

Shared Commitment to Quality in Empowerment Self Defense (ESD)

By ESD Instructors, Trainers, and Organizations

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Introduction

Empowerment Self Defense (ESD) is more than a collection of techniques. It is a holistic, evidence based approach to violence prevention that combines awareness, communication, emotional resilience, boundary-setting, decision-making, and physical self-defense to empower people to make informed choices about their safety and wellbeing.

As instructors, trainers, and organizations working across different countries, cultures, and communities, we recognize that the quality of our work depends not only on our individual knowledge and experience, but also on our willingness to learn, collaborate, reflect, and continuously improve.

The communities we serve place their trust in us. Every training we deliver has the potential to increase confidence, prevent violence, and strengthen resilience—but only when it is delivered with professionalism, integrity, and a commitment to continuous learning.

This document reflects the principles that guide our work as members and partners of the ESD Network. It is not intended to prescribe one single way of teaching, nor to limit the diversity of our approaches. Rather, it expresses our shared commitment to quality, ethical practice, collaboration, and the ongoing development of Empowerment Self Defense.

Our work is informed by internationally recognized professional standards, including the Code of Ethics and Professional Practice and the Instruction Standards of the Association of ESD Professionals (AESDP). At the same time, we recognize that quality is strengthened through research, experience, collaboration, constructive feedback, and dialogue within the wider violence prevention, feminist self-defense, safeguarding, and trauma-informed communities.

We believe that no instructor, trainer, or organization knows everything. Strong professional communities are built when we remain curious, welcome constructive feedback, share experiences, ask questions, challenge ideas respectfully, and continue learning together.

By signing this document, we affirm our intention to uphold these shared commitments and contribute to strengthening the quality, credibility, professionalism, and impact of Empowerment Self Defense.

Our Shared Commitments

1. We recognize that Level 1 is the beginning, not the destination.

Our Level 1 Instructor Training provides a foundation in Empowerment Self Defense methodology. It introduces the core principles, approaches, and skills needed to begin the journey of becoming an ESD instructor.

However, certification is not the end of learning. It is the beginning of a continuous process of professional development.

Becoming a skilled ESD instructor requires ongoing practice, further education, mentoring, self-reflection, experience, and a commitment to improving both teaching and facilitation skills.

This is why ESD Europe is committed to creating learning opportunities throughout the year—including seminars, webinars, mentoring sessions, and community exchanges. These spaces are available to all members of our network to deepen knowledge, strengthen skills, reflect on practice, exchange experiences, and learn from one another.

2. We commit to teaching what we are qualified to teach.

One of our core principles is to teach within our competencies.

As instructors, we commit to continuously expanding our knowledge and skills while remaining aware of the limits of our expertise. Ethical and professional practice includes recognizing when additional knowledge is needed, when further training is required, and when referral to other professionals is the most appropriate response.

Quality is strengthened when we remain humble, curious, and committed to lifelong learning.

3. We commit to continuously developing our self-defense and teaching skills.

Learning does not stop after certification.

Regular training in self-defense disciplines, facilitation, communication, group dynamics, trauma-informed practice, and adult learning strengthens both our confidence and the quality of our teaching.

Physical self-defense skills require practice, refinement, and continued development. Teaching these skills effectively requires not only knowing techniques, but also understanding how to teach them safely, progressively, and in an empowering way.

We strongly encourage network instructors to get Credentialed by the International Association of ESD Professionals. Credentialing includes a 1-year membership to the Association, which grants them access to all of the career building benefits the association offers — including discounts on continuing education courses.

The seminars, webinars, mentoring sessions, and other learning opportunities facilitated by ESD Europe are designed to support this ongoing development. They are opportunities to

practice, ask questions, exchange ideas, reflect on our teaching, and continue growing together as professionals.

4. We commit to deepening our understanding of violence.

Empowerment Self Defense goes far beyond physical techniques.

Understanding gender-based violence, power dynamics, coercive behaviours, trauma, discrimination, intersectionality, and the realities faced by different communities allows us to facilitate safer, more meaningful, and more relevant learning experiences.

This knowledge is essential because physical skills should never be taught in isolation. Participants benefit most when techniques are presented within the broader context of violence prevention: understanding why violence happens, recognizing warning signs, exploring options, discussing barriers to action, and reinforcing that physical skills are only one part of a much wider set of prevention strategies.

This is especially important when working on gender-based violence, but it is equally relevant for other forms of interpersonal violence and abuse.

For this reason, we commit to continually expanding our understanding through education, research, collaboration, and active participation in the learning opportunities created by ESD Europe. These spaces are not only about receiving information—they are also opportunities to share experiences, raise concerns, challenge ideas, exchange feedback, and contribute to the collective knowledge of our network.

5. We use short workshops strategically and strive for long-term learning.

We recognize the value of introductory workshops. They raise awareness, introduce Empowerment Self Defense to new audiences, open doors to partnerships, and often create opportunities for future collaboration.

Within our network, we understand that short workshops can be an important tool when used strategically. They can create visibility, respond to community needs, introduce the methodology, and serve as a bridge toward deeper engagement.

However, we also recognize that meaningful behavioural change, confidence-building, skill integration, and violence prevention outcomes require time.

For this reason, whenever possible, we commit to developing comprehensive courses of 8–16 hours or longer. These longer learning experiences provide participants with sufficient time to practice, reflect, receive feedback, build confidence, integrate new skills, and experience the deeper personal and behavioural changes that Empowerment Self Defense is designed to facilitate.

Our goal is not simply to reach more people, but to create lasting impact.

6. As the ESD Network, we are proud to work with all genders.

While women and girls remain disproportionately affected by gender-based violence and continue to be a central focus of much of our work, we believe that sustainable violence prevention requires engaging everyone.

By working with women, men, girls, boys, and people of diverse gender identities, we:

- help people develop skills to recognize, prevent, and respond to violence;
- teach not only how to set boundaries, but also how to recognize, respect, and support the boundaries of others;
- challenge harmful gender norms, stereotypes, and behaviours that contribute to violence;
- promote healthy relationships, respectful communication, empathy, and accountability;
- encourage active bystander behaviour and shared responsibility for safer communities.

Preventing violence cannot be the responsibility only of those most affected by it. Creating safer communities requires collective responsibility and engagement from all members of society.

We believe that involving all genders strengthens prevention efforts, promotes shared responsibility, and contributes to long-term cultural and social change.

7. We recognize that we represent more than ourselves.

Every training we deliver reflects not only our own work but also the wider Empowerment Self Defense community.

The quality, ethics, professionalism, and care that each instructor and organization brings to their work contribute to the credibility and sustainability of our entire network.

When we teach ESD, we represent the values and principles that connect us: empowerment, respect, inclusion, safety, continuous learning, and professional integrity.

8. We commit to staying connected and supporting one another.

When engaging with partners, institutions, donors, researchers, or organizations that are reviewing, evaluating, or seeking to better understand our work, we commit to keeping ESD Europe informed whenever appropriate.

This is not about oversight or control. It is about collaboration and mutual support.

By sharing important conversations, developments, and feedback, ESD Europe can provide additional context about our methodology, share experiences and evidence from other countries, connect local initiatives with broader international developments, and help ensure that Empowerment Self Defense is understood within its full context.

As a network, we also recognize that these conversations provide valuable opportunities for learning. Questions, feedback, and external perspectives help us identify areas where we can improve, strengthen our collective practice, and continue advancing the quality and impact of Empowerment Self Defense.

Our Collective Responsibility

We recognize that ESD Europe is not a traditional organization where one side gives instructions and the other simply follows orders or standards.

Each instructor and organization works independently, adapts Empowerment Self Defense to their own context, and brings unique experience, expertise, culture, and creativity to the communities they serve. This diversity is one of our greatest strengths.

At the same time, we recognize that independence comes with responsibility.

In order to maintain and strengthen the quality of our work, protect the professionalism of every instructor, and preserve the credibility and trust placed in Empowerment Self Defense as a methodology, we commit to remaining connected and aligned around these shared principles.

Being aligned does not mean teaching in exactly the same way. Rather, it means sharing a common commitment to quality, ethics, continuous learning, trauma-informed practice, empowerment, and professional integrity.

We recognize that the impact of our work is measured not only by the number of trainings we deliver, but also by the quality, safety, and care with which we deliver them.

When we continue learning together, supporting one another, participating in professional dialogue, and holding ourselves accountable, we strengthen not only our own practice but also the entire Empowerment Self Defense movement.

Our commitment extends beyond our own organizations. Every instructor, trainer, and organization contributes to how Empowerment Self Defense is understood by participants, partners, institutions, funders, researchers, and the wider violence prevention community.

For this reason, we choose collaboration over competition, dialogue over assumptions, and continuous improvement over complacency.

We recognize that maintaining high standards is a shared responsibility and that our collective credibility depends on each of us.

Together, we continue building a stronger, more connected, more professional, and more impactful Empowerment Self Defense community.

Appendix I

Professional References

This Shared Commitment to Quality in Empowerment Self Defense is informed by internationally recognized professional standards and by the collective experience of practitioners working in violence prevention across different countries and contexts.

Signatories are encouraged to become familiar with and regularly consult the following documents and resources:

- Association of ESD Professionals (AESDP)
 - IAESDP Code of Ethics — this is a living document that is reviewed and updated by the ECC - <https://www.esdprofessionals.org/code-of-ethics/>
 - IAESDP ESD Best Practices - also reviewed and maintained by the ECC - <https://www.esdprofessionals.org/industry-regulations/>
 - Professional Development Opportunities:
 - ESD Pro Academy - www.esdproacademy.com - Continuing Education (which will soon include access to CEU classes from outside industries that we can all benefit from.)
 - ESD Professionals Members Portal - <https://esdpromembers.com/membership-levels/> - Membership benefits access, especially career building support
 - Credentialing - <https://www.esdprofessionals.org/credentialing-exam-application/> - The Credentialing exam includes a one year membership to help them with business support
- National and international safeguarding policies relevant to the populations with whom they work.
- Current research and evidence on:
 - Gender-Based Violence (GBV)
 - Violence Prevention
 - Trauma-Informed Practice
 - Child Protection
 - Adult Learning
 - Empowerment Methodologies

Professional development is an ongoing process. We recognize that these resources continue to evolve, and we encourage instructors and organizations to remain informed about emerging research, good practices, and innovations within the field.

Appendix II

ESD Europe Learning Opportunities

ESD Europe is committed to supporting instructors and organizations through a culture of continuous learning and professional exchange.

Signatories are encouraged to actively participate in the learning opportunities organized throughout the year, including:

- Annual Advanced Learning Seminar
- Webinars with international ESD practitioners and specialists (including recordings available on ESD Europe's website)
- Mentoring and supervision sessions
- Community discussions and peer exchanges
- Instructor networking meetings
- Collaborative teaching opportunities
- Communities of practice
- International partnerships and exchanges

These spaces are intended not only for learning, but also for:

- asking questions;
- sharing experiences;
- discussing challenges;
- reflecting on teaching practice;
- receiving and offering constructive feedback;
- strengthening professional relationships;
- contributing to the collective development of Empowerment Self Defense.

Continuous participation strengthens both individual instructors and the wider ESD community.

Appendix III Choices of Areas for Continuous Professional Development

Recognizing that Empowerment Self Defense is interdisciplinary, we encourage instructors and organizations to continue developing their competencies in areas including:

Empowerment Self Defense • Teaching methodology • Facilitation skills • Scenario-based learning • Communication skills • Physical self-defense • Verbal self-defense • Risk assessment • Personal safety	Violence Prevention • Gender-Based Violence • Sexual Violence Prevention • Child Protection • Violence Against Children • Violence Prevention Frameworks • Prevention Education
Trauma-Informed Practice • Trauma awareness • Creating emotionally safe learning environments • Preventing re-traumatization • Participant wellbeing • Appropriate referral pathways	Inclusion and Accessibility • Working with children and adolescents • Older adults (including mixed gender) • People with disabilities • LGBTQIA+ communities • Refugees and migrants • Humanitarian settings • Safety at the workplace
Teaching and Facilitation • Adult learning • Group dynamics • Conflict transformation • Restorative approaches • Intercultural communication • Evaluation and documentation	Professional Development • Leadership • Partnership building • Project development • Advocacy • Monitoring and evaluation • Ethical practice • Public speaking • Research and evidence-informed practice

Professional development is a lifelong journey. While we don't expect all instructors to be expert in all areas, we encourage instructors and organizations to continue strengthening the knowledge and skills that are most relevant to their work, their experience, and the communities they serve.