

# EXCEPTIONAL

*People*



MAGAZINE

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*Susan  
Barrow*

## *Teaching Girls Verbal Self-Defense*

Break Through  
Limiting Beliefs to  
Achieve Greater Success

Your Success As a  
Leader Depends on  
Your Circle of Influencers





# TEACHING GIRLS VERBAL **SELF-DEFENSE**

*Susan Harrow*

Photography by Abigail Huller

**M**aybe Susan Harrow's vision was conceived long ago, when she was nearly sold to a Bedouin sheik in Israel.

Maybe it developed while she was teaching tennis in California. Maybe it flourished while she was conducting behavioral assessments for Pacific Bell.

But one thing is clear: The True Shield Program is inextricably connected with Harrow's long career as a PR powerhouse.

For well over twenty years, Harrow has worked closely with success-driven entrepreneurs and authors who want to get heard - and featured - by major media outlets. Along the way, she's discovered that women often struggle because they've been trained from birth into "pathological niceness."

What's wrong with being nice? Nothing, unless it's delivered - or interpreted - as weakness. It's no secret that women are repeatedly dismissed as employees, entrepreneurs, aspiring thought-leaders, or influencers. It's hard to toot your own horn or stand up for yourself when you've been taught that that's just... not nice.

And then there's sexual harassment, misconduct, and rape. Not big news to most women. Sadly, these have been a fact of life since the dawn of time. That this elephant in the room has recently been spotlighted in the media helps. But Harrow clearly believes that more can and should be done.

Through her long success as a publicist, Harrow has repeated to her women clients that the way they speak, stand, and express themselves makes all the difference in the way they are treated by themselves and by others. Can women be nice too? Absolutely. Harrow's mission is to teach girls how to gracefully yet firmly eliminate the chance of their own victimization.

True Shield is the result, and Harrow means to change the world with it.

This groundbreaking program is licensed to schools, universities, self-defense associations, companies, and other organizations keen on empowering girls age 12-24 to carry themselves with confidence and pride on their way to success. It's an easily-implemented 6 hour "verbal self-defense training in a box" which gives women the practice and necessary tools to say no, prevent assault, and stop rape.



A longtime martial arts practitioner, Harrow believes in the benefits of physical self-defense. She also knows that verbal self-defense can virtually eliminate the chances of physical attack. She's not the only one, either. Longtime victim advocates are rallying around True Shield as an important program that can decrease violence by men against young women, whether on campus, on the street, or in the workplace.

As if True Shield wasn't enough, Harrow's [prsecrets.com](http://prsecrets.com) website includes a Prevent Sexual Assault Vault, featuring helpful tips and short instructional videos to help women learn how to prevent sexual assault, harassment, or any unwanted or uninvited contact.

It's all in line with Harrow's "day job" - helping people turn their books into bestsellers, get mentioned in Oprah's "O" Magazine, and become sought-after guests on TV talk shows. Her book "Sell Yourself Without Selling



Your Soul" talks to women about how to promote themselves "without bragging, begging, or whoring." She also offers publicity courses, eBooks, podcasts and press release templates that help women grow their brands.

Susan Harrow has lived an exciting, varied life and she doesn't appear to be slowing down anytime soon. We caught up with her recently to learn more about her mission and her passion.

**Monica:** Behind every ingenious idea is a visionary with a passion - someone who sees a way to impact society in a profound way. As a visionary, what was your inspiration behind True Shield?

**Susan:** It was really for my women clients. We are trained to be pathologically nice from a very young age. It's really drilled into us. Training thousands of women in corporations, I saw that it didn't matter how skilled or how brilliant they were. I found that when it came to asking for what we want or being in a situation that we don't want, we often default to being nice and not embarrassing another person, or just thinking that we have to take it.

One of my clients is a doctor in a husband-wife team business. When a press release was coming out about their book that they didn't agree with, they didn't think that they could do anything about it. I said, "It's your reputation. It's your book. And you have every right to tell the publisher that you'd like it to be written in a different way and to suggest something that you want instead."

That is the basis of True Shield - and the basis of any kind of negotiation. The focus of Aikido is taking someone's energy and moving it in the direction that they think they want to go but it's really the direction that we want to go.

That's where the skill comes in. We don't even have to say "no." You can say, "I would prefer that we say this and we do it this way." That's really the art of negotiating any situation, whether it is verbal or physical.

**Monica:** How does self-esteem impact women under age 20 in terms of how they act in certain situations?

**Susan:** It's such a big question right now. In our day the question was social impact. But right now, with social media, there's so much more pressure on girls. There's group pressure in person and group pressure online. True Shield: Verbal Self-Defense for Girls, is a course for ages 12 to 24. We're working toward developing self-esteem; recognizing what feels good to you and how to respect yourself. We're helping to set those parameters and instill in girls that they have the right to say what they feel, and they have the right to be asked to be treated in a certain way.

Part of that is accomplished through role play, to develop the mental and muscle memory. It's really about role playing those situations so we can have real-life experience when they happen. Because they will happen. It's like trying to imagine all these different situations that your daughter or these girls will be put in.

Neuroscience experts say that the teenage brain isn't fully developed until around age 24, and the decisions that they make in the moment are not necessarily good ones. It's not their fault. It's because the brain hasn't fully developed.

So, by doing the role plays in these particular situations, you are building those neural pathways in the girls and automatically developing that self-esteem through practice.

**Monica:** How is the True Shield course implemented?

**Susan:** It's a done-for-you course, which means that everything is digitally downloadable. There are videos.

The course tells you what to say and what to do during the ten most difficult and dangerous situations that girls are typically in.

It can be taught by anyone. It's in Boys and Girls Clubs, Girl Scouts, Girls, Inc., shelters, and schools. Anyone who has any kind of teaching experience can teach the course. The materials are all there. It's an annual license and they can teach as many facilitators as they like. They can teach as many girls as they like, as many times as they like, for an entire year.

It's set up to be implemented in the most dramatic way so you can train





1,000 girls, 10,000 girls, whatever the size of your organization. It's also set up so we can measure and get evidence that it's working. There's an input survey and an outtake survey, and then a survey again in six months.

My dream is to have teens training teens, college girls training each other, and it going viral that way.

**Monica:** Does it require one-to-one interaction?

**Susan:** The ideal ratio is ten girls to one instructor. The girls also work with each other. One plays the role of the challenger and the other responds. Then they switch. They go through each scenario at least three times during the six-hour course. It can also be broken into several one- or two-hour sessions, if that's what works best for a school or an organization.

**Monica:** What does the feedback tell you about how confident they feel?

**Susan:** Kids between the ages of 12 to 24 learn fast. By redoing a situation 3 or 5 times, they can readjust their behavior in every single scenario. So, they improve super quickly.

In the facilitator's guide I share positive reinforcement only and suggest what teachers need to look for. It can be as simple as "raise your voice." "Make your eyes more intense." "Stand up straighter." "Notice your body."

It's about becoming aware of the messages that we're giving and making sure that they're 100 percent in sync with what we're saying. Are your eyes, face, body, voice, and tone, all giving one message? For example, some girls are not aware that they are saying "no" with their head cocked to the side. That is what we do when we flirt or are submissive. It's a natural inclination.

But when you're saying "no," or you want somebody to take you seriously, you want your head to be completely straight. That's starting to become aware of our behaviors, so we can be conscious and control them consciously.

**Monica:** Do you plan to create a program for women over age 24?

**Susan:** I am working on that right now, with a book and a course. I want it to be both an online course and a course trained in person by a team. It will be for any woman interested in speaking in corporations or out in

the world. I want to create a large team of people who can teach this on location or in their communities.

**Monica:** How have the women you've worked with over the years impacted your life personally and professionally?

**Susan:** I've learned so much from both the girls and the women. Women are so inventive. I'm always looking for those opportunities and thinking, "Wow. I never would have thought of that. That's really brilliant." I'm always learning from each different woman how we can stand up for ourselves without being harsh - unless the situation calls for that because some situations do. How can we do that in a way that is graceful?

**Monica:** Some men look at how a woman carries or presents herself and believe they can take chances with some but not others.

**Susan:** That is so true. That is part of what we want to work on as women too. Are you giving off unconscious signals that allow people an opening where you don't want there to be one? Start to understand what that is.

Is it something physical? Is it something energetic? Is it just who you are because of your personality? You might have to modify that in a situation in order to prevent such things.

**Monica:** What kind of feedback are you getting from the organizations using your program?

**Susan:** It's still in its initial stages. One school on the border of Mexico has been saying that the girls are loving it and starting to implement and use it in their daily lives. That's my dream, too: for girls and women to put it into action — to make it an integrated part of yourself, so that it becomes engrained into your behavior.

The practice is super important. We need to recalibrate and think about how we could have handled a situation differently. That's what I do with my clients in my media training. "What did you do well in your media appearance? And how do you want to shift next time?" Well, let's practice that to get that engrained, so the next time you respond in a way that feels best to you."

I'm really curious about the shelters. To me, it's to prevent sexual slavery. Perpetrators can identify people who are easier targets and that there is something about them that they can perceive right away. So, it's about shifting all of that, energetically and physically, to prevent sexual slavery and repeated assaults.

People can shift on the spot. As soon as you understand what your default response is, you can go, "Oh. That's the way I respond naturally but I can choose a different response. And if I don't choose a different response this time, I can choose a different response next time."

That's the beauty of it -- to have girls understand that they have a choice, and awareness: Awareness of yourself and of your surroundings.

**Monica:** Can the course also help them online?

**Susan:** Yes. I wrote an eBook that deals with texting, social media, and the law. For example, if someone posts a picture of a minor, it's a felony. You can invoke the law once you know that, and it has to be taken down instantly.

This course can be translated to online, but I also have an eBook that goes with the course, with specific strategies for online and texting. It's a different strategy online than physically. But we have to employ some of the same strategies. One of those strategies is ignoring the negative. It's super simple, but not easy to do. Things can get out of hand really quickly on social media with that kind of negativity.

**Monica:** You are an accomplished media trainer. You're a women's empowerment expert. You're a teacher, best-selling author, a former tennis pro, and you have a black belt in Aikido. What is the greatest value you can bring to the world?

**Susan:** That is something I ask myself every day. I think that my biggest value is to be able to stand behind other women and give them the incentive, the materials, and the support to be able to stand up for themselves and get what they want. That's my motto: "Speak your mind. Stand your ground. And sing your song."

*“ Trust yourself.  
Really think about the  
question,  
“Is this a full-body ‘yes’?  
Is this a full-body ‘no’?  
Am I growing into  
the person that  
I want to be?” ”*



That is what I see as my biggest mission. If we start to shift every woman and have every woman be able to speak up in her own way, then it's going to shift things globally in every culture. That's my vision. It's going to take a cultural shift, and it's going to take education.

Men have been able to behave in a certain way for a very long time without protest and without punishment in many cultures. Some of it is behavioral training that has not happened. That's where we can each take a stand and say that when something is not okay with me – if it's a situation that's not of an extreme danger, but it's more of a situation of education versus punishment – then we as women need to start doing that. The culture, the laws, and the policies are going to take a long time to change to support us.

**Monica:** How can people learn more about True Shield and get involved?

**Susan:** Go to [prsecrets.com](http://prsecrets.com), select Courses, then select True Shield: Verbal Self-Defense for Girls. Send me a message. Any way that anybody can contribute or bring it into their community would be really wonderful.

My big dream is to have ambassadors within communities to teach it, especially in communities that can't afford it. For anyone who would like to sponsor it for an organization, please contact me. That's the model I'm moving toward – more sponsorships so I can give it away free to organizations and schools. Some Boys and Girls Clubs can't afford it.

However you want to contribute, whether you want to be a teacher, or you want to bring it to your school or organization, or you want to donate as a sponsor or a corporate sponsor, I have a non-profit arm that supports that. It is already in Australia and in the next six months it'll be in Dubai. This is a skill that they're going to need in aerospace, STEM, and space exploration and in technology.

**Monica:** Can you offer a few words of empowerment and encouragement to help women become inspired to live their best lives?

**Susan:** Some of us are really encouraged to follow our passions, but we don't even know what that is. I love that

Elizabeth Gilbert says to follow your curiosity and let that lead you. It's really about just asking, "What is my next step and how can I serve best?"

Sometimes we put a huge amount of pressure on ourselves like, "I've got to figure out my whole life's purpose and my entire path." My path has changed about 20 million times and it continues to change. I'm kind of shy, so I really don't want to be the person in the spotlight, necessarily. That's why I'm a media trainer.

I will support people who are in the spotlight and who are doing really great things – socially conscious things, or things that are incredibly fun, or chocolate, or food. I love to have food clients to sort of balance it out. But I want that for each person. Where is it that you shine, that really makes you come alive?

**Monica:** Anything specific that you want to mention about True Shield that we haven't talked about?

**Susan:** True Shield is for any woman from 12 to 24. We've talked more about younger girls, but I think it's really important for girls in college, too, if they haven't had that kind of training before they get into college.

**Monica:** Would you mind closing the interview with your last word?

**Susan:** My last word would be: Trust yourself. Really think about the question, "Is this a full-body 'yes'? Is this a full-body 'no'? Am I growing into the person that I want to be?"

You can shift anything in the moment. One of the things that I really love about Aikido is the idea that you are being reincarnated every moment. You have a chance to reinvent yourself in the moment, in the very next choice, in the very next second.


To me that's really inspiring, not only on the mat, because Aikido was so difficult for me, and still is – but in my own choices. I can choose something different in any moment, including my thoughts.

**Monica:** Well, this certainly has been a pleasure.

**Susan:** Thank you so much, Monica. I really appreciate it. ■

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*"You must look  
within for value,  
but must look  
beyond for  
perspective."*

DENIS WAITLEY