# Your right to self-defense: 5 things to know about defending yourself in Indiana

Here are five details you should know about the right to defend yourself in Indiana.

## 1. You are allowed to use "reasonable force" to defend yourself or another person.

Indiana law includes the right to use reasonable force to prevent "the imminent use of unlawful force" against yourself or another person.

In a self-defense argument, a person is admitting taking the action they’re accused of — whether that was hitting someone or using a weapon on them — but arguing they should not be found legally guilty because they were trying to protect themselves or another person, Hermann explained.

Because of that, the person accused of using force should be able to articulate why they believed force was necessary to protect themselves or their property and was not excessive.

## 2. You can use deadly force only in certain cases.

Deadly force is justified under Indiana law if the person “reasonably believes” they have to use it to prevent serious bodily injury to themselves or another person, or prevent someone from committing a forcible felony.

“It’s not authorizing vigilante justice,” Hermann said. “It’s not authorizing you to hunt somebody down.”

Hermann gave the example of someone seeing another person take a baseball bat to their car. If property that can be replaced is under attack but a person is not in danger of bodily injury, that does not justify deadly force, he said.

“You’re not allowed to use deadly force unless there is an immediate threat,” Hermann said.

## 3. Invading someone's home legally justifies deadly force.

Part of Indiana’s self-defense law follows what is sometimes called Castle Doctrine — policy that grants a person the right to defend themselves in their own home. It goes one step beyond the rest of Indiana's self-defense policy, though.

Under Castle Doctrine, a home's resident does not have to articulate why they reasonably believed an intruder would have hurt them or another person in order to justify using deadly force. The fact that the intruder illegally entered or attacked the other person's home is considered proof of a threat.

However, that Castle Doctrine policy only applies in someone's dwelling, the attached property — like a yard or porch — or their vehicle, while it is occupied.

A workplace or other public area does not qualify a person for the Castle Doctrine protections unless they sleep in the same building, Hermann told the audience.

## 4. You do not have to retreat in your own home.

Hermann and Wedding recommended people call 911 as soon as possible when they spot an intruder.

“If you don’t have to engage them, then don’t,” Wedding said.

However, Indiana law states people do not have a duty to retreat before using force if the situation meets the standards to use deadly force. Warrick County Chief Deputy Michael Wilder said in an email that people should remember that includes an unlawful entry or attack on someone's home, occupied vehicle or property attached to their home — also the places protected under the Castle Doctrine.

Wedding advised the audience Thursday that if they were not comfortable carrying a gun and do not believe they could shoot and kill an intruder, they could use nonlethal options like pepper spray as well.

## 5. Do not move anything after a confrontation.

If a resident does use force against an intruder and cannot call 911 first, they should get in touch with law enforcement as soon as possible and not touch any evidence.

One myth law enforcement confronts, Hermann said, is the idea that an intruder’s body has to be inside the home for the Castle Doctrine to apply. People have asked if they should drag a body inside after shooting an intruder on their porch to prove their self-defense argument.

“I’m pretty sure we’re going to be able to tell if you moved a body,” Hermann said.

Wedding and Hermann talked through scenarios with their audience Thursday, giving advice on gun safety and preventing home invasions as well as telling people their legal rights to defend themselves.