



HOW-TO: STARTING AN ESD PRACTICE

Be Brave, Be Bold, Be Willing to Fail

You've decided that you want to establish an empowerment self-defense (ESD) practice. You have gone through ESD Training and suddenly feel that you have arrived. You have been touched by the transformative powers of ESD, and you are ready to hit the ground running, excited to share what you have learned with your community.

It is natural to want to jump right in. We recommend you first take a breath. Deciding to run a self-defense business or organization is a big decision, and there is much to consider. If it is unlike anything you have ever done before, that is okay, better than okay—it's a wonderful, fulfilling challenge. If it an extension of what you've been doing for years, that is just as wonderful.

You've decided to open your own ESD practice. Now what?

First, identify your audience, the group of people you would like to teach and serve, the people with whom you would most like to work. Maybe youth, teens, college-bound students, college students, entrepreneurs, non-violence organizations, corporations, law enforcement, or Girl Scouts. Perhaps you are passionate about working with the LGBTQ+ community, a specific cultural group, people with physical or mental health challenges, those who have suffered trauma, or the elderly. Take some time to write down what matters to you. The more specific you are, the better. By thinking this through, making notes, and recognizing what feels good to you, you will be able to identify your audience.

Once you have identified your audience, the next step is to consider whether you would like to operate as a for-profit or nonprofit organization. Both are mission-driven, both will be guided by your vision and your values. If you would like to make your living practicing ESD, a for-profit business may be the way to go.

Another option is to run a nonprofit. The term "nonprofit" is deceptive. Nonprofits (and not-for-profits) do generate profits, it's just that most of the profits generated are reinvested into the business and, while a portion pays for salaries, including yours, no

profits go to shareholders because there are no shareholders. Nonprofits can generate revenue (by charging for classes, for instance), but they often survive on funds raised (from grants and other donations). If you are going to create a nonprofit that will depend upon grants and donations, make sure that you are aware of what it takes to secure grant money and what and how much time fundraising entails. You will have to sing for your dinner if you go this route.

Another option altogether is to run your ESD practice on a purely voluntary basis, donating your time (and maybe more) to your practice. If you decide to take this path, you'll need to determine whether your practice will require seed money or capital investment (whether you will need to sink any money into it to get it going (seed money) and to run it (capital)). For instance, you may need to lease a space for teaching ESD classes or you may need to purchase training equipment (i.e., mitts, mats, and pool noodles) or you may want to hire an assistant (i.e., a padded assailant) or you may need to purchase a laptop computer (because every business, no matter how cool, has paperwork!). If what you need to invest is more than you have to spare, you might want to consider creating a nonprofit that will either generate enough revenue to cover these and other ongoing costs or that will provide you a structure for winning grant money and fundraising.

Whether or not you choose the for-profit, nonprofit, or volunteer road, your practice can be operated as a one-person show, you can create a partnership with another ESD instructor, or you can partner with an organization. There are many types of organizations with which you could partner: other ESD organizations (new or established), non-violence or violence-prevention organizations, domestic violence shelters or other organizations, mental health counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists, social workers, and so on. You may want to open a chapter or subsidiary of an existing, larger organization and operate under their umbrella name (sometimes using your own business name, as well). Working with a partner or partner organization can be rewarding as you work together toward a common goal.

Unless you are going to operate as a volunteer without a business structure or as a sole proprietorship, your business (for-profit or nonprofit) will need a board of directors. Boards are often comprised of leaders in your community, specialists who have an interest in your mission, interested persons who will aid you in fundraising, and/or corporate executives and other business leaders who support your mission and want to donate their time to do some good. Your board can be designed to have

more or less involvement in the running of your business, but there will always be some things on which the board will have a say and a vote.

If you decide to find a partner and you don't already have someone in mind, you'll need to identify potential partners – organizations or individuals. Begin by looking to already-established entities. This could be a gym, studio, school, spiritual center, corporation, government branch, retreat, or community center. Then take the leap and reach out.

Putting yourself out there can be scary, and sometimes the people you contact may not want to partner with you. It is essential to be Brave, Bold, and Willing to Fail so that you keep trying, keep moving forward toward success. With anything in life, there are risks. Running an ESD practice is no different, but don't let early fears or future challenges keep you from your dreams. We cannot promise that you will not fail in an attempt to connect and partner, but approach these road blocks as building blocks that will become the foundation for your success.

When you accept that some failure is inevitable, a mental shift occurs. You have faced your fears head on and have moved through them. With each failure, you will learn something – about your craft, about your style, about your practice, about your needs and desires, and about yourself. The more you learn, the more success you will achieve.

Always remember:

- You have something unique and wonderful to offer the world.
- There is genius in you that is uniquely yours.
- When you put yourself out there, you are doing something BRAVE.
- When you speak up and stand up for the things in which you believe, when you honor your values, you are doing something BOLD.
- Every failure is an opportunity to better understand yourself and those around you!
- Being WILLING TO FAIL provides lessons that set you up for success!

Remember, in deciding to run an ESD practice, no matter what form you choose, by being Brave, Bold, and Willing to Fail, you are one step closer to empowering your community and preventing violence.

Stay tuned for more How-Tos. If you have a topic you would like addressed, please submit it to our [Suggestion Box](#).