill out too much paperwork to get through, they are less likely to follow through. You may want to look into client appointment scheduling apps that also take payments, such as [SimplyBook.me](#) (HIPPA compliant and good internationally), Square Appointment, Acuity Scheduling, Picktime, Setmore, etc. See this [list](#) or [this one](#) for descriptions and ratings of many options.



### PRO TIP: Make your own templates.

Feel like you've written the same email or text message a few dozen times? You probably have! There is no need to start from scratch. Every. Single. Time.

Try keeping a list on your computer or cell phone of your go-to responses to FAQs and standard follow-up messages. Then, just copy-paste and personalize, and bring your email-drafting time down from 10 minutes to 30 seconds!



## Yes, YOU!

For ESD professionals who regularly offer 1- or 2-hour presentations or demos, follow up is equally critical to get schools, companies, and other institutions interested and motivated to level up with longer courses.

Following up with past participants is time-consuming, but critically important if you want to see those people back in your classroom. In fact, it is probably the effort and personal engagement implied by follow-up that makes this fundamental piece of running an ESD practice so effective! Thus, even if you are allergic to tapping out emails or sending text messages, try to block out a few minutes a day for the task. In the long run, if getting return participants is a priority for your ESD work, it will be worth it.

# GO DEEPER



As you know, when you teach an introductory ESD class that gives people an overview of the theory and a few favorite techniques, you are merely scratching the surface. You know and we know that they are missing out on many more ESD techniques and strategies, and so much personal growth, but unless you make that clear to them, your students might not know.

During class, be sure to let your participants know that your “intro workshop” or “basics class” is just an overview, or a starting point. You don’t have to hard sell to anyone, but it is to their benefit to know that there are many opportunities to go deeper and grow more in future classes.

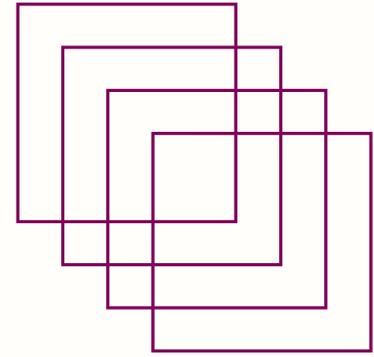


## DON'T FORGET TO FOLLOW THROUGH...

You said you would send your students materials after class? Whether you promised pamphlets, a workbook, a video, or photos from their session, follow through. Let your students know that you keep your word and you are still there. Not only does following through on in-class promises promote a sense of safety and trust, it also brings participants back and motivates them to stay connected, too!

# 6-TIPS FOR MOTIVATING REPEAT STUDENTS

Ultimately, getting return participants is more about consistency and connection than strategy or hacks. As you begin (or continue) to invite your students on longer and more in-depth ESD journeys, here are a few basic concepts to keep in mind:



## 1 || CUSTOMER SERVICE IS KEY!

Everyone wants to be treated well, and this is doubly true if a participant has survived something mentally or emotionally challenging (which many ESD participants have).

## 2 || REWARD THEM.

People like rewards, incentives, loyalty programs, and discounts for being great customers, clients, or students. So give it to them!



## 3 || INSPIRE THEM.

Whether they are paying for their ESD classes or not, participants often need encouragement and inspiration to keep coming back for more.

## 4 || VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE.

Keep your offerings fresh and varied. Multiple beginner sessions with different focus areas or a range of ESD-related curriculums make students feel like there is always something new to learn—which there is.



## 5 || DON'T IGNORE COMPLAINTS.

Constructive student feedback can almost always teach you something that can improve your ESD practice and lead to repeat students. If a student shares a complaint, that is an opportunity to listen with genuine curiosity, meet their need, and possibly develop an even stronger relationship with that person (which can also keep them and their friends coming back).

## 6 || SURVEY YOUR RETURN PARTICIPANTS.

Make an effort to understand what they want to learn, check in about how they felt in class, and discover new ideas to improve or expand your ESD offerings. Asking for feedback allows your students to feel more connected to you, because it gives them the opportunity to voice (Tell) their story. This creates potential for growth—for you, for them, and for your ESD work.



# GETTING STARTED: GIVE IT TIME!



There are many ways to motivate your students to return for your next class. While it can take a little time to develop these strategies, fine tune your communications, and lay the foundations for return participants, the potential for ongoing, in-depth ESD learning as well as the growth of your practice is worth the work. Give yourself the grace, time, and energy you need to grow your practice.

## READY TO GO?

We know you have so much ESD knowledge to share, and we trust that you'll have repeat students in no time! As always, we will be right here cheering you on.

Stay tuned for more how-to guides on developing your ESD practice and reaching your students on your terms.

# DISCLAIMER

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## CONTACT US

[www.esdprofessionals.org](http://www.esdprofessionals.org)  
[hello@esdprofessionals.org](mailto:hello@esdprofessionals.org)

+1 (703) 232-1636

