

OPE Playbook

Legal Use of Force

Regional Pilot Data			
Events	Avg Registrants	Avg Show Rate	Avg Conversion Rate

OPE at a Glance	
Lesson	Description
OPE Description	• This course provides a clear, practical framework for understanding self-defense and use-of-force decisions. Students learn the legal difference between force and deadly force, the four rules that govern deadly force, how disparity of force affects decision-making, and the range of use-of-force options available. The course also introduces a simple self-defense decision tree and explains critical steps to take after an incident, helping students make lawful, defensible choices under stress.
Ideal Venue	• Types of venues that would be ideal for this OPE (examples listed): ◦ Range ◦ Church ◦ Hospital ◦ College ◦ Office ◦ Community Center ◦ American Legion / VFW
Key Demographics	• Age Range ◦ Adults 18+ (ideal range: 21-65) • Experience Level ◦ Beginner to intermediate ◦ No prior legal or self-defense training required • Lifestyle & Roles ◦ Homeowners and renters ◦ Parents and family protectors ◦ Professionals who travel, commute, or spend time in public spaces ◦ People who want to protect themselves without becoming reckless or aggressive
Pitch Points	• Students will learn how the law evaluates self-defense and the difference between force and deadly force.

	• Students will understand the rules required to justify deadly force and how factors like disparity of force affect real-world decisions. • Students will learn a simple decision-making framework for self-defense situations and what steps to take after an incident.
Timing	• 5 Minutes: Introduction • 40 minutes • 15 Minutes: Pitch

Resources	
Resources	• Legal Use of Force Storyboard

OPE Overview	
Overarching Goal	• External - Official Partner Experiences are brief 1 hour mini-classes with a corresponding multi-channel marketing campaign intended to drive foot traffic and introduce students to local training organizations and the USCCA. • Internal - Provide AEs with additional sales opportunities during weekdays when Official Partner class inventory is limited.
Course Objectives	• Define the legal difference between force and deadly force • Identify the four rules required to justify deadly force • Recognize factors that create disparity of force • Evaluate appropriate use-of-force options in common scenarios • Apply a simple self-defense decision-making process • Describe appropriate actions to take after a self-defense incident
Target Audience	• Intended Audience • Everyday civilians who want to understand lawful self-defense • New or experienced firearm owners • Individuals who carry or are considering carrying a firearm or other defensive tools • People who want clarity on when force is legally justified • Mindset & Motivations • Wants to stay within the law • Concerned about making the right decision under stress • Seeks clear rules, not guesswork or "internet advice" • Values personal responsibility and preparedness • Common Pain Points • Confusion about what the law actually allows • Fear of legal consequences after a self-defense incident • Uncertainty about when force becomes deadly force

	• Lack of a clear mental framework for decision-making • RTM: Describe the typical attendee of this OPE during the pilot.
Course Materials	Required: • Computer and ability to display PPT on either a large television or a screen.
Safety Reminders	• Although this is not a hands-on class and participants will be seated for the presentation, remind everyone of emergency exits and location of medical equipment.

AE Checklist	
Timing	Description
Four - Six Weeks Prior	☐ Submit event request in Salesforce. (4 wks prior for free events, 6 wks prior for paid events)
Four Weeks Prior	☐ Review the OPE slide deck. ☐ Order class materials. ☐ Promote/advertise the upcoming class on social media channels.
Two Weeks Prior	☐ Review the OPE slide deck. ☐ Confirm classroom/range time of class.
One Week Prior	☐ Review the OPE slide deck. ☐ Verify your class roster. ☐ Send students a follow-up email with class details and required gear.
Day of OPE	☐ Review the OPE slide deck. ☐ Confirm classroom/range time of class. ☐ Send a personalized email and/or text to registrants to remind them to attend the event. ☐ Prepare all training materials, aids and multimedia.
After OPE	☐ Send students a follow-up "thank you" email including any follow up discussions needed with students who were considering purchasing a membership ☐ Take notes in the Playbook on what went well during class and what needs improvement

Introduction	
Presentation Content	Description
Welcome <i>(not in slide deck)</i>	- Before diving into the slides, cover introductions, venue-specific details, course objectives and, if desired, an icebreaker activity. - Introduce yourself and any co-instructors or guest speakers; if desired, give a short bio of yourself. - Set the stage and give context to the course; you won't know each student's reason for taking the course, but you'll want to support all students' training efforts in a safe learning environment.
Policies and Procedures <i>(not in slide deck)</i>	<i>Guns in the classroom MUST remain holstered or cased. (Unless there is a need for self-defense in a dynamic critical incident, or unless otherwise instructed, firearms should not be accessed by students.)</i> <i>Please silence or turn off cellphones. It is not OK to leave to make phone calls or conduct other business unless it constitutes an emergency.</i> <i>We will be taking regular breaks, but if you need a bathroom break, please feel free to quietly leave the classroom.</i>

Classroom Presentation	
Presentation Content	Description
Presentation Overview	- Provide information around the use-of-force and the legal standards that surround it. - Emphasize the need for training, practice and realistic applications in the real world. - Promote additional class offerings as well as the benefits of the USCCA and its membership.
Safety Check	Persons may have concealed weapons in class but it should be mentioned that for the purpose of this class, no weapons will be used and none should be displayed.
Who is the USCCA?	- Education - Training - Self-Defense Liability Insurance
Key Topics	- This course will cover: - The Legal Use of Force - Force vs Deadly Force

	○ The Four Rules of Deadly Force ○ Disparity of Force ○ Use-of-Force Options ○ What to Do After an Incident ○ Self-Defense Decision Tree
The Legal Use of Force	● General principle ○ You may use reasonable force to protect yourself (or others) from an unlawful threat of harm. ○ Force must be necessary and proportionate to the threat you're facing. ● Levels of force ○ Force (non-deadly force) is permitted when you're facing unlawful physical force that does not rise to a deadly threat. ■ Examples of non-deadly force include pushing, grabbing and striking to stop an assault. ○ Deadly force is permitted only when you reasonably believe you're facing imminent danger of death or serious bodily harm. ■ Examples of deadly force include firearms, knives and other potentially lethal tools. ● Aftermath considerations ○ Even if you acted within the law, a prosecutor and a jury will review whether your use of force was truly reasonable. ○ Others will judge your actions with the benefit of hindsight and time, while you had only seconds to decide under stress.
Force and Deadly Force	● Force ○ <i>Definition</i> ■ Most states define "force" as the minimum force required to end a threat. ■ It's important that the force does not exceed the threat. ○ <i>Examples</i> ■ For a minor threat (e.g., someone grabs your arm and leaves a bruise), it would be excessive to respond by breaking bones or causing a permanent injury. ■ The response must be proportionate to the level of threat. ● Any level of force you use will be scrutinized. ● Even non-deadly force must be proven reasonable given the circumstances. ● Deadly force ○ <i>Definition</i>

	■ Each state defines when the use of deadly/lethal force or the justifiable taking of a life is lawful. ○ <i>Common standard</i> ■ Deadly force is allowed only if: ● You face an immediate and unavoidable danger of death or grave bodily harm. ● You (the individual facing the threat) are an innocent person. ● No other option exists. ○ <i>State variations</i> ■ Legal definitions vary by state regarding what counts as: ● "Innocent" ● "Immediate" ● "Great/grave bodily harm" ○ <i>Legal reality</i> ■ After a self-defense incident, the prosecutor and the jury will decide if your actions met the standard for the legal use of deadly force. They'll deliberate with time and safety in a courtroom, while you must decide in seconds, under the stress of an attack.
The Four Rules of Deadly Force	● Reasonable/immediate fear ○ You must believe that your or another's life is in immediate danger of death or great/grave bodily harm. ○ Standard: What a reasonable person would also feel given the same circumstances ● Innocent party ○ You cannot be the aggressor. ○ You cannot have started or escalated the conflict. ● No lesser force ○ Deadly force is acceptable only if lesser force is insufficient to stop the threat. ○ If a threat can be stopped without deadly force, you must do so. ● No escape ○ In many states, there is a duty to retreat (if it's possible to do so safely) before you can use deadly force. ○ Exception: Stand-your-ground laws, which vary by state
Disparity of Force and Its Factors	● Disparity of force ○ This refers to an imbalance in ability, numbers or other factors. For example:

	■ <i>Age difference</i> ● An older individual often has reduced strength and slower reflexes. ● Courts recognize significance, but age alone is not always enough. ● Age becomes a stronger argument when it's combined with frailty or limited mobility. ■ <i>Overwhelming size or strength</i> ● A larger and stronger attacker equates to an inherent threat. ○ For example, combat sports are separated by weight class to prevent unfair advantage. (This highlights the importance of size and strength in confrontations.) ■ <i>Force of numbers</i> ● Being outnumbered equates to a clear disparity of force. ● Multiple assailants are recognized as a greater threat and may justify a higher level of force. ■ <i>Specialized combat skills</i> ● Advanced martial arts and combat training equates to an elevated threat, even if the aggressor is without a weapon. ● Courts do not automatically equate a trained individual's actions with deadly force. (This depends on specific circumstances.)
Understanding Force Escalation	● The use of force is not rigid and should always be commensurate with the threat you're facing. ○ The levels (discussed on the next two slides) are guidelines, not a mandatory sequence. ○ You may: ■ Skip levels if the threat escalates suddenly. ■ Repeat a level if the threat continues at the same stage. ● Always remember: ○ You can and should de-escalate if the threat reduces. ○ You can escape or retreat if it's safe to do so. ○ You must stop using force once the threat has stopped.
Use-of-Force Options: Levels 1 & 2	● It can be very helpful to think of different "levels" of force in response to varying threats. Any use of force on your part will be scrutinized,

	with each level receiving greater attention as the severity increases. Thinking of force in this way can help you: ○ Better understand that the level of force you use must correspond to the severity of the threat you're facing ○ Avoid excessive and unnecessary force and reduce your risk of legal consequences related to your use of force ● We'll discuss four different levels of force. ○ Level 1: Presence and verbalization ■ <i>Action</i> ● Deter or stop a threat using situational awareness and verbal communication. ■ <i>Examples</i> ● Cross the street to avoid a suspicious person. ● Issue a verbal command, such as "Stop!" or "Help!" ● Use a personal alarm or whistle to deter an attack or to attract attention or help. ○ Level 2: Empty-hand control (bodily force) ■ <i>Action</i> ● Escape or create distance using physical skills and techniques. ■ <i>Examples</i> ● Kicks ● Punches ● Throws ● Blocks ■ <i>Advanced options</i> ● Use these only if you are trained and confident in your abilities AND if no other viable options are available: ○ Pressure points ○ Joint locks ○ Chokes
Use-of-Force Options: Levels 3 & 4	● Level 3: Non-lethal force ○ <i>Action</i> ■ Incapacitate and stun an attacker without death. ● Be aware that the risk of casualty still exists (e.g., the attacker falls and hits his or her head after you use such a weapon). ○ <i>Examples</i> ■ Pepper spray ■ Stun gun

	■ Taser ○ <i>Conditions</i> ■ Non-lethal weapons must be legal to carry and use in your state. ■ You must understand their effects and limitations. ● Level 4: Lethal Deadly force ○ <i>Action</i> ■ Stop a threat (includes the potential for serious injury or death). ○ <i>Examples</i> ■ Firearms ■ Knives ■ Sharp objects ○ <i>Considerations</i> ■ Laws vary from state to state, so it's important to stay current with your local and federal regulations. ■ You should use this level of force only as a last resort and only if you reasonably believe that there is no other way to prevent the attack. ■ You should be aware of the legal, financial and moral implications of using lethal force. ■ General rule: Lethal force is justified only if you're facing an imminent deadly threat or grievous harm.
Duty to Retreat vs Stand Your Ground	● Specific laws explain whether you're required to retreat before using force. They typically fall into two categories: ○ Duty to retreat ■ <i>Definition</i> ● Duty to retreat means you must withdraw or attempt to escape before you can use force – especially deadly force. ■ <i>Purpose</i> ● Duty to retreat emphasizes preservation of life and promotes de-escalation and conflict avoidance. ■ <i>Key reminders</i> ● You must attempt to withdraw or escape before using force. ● Focus on de-escalation and avoiding violence whenever possible. ● Your duty to retreat varies by state. ● Duty to retreat is most commonly applied in public spaces.

	○ Stand your ground ■ <i>Definition</i> ● Stand-your-ground laws remove your duty to retreat before you can use force in self-defense. ○ A key difference to note is that unlike with traditional self-defense laws, there is no requirement to attempt escape first. ■ <i>Purpose</i> ● Stand your ground empowers you to defend yourself immediately when you're facing a threat. ■ <i>Key reminders</i> ● There is no obligation to retreat from a threat. ● You may be justified to use force – including deadly force – if you have a reasonable belief that danger exists. ● Stand-your-ground laws may apply in both public and private spaces, depending on state law. ● Stand-your-ground laws are there to protect you in court in the event that you're unable to retreat when you're facing a threat. ● Remember that just because the law says you're not required to retreat doesn't mean retreat may not be the best strategic or moral option in a given situation.
Castle Doctrine	● Castle Doctrine ○ <i>Definition and purpose</i> ■ This legal principle affirms your right to use force – including deadly force – against intruders in your home. ■ "A man's home is his castle." ○ <i>Scope of application</i> ■ The Castle Doctrine may apply to your home, vehicle and/or place of business, depending on state law. ■ It permits you to use deadly force when you're facing an immediate threat of death or great bodily harm. ○ <i>Considerations</i>

	■ Castle Doctrine is a centuries-old legal principle. It should not dictate your tactics in a home-defense situation. ■ Interpretations vary by jurisdiction, and some states limit or do not recognize it at all. ■ While it may provide protection against criminal liability, it does not absolve you of civil liability. ● In other words, you may still be held civilly liable for defending yourself and could be sued in civil court by the intruder or his or her family.
What to Do After an Incident	● Win the race to call 911. The first person to call 911 is typically viewed as the victim. ● Afterward, contact the USCCA Critical Response Team and/or your attorney. ● Secure your firearm/defensive tool when you can be sure that the threat has ended. ○ Place your firearm or defensive tool on the ground (or reholster it) once the scene is safe and before police arrive. ○ Expect it to be taken into evidence as part of the investigation. ● Stay calm and composed. ○ Police will arrive uncertain about who the “good guy” and the “bad guy” are. ○ Clearly identify yourself as the “good guy.” ● Follow police instructions. ○ Comply even if you’re handcuffed or are ordered to the ground, especially if a firearm is involved. ○ Remember, emotions will be high, and the officers’ top priority is to go home safely.
Your Rights After a Self-Defense Shooting	● Before the police and/or your attorney arrives, note small details that may serve as evidence. ● Key reminders ○ Say: “I was attacked, I feared for my life, and I had to defend myself.” ○ Tell officers that you’re willing to cooperate but are waiting for your attorney. ■ You have the right to an attorney. You also have the right to have a lawyer present during questioning. ■ This is protected by the Sixth Amendment. ■ Once you invoke your right to an attorney, police must stop all interrogation until your attorney is present.

	○ Anything you say can and will be used against you in court. ○ Your Fifth Amendment right to silence is your strongest defense at this stage. ■ You have the right to remain silent, protected by the Fifth Amendment. ■ You're not required to answer police questions. ■ This right prevents you from accidentally making self-incriminating statements. ● After a high-adrenaline incident, your logical thinking becomes impaired, your time perception may be distorted, and you may experience memory gaps or false memories. ● Give yourself time to process, and rely on your attorney's guidance. ○ Even police officers are often advised to wait 48 to 72 hours before giving statements to improve accuracy and recall.
Self-Defense Decision Tree	● This slide serves as a transition back into self-defense decision-making and sets up the activity that follows. ○ The flowchart on screen illustrates some of the key decisions involved in determining whether the use of force is justified. ○ This example does not represent every possible decision but rather provides a high-level overview of the initial judgment process that you must consider before using force. ○ The decision tree continues until you reach the ultimate question: whether the use of force is necessary. ● Below are key questions and explanations used to guide that decision-making process: ○ Did you face a threat? ■ Was there an imminent threat of unlawful force? ■ Mere words are not enough. There must be a physical threat of harm. ○ Was the threat reasonable and immediate? ■ Would a reasonable person in the same situation also believe he or she was in immediate danger of death or serious bodily harm? ○ Are you an innocent party? ■ If you started or escalated the fight, your self-defense claim may be limited. ■ An exception applies if you clearly withdraw and the other party continues the attack. ○ Did you attempt to retreat (if required)? ■ In some states, you have a duty to retreat (if you can do so safely) before you can use deadly force.

	■ In stand-your-ground states, there is no duty to retreat if you are lawfully present.
Activity	• The next slides introduce a student activity. • If time permits, complete all four scenarios. If not, adjust and select scenarios based on time remaining. • Students will analyze a series of scenarios. • The goal is to determine the appropriate and lawful course of action in each case. • Use this activity to: ○ Engage students in discussion ○ Recall and apply the Four Rules of Deadly Force ○ Reinforce understanding of the legal standards for the use of deadly force
Scenario: Immediate Fear of Death or Great Bodily Harm	• A claim of fear of death or great bodily harm could be argued. • However, it fails the “immediacy” element of lawful self-defense. ○ The neighbor was on the third-floor balcony, while you were on the ground level. ○ A prosecutor would likely determine that the threat was not immediate or actionable. • This is a no-shoot scenario. The correct response would be to call the police and secure yourself inside your apartment.
Scenario: Must Be an Innocent Party	• You made a mistake by muttering “idiot” and shoving the individual. ○ This violates the “innocent party” requirement of self-defense. ○ Even minor aggression can cross the line and eliminate your claim of innocence. ○ Your status shifts from innocent defender to active participant. While there was an immediate threat of death or great bodily harm, you violated the “innocent party” rule. • You would likely be charged with a crime for using deadly force.
Scenario: No Lessor Force Available to Stop the Threat	• Initial use of deadly force ○ It was likely justified. There was no reasonable alternative but to respond with your firearm. ○ Prosecutors would likely agree that deadly force was reasonable at that moment. • After the aggressor dropped the firearm ○ The suspect was no longer armed and was already injured. At that point, pepper spray or another lesser level of force could have been used to stop the threat. ○ Continued use of deadly force may violate:

	■ “There must be a reasonable and immediate fear of death or grave bodily harm.” ■ “No reasonable means of escape is available.”
Scenario: No Reasonable Means of Escape	● An immediate risk of death or great bodily harm was clearly present. However, you had other options available. ○ Your vehicle was fully functional and could have been used to safely drive away (retreat) from the threat. ○ By choosing not to leave, you weakened your legal argument for the necessity of using deadly force.
Questions?	● Be prepared to answer questions about the use of deadly force both inside and outside the home. ● Be prepared to discuss the differences between stand-your-ground laws and duty-to-retreat laws. ● Consult with your RTM regarding additional questions you should anticipate from your target audience.
Pitch Slide	● <i>Insert Pitch Slides throughout the presentation as appropriate between Topics</i> ○ USCCA Resources ○ USCCA Training ○ USCCA Self-Defense Liability Insurance
Next Steps	● Visit the USCCA Concealed Carry Reciprocity Map. ○ The USCCA Reciprocity Map allows you to see those states in which you can legally with your current concealed carry permit. ○ If you don’t already have your permit, the map includes information on how to obtain one in your state. ○ The map also provides more detail on your state’s self-defense laws, including Castle Doctrine, stand your ground and duty to retreat. ● Develop mental plans for probable scenarios. ○ Similar to the activity we did above, you should run through different mental scenarios to “workshop” how you would react. ○ If you have a family, incorporate them into these scenarios. The entire family should practice playing them out so that each person understands his or her role.

	● Become a USCCA Member and visit the USCCA Protector Academy ○ <i>USCCA Membership</i> ■ USCCA Membership offers access to ongoing education and training on the legal use of force. ■ It also includes self-defense liability insurance¹ — protection from legal costs following a defensive incident. ○ <i>USCCA Protector Academy</i> ■ The USCCA Protector Academy features videos, courses and guides covering topics such as the legal use of force, home defense, emergency first aid, defensive tool skills and more. ■ The library includes more than 430 video episodes; more than 80 guides, eBooks and checklists; and three shooting qualification levels. ● RTM: What additional training opportunities can the audience be pointed to: ○ Related to the topics covered in this presentation ○ Offered by the hosting OP
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