

# DIRECT ACTION



# DIRECT ACTION HANDBOOK

*More harm can be done through obedience than through  
disobedience.*

Hanna Arendt



## **Content (mostly recycled from other sources) :**

- What is Direct Action (DA) ?
- Examples of Direct Action
- Handbook for Action (produced for the G8 2005 in Scotland)
- Action Planning – Rant Collective
- Consensus Decision Making Flow Chart – Seeds for Change
- Street Safety – Rant Collective
- Protecting yourself – Rant Collective
- After the action – Rant Collective
- Aftercare – Rant Collective
- What wikipedia says....
- Resources

*Copyleft – use this handbook*

## WHAT IS DIRECT ACTION (DA) ?

*“Direct Action” is a form of creative resistance, and has to be understood as part of an intervention against power and exploitation as well as a step towards visionary, emancipatory forms of society.*

*“Direct Action” is a method, a concept, a way of thinking... Undertake responsibility, do it yourself, think about how you would want it to be and go in this direction. Don't ask for permission. Be a spanner in their wheels. Do it yourself.*

### **The Two Main Ways Direct Action Works:**

- Interfering with the operations of injustice: examples: WTO blockade, burning draft cards, stopping troop trains, pulling up genetically modified crops
- Embodying an alternative: Address a problem legally or illegally: Examples: Squats, Needle Exchange programs, feeding the homeless.



## Examples of Tools for Direct Action:

### **Blockading**

D-locks, armtubes, lock-ons, tripods  
Tunneling  
Barricading

### **Climbing actions**

Banner drops  
Tree occupations

### **Subvertising**

Changing billboards

### **Sabotage**

Animal liberation  
Smashing war planes  
Sabotaging construction machines

### **Office occupation**

### **Street Action**

Theater  
Graffiti

### **Guerilla gardening**

planting where you are not supposed to

### **Squatting**

and so much more...

(Check out [www.schnews.org.uk/diyguide/index.htm](http://www.schnews.org.uk/diyguide/index.htm) for DIY guides on different issues. Great: Delia Smith's guide to Basic Blockading. Also if you are not sure about what some of the above means)

## Direct Action can:

Raise awareness  
Raise political and financial costs  
Delay time schedules  
Build movement  
Radicalize

Educate and inform  
Delegitimize organisations,  
institutions and programs  
Empower  
Be fun

# Fashion Tips

## *Several thin layers, long trousers plus raingear.*

Take more clothes than you need - you can always take them off if it's too hot. Layers can also be changed if contaminated with CS gas. Thin long sleeved shirts protect against sunburn.

*A watch* – synchronised with those of your mates.

*Pockets with zips and rucksack* for putting essentials into.

*Supplies* - plenty of water and food; bust cards (telling you your rights on arrest and solicitors number); change for phone, bus or taxi fare; tampons; toilet roll; midge repellent.

***Delia says:*** “Always empty your bags and pockets before you leave. Only take what's really necessary.”

*A hat or hood and sunglasses* protect not only from the sun but also from intrusive intelligence gathering by the police.



*Remove jewellery, tie up hair and cut nails*

- helps to avoid getting hurt. Hair can get tangled up and offers a nice handhold for police.

*Sturdy boots* to protect your feet (even on a hot day!)

## **Do not take:**

“Offensive weapons” (anything pointy or heavy eg penknives/ screwdrivers); illegal drugs; alcohol (impairs your judgement), credit cards, ID (unless you're from a foreign country or driving a car), address books/diaries – the cops would love to have your mates' phone numbers. Mobile phones: can be useful but get a clean simcard (the little chip where all the info is stored).

# Medical Issues

**ALWAYS carry water and food** for yourself. Drink lots of water to avoid getting dehydrated. Carry water in cycling type water bottles (the ones that are squeezey with pop up tops) as these can be used for eye flushes to treat CS gas. Eat regularly to avoid your blood sugar getting low, which makes you disorientated and a danger to yourself and others. Take emergency sugar rations eg. chocolate, flap jacks.

**TELL your mates if you have any medical issues** (eg asthma, epilepsy, diabetes, pregnancy, heart problems etc.) Carry any emergency medication you might need, eg insulin, inhaler, even if you have not had a problem for a long time. Also take your prescription (otherwise the cops might take it off you). Wear a small wristband with medical issues written on it to makes it easier for medics to treat you.

Make sure you have a **first aid kit** and someone with first aid skills in your group



**UK Action Medics** provide first aid on actions and the convergence spaces.

**TEAR GAS** may be used by the police to make people panic and to disperse crowds. Most importantly - Stay calm!

- ✓ Wear well-fitting swimming goggles with shatter proof lenses to protect your eyes. Prescription swimming goggles are available. Carry vinegar/ lemon juice soaked bandanas in sealable plastic bags - effective for short periods against breathing CS gas.
- ✓ Make up, sunscreen or midge repellent needs to be water or alcohol based rather than oil based. Tear gas is soluble in fat so creams make it worse and may cause burns.
- ✓ Bring spare contact lenses / glasses. If exposed to CS gas or pepper spray get contact lenses out quickly as the gas can get trapped behind the lenses and burn your eyes.
- ✓ Get rid of any contaminated clothes and flush out eyes with cold water. The burning will subside eventually.

# THE BUDDY

# SYSTEM

## Buddies:

Buddies are 2 or 3 people who stick together and look after each other throughout an action. Being a buddy means you **never** leave your partner(s) - ensuring no one gets forgotten.

- ★ know if their buddy has any special (e.g. medical) needs
- ★ keep checking that their buddy is still with them
- ★ make sure that their buddy is physically ok and find food/drink/warm clothing/medical attention if they aren't
- ★ leave with their buddy if they want to go, for any reason
- ★ keep an eye on their buddies emotional state and try to calm them down/comfort them when necessary
- ★ tell legal support if their buddy gets arrested.
- ★ call for observers/first aiders if their buddy is injured.

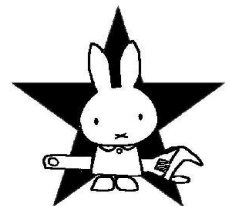
## Affinity groups

These are small groups of people who prepare for and take action together. Affinity groups are organised in a non-hierarchical and self-sufficient way and can either act on their own or as an autonomous group within larger protests. Working in an affinity group is your best protection in the course of the action.

Roles and tasks can be split up between members, and you can support each other emotionally and in case of arrest or injury. A good size is 6-12 people. It's useful to form sub groups of 3-4 people who act as buddies.

Within the group share your hopes, fears, experiences, strengths and weaknesses. Agree on the form of the action in advance (how willing to risk arrest, the limits of your involvement, how non-violent, how spiky etc.)

Stick together - work as a team. Agree on a short name for your group which can easily be shouted and recognised, in case your group is split up and you get lost.



### **LEGAL OBSERVERS**

take notes on police conduct, arrests, violations of activists' rights



### **ACTION PARTICIPANTS**

carry out the actual action (climbing, locking-on, trespassing etc)

### **FIRST AIDERS**

deal with any medical or health issues



### **ACTION**

### **SUPPORT**

provides direct personal support for action participants (food, water etc)

# **ROLES**

## **ON**

# **ACTIONS**

### **POLICE LIAISON**

facilitates communication between police and affinity group

### **TRANSPORT**

drivers with cars/buses

### **LEGAL SUPPORT**

(at the end of a phone) keeps track of arrests, works with solicitors

### **TRAFFIC WARDENS**

responsible for the safety of people from cars and other vehicles



### **MEDIA LIAISON**

empowered to talk to the media and act as a spokesperson

### **QUICK DECISION FACILITATOR**

helps group to make decisions quickly



Many tasks and roles need to be taken on during an action. Sit down with your affinity group and draw up a list of all the tasks and roles that need covering and decide who will do what. It's vital that people have a clear understanding of what their role involves. They also need to stick to their role throughout the action, and not just wander off in search of a cup of tea. Roles will vary from action to action, and sometimes people take on more than one role.





# Communication

When you're working with others, you need to think about **communication**. How will you stay in touch? Can you assume that in a large crowd you'll be able to stay within sight and sound of each other? It's worth thinking through and agreeing a few strategies in advance. You could communicate using **mobile phones**, but will you hear them ring in the noise of the crowd? What if your phone gets no reception? Mobile networks do sometimes go dead around mass mobilisations. You could use **whistles**, but how will you distinguish your whistles from those of the rest of the crowd? You could have a **visual signal** to regroup and talk – a hand signal, or a distinctive flag. It's definitely worth having **an agreed meeting place** that your whole group can fall back to if you get split up or if the protest becomes more 'full on' than you're comfortable with. If you agree such a place everyone needs to know how to find it, and it needs to be a space that will stay safe throughout the day.

## Knowing where you are

Knowing your way round the site of any action can help you stay one step ahead of the police, find secure places to rest and recover, or stay mobile and allow you to take effective action. It's worth getting hold of maps and street plans of the area and making sure everyone in your group has at least a **basic understanding of the geography**.

## Consensus Decision-making on actions

Actions are fast moving situations and rarely go as planned. Your affinity group will have to make quick decisions on how to react to changing situations. Taking decisions by consensus ensures that everyone is behind the action. Consensus doesn't mean that everybody always agrees, but that everybody supports the decision. **Before** the action work out what people are prepared to do and **what limits they have** (eg not willing to risk arrest). When faced with such a situation in reality you've got some idea of what the group might want to do. It's best to have a few practice runs in your group. Give yourselves 2min to come to a decision on scenarios (eg. "You're taking part in a march. The police have given you 2 minutes to get out of the road, or they'll arrest you all. What do you do?")

# Outline of quick consensus:

- 1) Appoint a facilitator in advance!
- 2) The facilitator briefly states the situation to make sure everyone is clear:

**“ We’ve been given 2 minutes to move or we’ll all be arrested”**

- 3) The facilitator asks for proposals: **“Any proposals?”**. In some cases there may be time for discussion, but in others there won’t be. It’s up to the facilitator to assess the time and act appropriately...

- 4) Someone makes a proposal

**“Yeah, I propose we link arms and sit down”.**

In some cases you might have time to make friendly amendments to the proposal.

- 5) Facilitator restates the proposal, for clarity, and then tests for consensus:

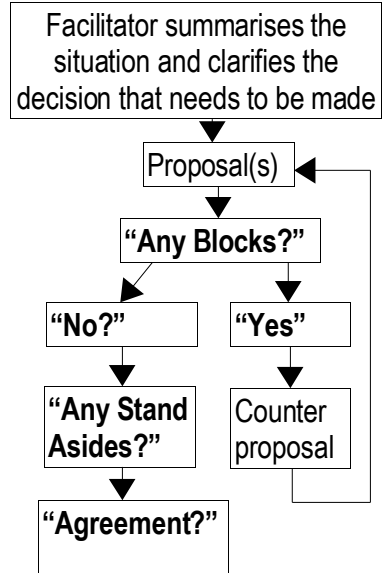
**“OK, it's proposed that we sit in the road and link arms. Any Blocks?” – “No”**

**“Any Stand asides?” – “Yeah, I’ll lose my job”**

**A Block** kills a proposal - it's a total veto. Everyone has the right to block. In quick consensus people normally block for 2 reasons - 1) a proposal will split the group or 2) the group is failing to make a decision. If a proposal is blocked, you need a new one! Some groups insist that in quick consensus you must have a counter proposal before you can block.

**A stand aside** is agreeing to disagree. It allows the proposal to go ahead in the group's name, but those that choose to stand aside take no part in that action.

**A friendly amendment** enhances a proposal. It's not a new idea, but a way of making an existing one more effective.



# Spotting Trouble - Police Tactics

## “Control, Contain, Disperse”

In Britain the police favour close contact public order policing when faced with large groups of people. The favourite tactic at present is to divide very large groups into smaller ones and surround and contain them. If you find yourself in such a containment (“kettle”) prepare yourself for a long wait, before you are either let out (after being searching) or arrested one by one.

To avoid being contained **keep your eyes open at all times** and watch what the police are up to. Police lines are usually formed on one side first and then the other, so if you spot this there is still time to move out. Also keep your eyes open for any large concentrations of cops down side streets. Continuously moving about makes it more difficult for them to contain you.

Another sign that might signal imminent containment or a baton charge is cops changing from normal uniform into riot gear.



When they fail to divide groups, riot police are sent in lines to break up and disperse crowds, by hitting out with batons.

**Mounted (horseback) police** are also used in the same way. It's important to understand that once given the order for a baton charge the police won't distinguish between violent or non-violent protesters. As far as

they are concerned, if you are not a troublemaker you would have left the area a long time ago. Police in Britain are issued with metal retractable batons, which cause nasty head wounds but minimise the risk of brain damage or death.

**CS gas** is issued, but not often used - guidance refers to life threatening situations. **Pepper spray** is used, not generally in crowds, but mostly when making arrests by spraying in the face. Water cannons have never been used on the British mainland but are being talked about.

**Horses** are used to protect buildings, seal off streets, and to push back and split groups of people. The only safe response is to move out of the path of the horses calmly but swiftly. Do not sit down in front of them, unless you want to get trampled. Instead, move around the horses and fill up the space behind them as soon as the horses have passed.

**Dogs** may also be used, especially to protect buildings, patrol rural areas and for sniffing for drugs.

**Snatch Squads** are small groups of cops (usually six, in a triangular formation) who are sent into the crowd to snatch and arrest individuals. These might be people that the cops think are “ring leaders”, or just people they don't like the look of. They also like to target people with musical instruments, cameras and the like. Watch out for each other and if you see a snatch squad approaching let people around you know about it. You can sometimes spot a senior police officer pointing out people they want arrested. Often a snatch squad is used to incite violence, to create a pretext for attacking the protesters.

Be aware that police officers do not like to be isolated from their colleagues and will often react very violently to this situation.

**Intelligence gathering** is the police's favourite intimidation tactic. Expect to see lots of intelligence gatherers with video and stills cameras. CCTV cameras will often be installed on roof tops and you will be filmed from helicopters hovering above. One way to protect yourself from this is to wear a wide brimmed hat and sunglasses or fancy dress. Be aware though that the police can arrest you if you refuse to take off “any items worn for disguise”.

# Tips for large protests:

- Form affinity groups and have a buddy with you.
- Stay alert and keep moving around, as a group and individually.
- Fill gaps and face outwards so you can see what's going on.
- Link arms if possible – this forms protective barriers and gives moral support.



# Preventing and de-escalating violent situations

Quite often we're faced with aggression on actions – from employees, the police, passers-by and sometimes fellow protesters. Or you yourself might “lose it”, eg when you see a friend being hurt. Being aware of what can lead to aggression and violence on actions can help to avoid these situations arising, and keep the action safe.

**Stay focussed on your aims** - Work out what it is you want to achieve and how you will do this. A clear motivation and sense of purpose can help you to stay focussed in a chaotic, frightening situation.

**Work in affinity groups.** This not only provides back-up but also support when a member of the group starts to get stressed.

**Stay calm, relaxed and alert.** Try to notice things before they become a problem so that you can respond in good time. If you're scared or feel your adrenalin pumping, take some deep slow breaths into your stomach – this will calm you and allow you to think more clearly.

**Create a positive atmosphere** for yourself and others. Make music, sing and laugh. Share hot tea and chocolate around.

**Think of the opponent as a human being.** Show respect. Be aware of their capacity for positive action. They may also be worried or afraid. Treating others in a way that you would like to be treated.

**Watch body language** – your own and others. Look relaxed and open, use gentle hand movements - avoid sudden moves which could be interpreted as hitting out. Don't make fists. Use non-threatening eye contact. Avoid getting into people's personal space.

**Don't act submissive or frightened.** Don't plead and beg, don't fold arms or look away. At the same time don't be aggressive, threatening or insulting. Physical violence may make an attacker feel justified.

**Watch your language.** Say “I”, ask questions. Keep your voice low but clear and under control. Be relaxed, but firm. Do not rush into faster and faster speech. Only interrupt if people are being personally abusive. Listen – and show that you have heard what is being said.

**Do the unexpected** - it can be a distraction and create surprise. Use humour, shake hands, sit down, offer coffee etc. Become active - match the energy of the situation and transform it.

# ...Dealing with the Police...

Whilst in Scotland you'll undoubtedly get into contact with the police. Read the bust card enclosed in this booklet and take it with you at all times. It has all the important legal information on it. Also write the numbers of G8 legal Support group and solicitors on your hand or arm when going on an action in case you lose the bustcard. If you get stopped or arrested contact the Legal Support Group straight away.



- Be calm and assertive. Don't be intimidated. Know your rights.
- Ask to speak to the senior officer present (PCs know nothing anyway).
  - Try not to lose your temper or swear (this may be used as an excuse to arrest you).
  - Lay off the drink (this may also be used as an excuse to arrest you).
- Keep a watchful eye out for other police and other protesters.

The police will ask you all sorts of questions **which you're not obliged to answer**. They are out to gather information. Don't give it to them, for your sake and that of your fellow protesters. You don't even have to give your name and address when you are randomly stopped or searched. The only time you do have to give your name and address is when the cops reasonably suspect you of committing or witnessing an offence **“No comment”!** or when they detain/arrest you.

## Debriefing and evaluation

It's important to debrief after an action. Do this as soon as possible, ideally on the same day. It's a great way of learning lessons and giving everyone a chance to express how they feel. Make note of anything useful for planning the next action. What happened to each person? How did people feel during the action? Was everyone supported by the group? How did the group interact? What was achieved? What could be improved? Does the group want to stay together for further actions? Do people need any continuing support, for example because they have a court case as a result of the action?

# Action Planning

Produced by the Root Activist Network of Trainers

“The power of the action is in the reaction”. Saul Alinsky, community organizer

Organizing actions is not rocket science. Nor is it as simple as baking a cake. There are many elements that go into making your action successful. If you take the time at the front end to be really clear about what you are trying to do and why, it can make the difference between building real power and feeling like a flop.

If your plans are good, if you have a realistic assessment of your numbers and your resources, and if the people working on it are accountable, the only thing to be worried about is the weather. And this is no small matter and should be factored in. Sitting on a street in January in Michigan is not going to quickly move people to stronger actions. So be smart about what you are asking people to participate in. After all, we’re assuming that you want them to come back again!

Most often actions are part of a larger organizing effort or campaign. If this is true for you action it is important that actions build in energy and excitement over time.

## Some thoughts about strategy...

Strategy means looking at the big picture.

Strategy means knowing what your overall vision and immediate goals are.

Strategy is about concentrating resources in the right place

Strategy is knowing when to use your resources as well as what kind to use.

Strategy is knowing who has the power to make the decision.

Strategy means knowing your own and your opponents’ strengths, weaknesses, allies, opposition, constraints, and opportunities.

Strategy is knowing what story you are trying to tell, who are the sympathetic characters, how do you frame the conflict, create moments of drama, and a happy ending.

### **Some Questions to Consider When Planning an Action**

**Goals:** what are we trying to accomplish? Are your goals concrete, tangible, winnable?

**Target:** who are we trying to impact/move/influence?

**Message/Demands:** What is your message? Who are the other audiences besides the target, what do we want them to know, what do we want them to do? Do the message and target fit together in a way that is easily understandable? Can it be summed up in a "slogan" What is your slogan, theme, sound bite? Does it fit on a banner? Are your demands clear and simple? Do you have several fallback demands?

**Mobilization:** How many do you need/want for the action? How many people can you mobilize? Do you have turnout goals? Is there a good turnout plan for the action, including last-minute reminder phone calls, email blast etc? How will you change the plan if you don't have enough people?

**Scenario:** what will happen? what does it look like? Is the action symbolic or disruptive? Is it public or secret? Will your action be *fun* and powerful? Is your group comfortable with the plan? Will the plan be outside the experience of the target? Does it have a beginning, middle and end? How does the scenario communicate your message without words—where the visuals alone communicate your message. Consider timing. Is your event competing with other things, can people come? The more your event/action contains novelty, conflict, new data, simplicity, humor, prominent figures involved, civil disobedience, bright props and images, local impact, holidays, anniversaries the more coverage it will get.



**Action Site:** How does your action site relate to your target? Is it one and the same? If there are multiple action sites which you are considering, which best communicates your message and will accommodate your action. (Some things to consider in choosing an action site are size, visibility, access, proximity to roads, phones etc, fences, security, sidewalks, public space nearby, parking, tenants etc) Have you scouted the building and made a floor plan? Do you know where to find: elevator and stairs, bathrooms, payphone, parking or nearest transit stops, the target's office. Can the site accommodate disabled members? Are there security cameras, how big is the sidewalk, is there a public space nearby? Are there parking garages? Who are the other tenants?

**Program:** How are we communicating? Speakers, performance, poetry, story boards, videos.

**Publicity:** How will you get the word out? – fliers, postcards, webpages, emails, posters, ads, psa's

**Logistics:** do you have all the things you need?

- Signs, Banners, Flags
- A leaflet for the day of action
- Sound System
- Bullhorns and batteries
- Sign In Sheets, clip boards, pens
- Noisemakers, whistles, drums
- Puppets or other visual props
- Legal instructions, marshal! instructions
- Cameras, film
- Food, drinks
- Transportation (busses, vans, cars) & routes for drivers
- Set Up crew
- Clean up crew
- Security arm bands
- Press packets
- Communication equipment (radios, phones)

- Money for legal expenses

- **Props:** Make it visible , participatory, a picture is worth 1000 words

- **Training:** Are people prepared for their roles, the action etc?

- **Legal/Police:** do we seek permits or not, will we have a liaison team on the day of?

- **CD/DA Support:** strategy, plan, recruit, training, get out of jail support- food, drivers, court plan etc... Do you have all the legal information you need? Are there lawyers on call?

- **Security/Traffic Plan:** what is needed? Who will coordinate, train, recruit? What are police plans and contingencies, how to protect participants, how to deal with provocateurs

**Media:** How do we publicize our issues and message? If you want the media, have they been notified? Have you:

- Sent a press advisory including a notice of your photo opportunity and highlighting your gimmick, a week ahead of time?
- Called the daybook a week ahead of time?
- Advance calls to reporters pitching story/giving background/spin
- Sent press release the day before?
- Called assignment editors the day before the action?
- Prepared a release or press packet (including background materials) for distribution on the day of the action?
- ID & train/prep spokespeople to talk with the media at the action itself?

**Staffing:** -Develop decision-making structure (SpokesCouncil, Tactical Team)

ID all “staffing” or roles or areas of responsibility that you need for the action

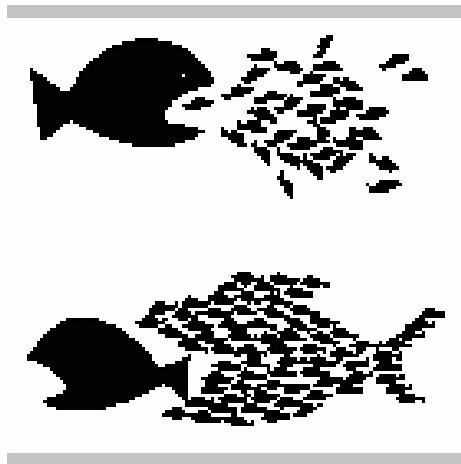
- Team/march leader
- Police Liaisons
- Marshall, PeaceKeeper, Security, Traffic
- Leafletters

- Media person
- Organizational spokesperson
- Set up crew
- Clean up crew
- Drivers
- Chant leaders
- Prop distribution & collection
- Equipment distribution & collection
- Sign-in team
- Get out of jail people, lawyers

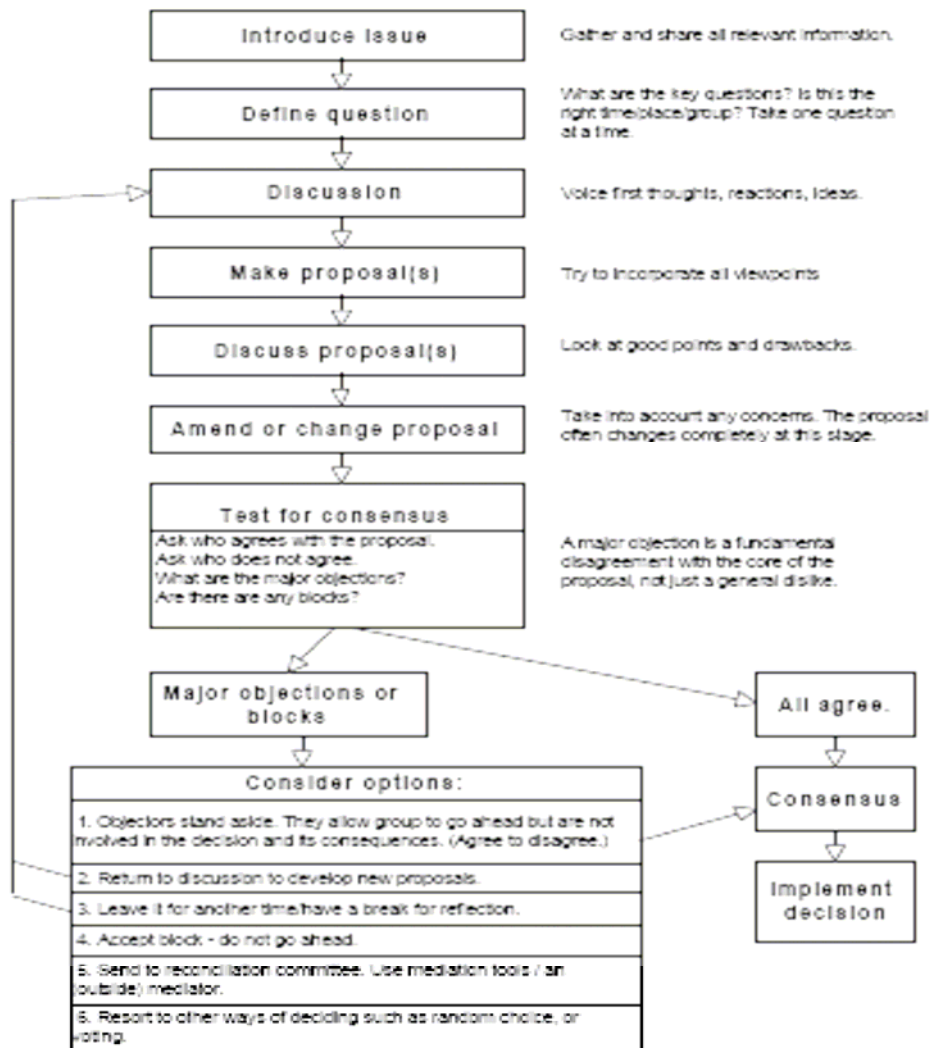
**Communications:** how will we communicate during the action? what equipment will we need? Where will we get it? What are the protocols?

**Coordination/Prep**– do you have a prep meetings planned to review scenarion, communications, maps, and make sure teams working together are familiar with what needs to be done?

**Debrief:** Who will debrief the action and where will the debriefing occur?



## Consensus Decision-Making Flowchart



Seeds for Change

www.seedsforchange.org.uk | hello@seedsforchange.org.uk  
 0045 330 7583 @seed-copywrite - copy + distribute

This is the procedure you would follow in a meeting, it is not suitable for quick decision making.

From Seeds for Change

# Street Safety

- Pay attention to what is happening around you. (This includes other protestors and police!)
- Keep breathing and stay connected to the earth--this will prevent panic. Panic reduces critical judgment and our ability to make good decisions. Panic also spreads quickly.
- Have a Buddy, watch out for one another and keep track of each other.
- Get a good map – used colored markers to highlight key sites, you can laminate it easily with clear mailing tape.
- Scout the area ahead of time, particularly during the days and times of the action. Be familiar with streets, allies, public buildings, restaurants etc. Identify “safe spaces”
- Have a re-group plan in case you get separated (one or two places you decide in advance. Public buildings like train stations, bus terminals, restaurants can be great re-group sites) An easy technique for Buddies is to agree to go back to the same spot you last saw each other.
- Have an exit strategy – how do you get out of an area.
- Have contingencies planned in advance to minimize major decision-making in the street
- Don't act on rumors – have scouts or a communication system to verify what you hear.
- Bring a change of clothes in case of tear gas or a need to change your appearance.
- Crowd Dynamics – consider what's going on, who's around me, are they my allies, do you feel connected?
- Cop Dynamics – what are they doing, what is their formation, have they put on gas masks, who is in charge? What does the energy feel like?
- Dangerous moments: at the end of a demonstration when you think it is over.
- Nourishment – carry a little something to eat like a power bar, nuts or fruit and lots of water

## If Confrontation Occurs:

Stay calm, centered, and don't give way to fear.

- Know what your intention is for the action: literally stopping a meeting? Building alliances? Drawing attention to an issue? The specific choices we make will depend on our intention.
- Convey that intention clearly to the group so that everyone understands the reasons behind the choices we may make.
- Oppose the power of violence with the power of our radical imagination.
- Remember that every act we take is a choice, and that we have choices in any situation.
- Seek to undermine dehumanization, by not ourselves dehumanizing our opponents, for when we do we simply reinforce the mindset and energetic patterns that encourage violence.
- De-escalate conflict by speaking calmly, moving slowly, keeping hands down and open, listening, making yourself human.
- Act in unexpected ways, not doing the dance of violence and intimidation, but writing our own steps and music.
- Bring art, music, drums, seeds, masks, puppets and magic into confrontation to embody our vision and hope.
- Seek to broaden the awareness of our opponents that they are also making choices, that their behavior is not predetermined.
- Use humor and surprise.
- Know what may escalate the tension in a situation, and what may de-escalate it, and make a conscious choice about which to do.
- Act to strengthen our group solidarity and support.
- Ask these questions before we take any extreme act:  
Does this further our intention?  
What base of support do we have for taking this action? What support do we risk losing? Why is this act worth risking that support?  
Did we agree to this act? If not, what will it do to our community solidarity?  
Will this act loosen the web of restraint? Can we afford to do so at this moment? Who is most at risk, if we do, and have they agreed to accept that risk?  
Does this act embody our hope and vision?  
Do I know and trust the person urging me to take this action?  
Does this action embody the world we're fighting for?

## Protecting yourself

Taking good care of yourself – eating, sleeping and drinking lots of water will go a long way to keeping you focused, grounded and healthy during street actions. No matter how tight our plan of action is with our affinity group, we can never really predict what will happen in an action, how the police will (over)react to our demonstration, no matter how peaceful we may be. So the more we are physically prepared the easier it will be to respond.

The Police have a wide range of “non-lethal” weapons at their disposal and we have seen that they rarely hesitate to use them. Usually their intent is to disperse us, but we know that our ability to hold political space is crucial. Here are a few tips we’ve learned along the way:

**Batons:** If they are being held horizontally to push, you can turn your back and hopefully the backpack you are carrying with extra water etc can take the blow. Or you can face them and use your hands as a soft shield. Banners and signs can also help break impact. Finally, sitting down may shift the energy and thwart their ability to push us back. (If they are shooting rubber bullets, don’t sit down.)

If police are using batons to jab, packs, signs or banners can shield you. If they are swinging and you brought a helmet, now would be a good time to make sure it is on! You may decide to leave quickly. Protect your head with your arms, especially the base of your skull and temples. If you have been hurt and go down, curl up in a fetal position and protect your head, stomach and genitals. Lie on your right side if you can to protect your liver as well.

After the police have left, apply pressure to any area that is bleeding and get help from a medic.

**Projectiles:** (Rubber, plastic, wooden bullets, bean bags, etc.). If the police have opened fire, turn your back to them in order to protect your face, throat and stomach. You may choose to slowly

walk away or run. Don't sit down: police are supposed to fire low, to aim for legs and feet, not heads. They don't always obey this protocol, but you increase your chances of getting hurt if you sit down. These projectiles are not non-lethal and several protestors have been seriously hurt by them. If you are shot and bruised, try and see a medic, but taking some Arnica, pills or rub will help with the bruising.

**Horses:** Are often used to move crowds. They are big, strong and frightening. IF you have a large group of people, sitting down together and forming a living carpet will stop the horses if they can see you and have room to stop. Horses will not walk on what seems like uneven or moving pavement. Pull your legs in close, and try singing or humming rather than yelling—a spooked horse is dangerous. If the horses are backing into you, get up.

**Dogs:** If the police use dogs, it is important to keep your hands, arms, legs etc pulled in tight. Do not give them anything to sink their teeth into. Do not look at the dog, but make eye contact with its handler instead. Talk in a clear voice, tell them to restrain the dog, to shorten its leash, put the dog back in the vehicle etc.

**Pain Compliance** – should the police be in a position to arrest you, they will often use pain compliance holds if you are linked up or locked down in any way. They may apply pressure to certain places on your body where the nerves are close to the surface or they will manipulate your body in the opposite direction it is meant to go. While there are certain ways to minimize the pain, these are essentially torture technique and resistance may cause serious harm. At some point you will likely need to let go. Agree beforehand with your affinity group on a safe word that means, 'let me go'.

## **Tear Gas and Pepper Spray**

**PREVENTION:** Wash before with unscented castille soap. Don't put vaseline, mineral oil, oil-based sunscreen or moisturizers on skin as they can trap chemicals. Cover up with water repellent clothes & gear. Don't wear contact lenses.



## FOR PROTECTION

- A bandanna, soaked in lemon juice or vinegar kept in a ziplock baggie to conserve moisture which can be put over your nose and mouth. Try a peeled onion.
- And shatterproof goggles. If you wear glasses: Either find goggles to fit over or put them on a string so you can take them off and put goggles on instead.
- A paint mask or filter or gas mask.
- Water bottles with squirt tops for washing eyes.

## GENERAL TREATMENT FOR TEAR GAS (CS, CN) AND PEPPER SPRAY (OC)

- Stay calm & focused. You are strong. The discomfort is only temporary & will not damage you.
- Don't touch face or rub eyes. Get to fresh air, eyes open, arms out (if tear gas), remember you can breathe and breathe slowly.
- Blow nose, spit out chemicals.
- Carry water to flush your eyes & gargle. Flush eyes with head tipped so water runs off the outside of the face, not toward the nose.
- A solution of 1/2 liquid antacid (Maalox, but NOT mint-flavored!) and 1/2 water can be used to flush eyes if water isn't helping. Medics will carry it.
- When your body heats up (from running or panicking, for example), the irritation may increase. Your pores will open allowing more absorption of the chemicals.
- Face the wind, open your eyes, hold your arms out and walk around to let fresh air decontaminate you. Take slow deep breaths of clean air.
- Don't touch your eyes or your face, as you may re-contaminate yourself.
- Before you assist or treat anyone, ask them for permission! Then explain to them what you are going to do before you do it.

- Make sure cleaning solutions and water spill directly to ground so as to not contaminate clean skin, clothes or hair.
- Store contaminated wipes in a sealed bag.
- After treatment, wash with cold water & replace contaminated clothes.

#### AFTERWARDS:

- Be aware that entering into a room with contaminated clothes, hair & skin reeking of chemicals will contaminate the room.
- Make sure that you leave a plastic bag outside or near the inside of your door to put your contaminated clothes in.
- Decontaminate with a cold shower (keeps pores closed preventing chemicals from entering skin).
- Exchange contaminated clothing for fresh.

#### Some Special Conditions:

- **Contact lenses** are dangerous because they can trap chemicals underneath and burn your eyeball! Thus wearing your glasses is usually recommended. If you wear contacts they must be removed if you are hit with tear gas or pepper spray or serious damage to your eyes can occur. Disposables are great, but still carry your glasses and/or bring a spare pair of lenses. If yours are not disposable, keep a case with you, once contaminated they may be history however.
- **Asthma** is seriously irritated by tear gas, and can be fatal. Try and stay out of the gas or spray and make sure you bring your inhaler.
- **Pregnant Women/Nursing Mothers:** being in this toxic environment is not advisable for you or your baby. Stay out of it if you can.

# AFTER THE ACTION

Actions are intense, sometimes terrible, often wonderful. When they are over, we need to stay connected with the friends we've made. We may need to talk to those who've been through the same experiences, to celebrate and rage and laugh and mourn together. Be sure your affinity group plans time to debrief together, and a post-action party when everyone is back home safe.

## Coming Out of Jail Stronger

Jail can be a powerfully transformative experience. It reveals the underside of the power structure in this country, and gives those who come to the action from a more privileged background a chance to experience what poor people and people of color face every day. Jail can be upsetting and traumatic, strengthening and empowering, an emotional roller coaster, a deeply bonding moment. Some of the things to anticipate in jail and once you are out are:

**Rage:** Jail is simply the distilled form of the larger violence around us. Anger is a sane and healthy response, but you may find it deflected onto your friends and families instead of directed to the systems of oppression we're fighting. Warn your friends and coworkers to tread gently and not order you around for a while. Be prepared for flashes of rage, and try to remember whom we're really angry at.

**Self-Blame**—You've been in a system designed on every level to make you feel bad, wrong, inadequate and powerless. The men and women who run it are experts in psychological manipulation and intimidation. They spend a lifetime developing their techniques—you had at most a few hours training in how to resist them.

When you're in jail, you're constantly faced with decisions to be made with inadequate information under conditions of fear and exhaustion. You may make mistakes. You may end up complying

when you later wish you'd resisted, or failing to act when you think you should have. You may make decisions you later regret.

Try not to blame yourselves. One of the ways the system functions is to keep us focused on what we, individually, did or didn't do instead of on the violence of the system itself. Self blame is the way we take the violence of the system in, and beat ourselves up instead of making the guards and police do their own dirty work. And it rapidly turns into blame of each other, becoming a force to divide us and cut us off from the very support we need.

**Difficult Re-entry:** It's hard to go back to regular life after the intensity of an action. It's hard to go home to a lonely apartment after the strong community we've felt in the action and in jail. It's hard to go back to school, a job, or to any institution that suddenly seems like a softer-edged version of the jail. And everything suddenly does look like a version of jail—a system of punishment and control.

You may find yourselves tired, depressed, unable to take pleasure in things you usually enjoy, vicariously experiencing the sufferings of all the oppressed and dispossessed. Food may seem tasteless, work or studies meaningless. You may lose things, get confused, and have difficulty functioning.

These are common human responses to loss, trauma and stress. They are not a sign of your personal weakness or inadequacy. Here are a few things that can help:

**Talk About It:** Ideally with the others who were with you, with your affinity group or with someone else who has been through a similar experience. If that's not possible, find a friend who is willing to lend a sympathetic ear, or a counselor. You need to tell your story, sometimes over and over and over again.

**Rest:** We've all put out a phenomenal amount of energy. Sleep. Take yourself out into a natural environment with trees and green plants. Lie on the ground. Restore your energy.

**Cleanse:** Do something physical and symbolic to release the energies of the jail. Take a shower and scrub with epsom salts,

bathe in the ocean or a running stream, wash your clothes. Do it with the conscious intention of letting go of the jail energy, of emerging renewed.

**Renew:** If you have a spiritual practice, now is the time to intensify it. If you don't resonate with spirituality, take time for what does inspire you and feed you, whether it's the forests, music, or the company of friends.

**Learn:** You've just received a priceless educational experience. You now know more about the underlying workings of the system we are fighting. You've had a small taste of the violence and repression experienced every day by the poor, by people of color, by those who end up in jail without the support of an action and a media team. You will never be the same person you were before this action.

**Honor yourself:** And all of us—for the courage, strength, and commitment we've shown in taking action, for the movement we are building together, for the ways we've listened to one another and struggled with our differences and already changed the world. You deserve to feel proud to have been part of this action, and to be in a movement that contains such brave, committed and caring people.

**Carry it On:** Rage can be an energizing force. So can love. As hard as a jail experience can be, it can also be empowering. We can come out of it stronger than we went in. What we've learned from this action can move us into the next phase as we build the movement that will transform the world.



# AFTERCARE:

## Responding to Trauma

Supporting Yourself and Others to Cope with Traumatic Incidents

**Everyone participating in an action is confronting the abusive power of the state. Our response to the abuse that we experience will depend on our self-care and support in the midst of that experience, on our personal histories, as well as the actually traumatic incidents that occurred. Circumstances that are likely to produce high levels of post-traumatic stress are personal exposure to physical, mental, and sexual assault, witnessing the assault of others, and prolonged or intense fear. Factors that place us at greater risk for post-traumatic stress are having a history of abuse, not getting support that we need from our allies, and being separated from others, either during or following the action. Because abuse is pervasive in this culture, learning to heal from and integrate our traumatic experiences in action can empower us to live our lives more fully every day.**

As we have already highlighted, a traumatic situation can affect different people in different ways. There are a wide range of symptoms associated with trauma sufferers, which is one of the main reasons why it is often misdiagnosed. For the sufferer, the sooner these symptoms are identified and treatment sought, the quicker they are likely to improve, both personally and professionally.

So what are the trauma warning signs that you need to look out for?

Nightmares

Flashbacks and hallucinations

Disturbed sleep

Social and Emotional Withdrawal

A Sense of having a foreshortened future

Inability to concentrate

Hyper vigilance

Individuals who experience trauma injury very often go on to develop

Phobias/ Panic attacks

Depression

Increased Alcohol, Smoking and Drug Use

Absenteeism

Feelings of suicide and being unable to cope

A sense of isolation

If someone is showing signs of trauma – whether it be one hour or one month after a traumatic incident – **take it seriously**. Post-traumatic stress can be severely worsened by ignoring it or making fun of it – “come on get over it!”

In the **immediate aftermath of a traumatic incident**,

1) Ask the affected person they'd like to go to a quieter space to talk about it. Don't yank them away if they wish to remain connected to what is happening. But talking soon after the incident is one of the best ways we have of minimizing ongoing trauma. There is no need to dissect everything that happened at this stage but just listen.

2) Help them to reconnect with their affinity group, and to locate those they are concerned about. Healing from a trauma is partly about finding safe ways to reconnect a range of things that have been severed by the trauma (trust, faith, etc), and this is not done by ignoring or minimizing it.

3) Be mindful of little things that you can do to assist the person to **restore a sense of dignity and humanity** ... finding a space where they can have a wash, feeling the grass underneath their feet ~ ask them what will help (as this will differ between people and circumstances).

4) It goes without saying how important **deep listening** is. It is particularly important to reassure the person that what they are

feeling is normal ... that traumatic reactions are normal reactions to the types of events that no-one should have to be exposed to, that it isn't a sign of going mad, nor of being unable to 'stand up for the cause.' Again, be very wary of "don't be a cry-baby" type of reactions that come out of the same sense of patriarchy found in police cultures and in much of society.

And in the **days after the traumatic incidents?** ... some things to remember include

Eating nourishing food

Being physically active, as traumatic incidents can wash one's body with chemicals that need releasing through exercise

Helping the person to establish a normal routine for themselves, to do at least some of the sorts of things that they would do had they have not been traumatized

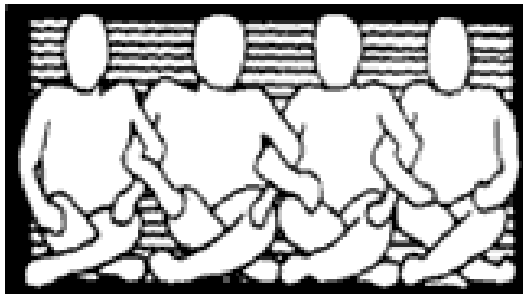
Continuing to provide a listening ear

Helping the person to find their own balance of reconnecting with various facets of the mobilization, spending time in a small

supportive group (s), and being alone if they express this wish

The person may not be their normal self ... be patient, and don't try to snap the person back into their normal self

For particularly severe traumatic incidents, it can be helpful to organize a formal group debrief for those affected, at some point between 24 and 72 hours after the incident. A formal debrief is run by someone with experience who can help those involved in a particular incident to support each other.





## What wikipedia says...

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Direct\\_action](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Direct_action)

Direct action is a form of political activism which seeks immediate remedy for perceived ills, as opposed to indirect actions such as electing representatives who promise to provide remedy at some later date.

Direct action includes such activities as strikes, boycotts, workplace occupations, sit-ins, intimidation, harassment, political assassinations, revolutionary/guerrilla warfare, or sabotage, and less oppositional methods such as establishing radical social centres, which are often squatted. Direct actions are often (but not always) a form of civil disobedience, and are sometimes illegal. Those employing direct action aim to either:

- \* obstruct another agent or organization from performing some practice to which they object.

- \* act with whatever resources and methods are within their power, either on their own or as part of a group, in order to solve problems.

Supporters of direct action view reformist politics as ineffective in bringing about change, while still giving a sense of accomplishment to the participants, thus allowing the party or institution being targeted to continue with its perceived harmful practices without further harassment. Anarchist Emma Goldman articulated this idea by saying "if voting changed anything, they'd make it illegal."

### **Nonviolent direct action (NVDA)**

Nonviolent direct action is any form of direct action that does not rely on violent tactics. Mahatma Gandhi's teachings of Satyagraha (or truth force) have inspired many practitioners of nonviolent direct action (NVDA). In 1963, civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr. described the goal of NVDA in his Letter from Birmingham Jail: "Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored."

One major debate is whether destruction of property can be included within the realm of nonviolence. This debate can be illustrated by the response to groups like the Earth Liberation Front and Animal Liberation Front, which use property destruction and sabotage as

direct action tactics. Although these types of actions are often viewed as a form of violence, and even terrorism, many supporters of these types of actions define violence only as harm directed towards living things, and not towards property.



*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.*

Margaret Mead

## **Resources:**

[www.seedsforchange.org.uk](http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk)

great downloads about facilitation, groups, media, legal, funding, etc.

[www.uhc-collective.org.uk](http://www.uhc-collective.org.uk)

download NVDA (non-violent direct action) toolbox

[www.rantcollective.net](http://www.rantcollective.net)

training collective in the USA, lots of useful material about campaigning and demos

[www.eco-action.org/rr](http://www.eco-action.org/rr)

online version of several chapters of Road Raging (*the book about road protests*)

[www.schnews.org.uk](http://www.schnews.org.uk)

lots of DIY guides about protest, organising, squatting...

[www.turning-the-tide.org](http://www.turning-the-tide.org)

infosheets on different issues

[www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org)

independent grassroots media

[www.activist-trauma.net](http://www.activist-trauma.net)

Activist Trauma Support with lots of information material to download

In German: [www.projektwerkstatt.de/saasen](http://www.projektwerkstatt.de/saasen)

Lots of zines about different topics on order

*Thanks to all the collectives and groups we have used material from to produce this booklet*

# TEAR DOWN THE BORDERS



## ABOLISH PRISONS

We want a world without cells,  
Without bars in front of windows,  
Without prison walls,  
Without judicial systems

## SUPPORT PRISONERS

Contact: [life@lifeproject.lu](mailto:life@lifeproject.lu)

LIFE asbl, 53, Val des Aulnes, L-3811 Schifflange  
*Compiled for the ActionCamp06 in Luxemburg*