

# Non-Violent Street Tactics

*1 hour 50 minutes*

**Materials:** Definitions of “Direct Action” and “Violence” on butcher paper, “violent” “non-violent” “I'd do it” and “I wouldn't do it” signs, Cop Hats, Batons, Masking tape (to mark injuries)

## I. Introduction *(5 minutes)*

- Introduce trainers
- Who has: de-escalated a situation (in activism or not), used consensus, been to a protest, been to a non-violence or direct action training, done CD or direct action? Then we've all used nonviolent tactics of some kind.
- In this workshop, we want to focus on non-violent tactics rather than the history behind non-violence. Any discussion of theory of non-violence will be directly related to thinking strategically about the safety and effectiveness of specific tactics that we call non-violent.
- We don't have the absolute answers. For discussions to be useful, please speak up – especially minority opinions.

## II. Defining Violence *(15 minutes)*

### A. Matrix of Morality – so what is violent, anyways? *(10 minutes)*

#### Set Up

[Put signs on the four walls of the room - two walls with "Violent" on one wall and "Non-Violent" on the opposite wall, and two walls with "I would do it" on one wall and "I would not do it" on the opposite wall. You'll give participants some hypothetical situations and actions, and they'll move to a place in the room that shows how much they think that action (in that situation) is violent, and how likely they are to do it. In a small group, you can get everyone to talk at least once by asking two people per question why they're standing where they are.]

#### Introduce the Exercise

- We're going to give you some hypothetical situations, and you're going to move to a place based on whether you personally would do it, and whether you personally think it's violent.
- This is a spectrum, so if you feel really wishy-washy about something, you can stand towards the middle.
- We'll ask folks why they're standing where they are, but you can pass if you don't want to answer.

[Trainers: model the exercise using "Destruction of private property" as your hypothetical situation.]

### **Hypothetical questions:**

- destruction of private property
- ownership of private property
- dropping bombs
- paying taxes
- eating meat
- imposing economic sanctions
- physically restraining a person from smashing a window
- throwing tear gas canisters back at cops

### **B. What Is Nonviolence? (5 minutes)**

- As we can see by this exercise, we all have different definitions of violence and, therefore, non-violence. What are some definitions that people have of violence?
- For the sake of this training, we'll define violence as: The use of force to harm or intimidate a person. Obviously, this is just a working definition so that we can get through this next hour productively, not the final say on what violence is.
- Also for the sake of this training, we are going to focus on direct violence. That is, a cop hitting you over the head rather than the concept of private property or racism. It is important to not perpetuate violent behaviors & assumptions in our work. This means recognizing and combating personal racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, etc. in ourselves and others. But that's a whole other workshop.
- Non-violence is a tactical approach that involves finding ways to achieve our goals without harming people. [Emphasize this point/concept throughout]
- Sometimes, the concepts of non-violence and pacifism are used interchangeably. They aren't the same. Non-violence is a set of tactics (aka a strategy) and pacifism is a set of beliefs (that is, an ideology).

### **III. Direct Action (10 minutes)**

For this training, we're going to use this definition of direct action: Achieving your goals by the most direct means possible - with the fewest intermediaries.

#### **A. Why Use Non-Violent Direct Action?**

##### **1. Safety**

- On the street, they help to ensure safety of individuals and groups
- Scared cops are dangerous cops – but mention that cops often get violent when your protest is effective, whether or not you use violence
- To make protests more inviting to people who aren't active yet
- Less likely to be nailed by the criminal justice system
- Protecting folks who are targeted
- It looks more sympathetic in the media

##### **2. Effectiveness**

Being effective can mean many different things. It's a good idea to first determine the goal of your direct action so you can choose a tactic that is most

likely to achieve this goal

## **B. Some potential goals/purposes of non-violent direct action**

- create a spectacle to bring attention to an issue through mainstream media
- educate public on certain issue through visibility on street
- disrupt normal order of things
- shut down meetings or events
- impact those in power through their pocketbooks
- create a visible show of resistance and inspire others
- to have fun and stay active

## **C. Some things to think about:**

Non-violent direct action as a strategy used in conjunction with other strategies (outreach, education, legislation, armed revolution) in order to effect social change that is wide in scope and long-term. The ANC in South Africa successfully fought Apartheid using mostly grassroots organizing, but also non-violence and violence against military and civilian targets.

## **D. Some Non-Violent Direct Actions**

- Sitting in intersections / Locking down
- Sit-ins, Kiss-ins, Cough-ins, Die-ins
- Banner hangs
- Walkouts
- Taking over a welfare office
- Billboard redecoration / Public Art (Graffiti)
- Homeless encampment in front of city hall
- Giving free food to people in public places
- Workplace strikes
- Property Destruction

## **IV. Dealing with violence in a non-violent way (40 minutes)**

### **A. Hassle line role play (15 minutes)**

[Have people split up into two lines facing each other.

Scenario: One line is blockading the entrance to a GAP, the other line are customers trying to get in to shop. Cut after five minutes.]

### **Discussion about de-escalation**

1. What did the shoppers do that was difficult to deal with?
  - Targeted 'weak points'
  - Teamed up
  - Got angry

- Personal attacks / physical attacks
- 2. What did the protesters do that was effective?**
- De-escalated, calmed things down
  - Planned ahead of time (sound bites, chants, contingency plans)
  - Teamed up to help each other
  - Talked to shoppers & identified with them
  - Used body language, tone of voice, eye contact
  - Mirroring
- 3. To sum up:**
- Be prepared – with talking points, chants, alternative shopping venues, contingency plans, etc
  - Know and trust each other
  - Be aware of what's happening around you
  - Know your goals
  - De-escalation is key to non-violence strategies. Keep your eyes open and defuse problems before they occur

[Switch roles and do it again. Option: To make it more difficult, this time the people trying to get in are working class folks trying to get to their jobs or trying to cash their paycheck before banks close for the weekend.]

### **B. Quick Decision Making (10 minutes)**

During an action, it's important to make decisions everyone can live with because people are putting themselves at risk. But, you usually have to make decisions quickly. How can you do both?

- Figure out your quick decision-making process before the action.
- Brainstorm ways to make quick decisions
- Majority rules, temporary leader, no-block rule, etc.
- Brainstorm ways for everyone to be happy & safe even if you can't agree
- "Buddy" system for people who want to/need to leave
- Recognizing/Defining at-risk roles and "support" roles. Discuss everyone's risk-tolerance and choose roles so that everyone can participate in the action even if they don't want to risk arrest or violence. Non-arrest risk roles are as important as any others.

### **C. Police Liaison Role Play (15 minutes)**

[Scenario: Participants are in a large group picketing an ROTC building. Two police officers (trainers) arrive and try to make them leave, though they are vague about why. When everyone talks and yells at once, the cops call for back up and declare an unlawful assembly. ]

### **What went wrong?**

- Different activists were communicating conflicting things to the cops.
- They did not agree on what they would and would not compromise on.
- With everyone talking, the cops can't understand anyone.
- The situation escalated until the cops called for backup and they got arrested when they maybe didn't have to.

**How could this situation have been handled differently and maybe not resulted in arrest?**

- Key lesson: Use a police liaison to more effectively communicate with cops.
- A police liaison can stall for time.
- The police liaison is not kissing ass, is not going to try to be their buddy, and is not adversarial. You should approach it as a business relationship.
- This means communicating the starting point for negotiating (where they'll go, whether they'll quiet down, etc.), and then serving as a go-between for the cops and protesters.
- This does not mean making decisions for the group.
- Negotiate with the "ranking officer" or the highest ranking officer present, as he/she is almost always the one in charge (or at least responsible for what happens).
- A police liaison should go out to meet approaching cops so that he/she can talk to them away from the group or action, thus taking the heat off of your friends and giving you more of a chance to de-escalate.
- Since the police liaison is closest to the cops and maybe giving them bad news, you have a higher risk of arrest.
- Cops will want to talk to the "leader" – that is, the straightest, whitest, biggest, male-est person. Work out group dynamics around these issues ahead of time.

[Repeat the role play if time allows. Let participants choose a police liaison, and remind them to meet the cops as far away from the protest as possible. The cops should threaten and give them a hard time. End the role play when the police liaison communicates the cops' demands to the activists and they start to make a decision about what to do. Debrief: Did the police liaison: meet the cops far from the protest, successfully listen to the cops demands, communicate to the cops that they'll have to talk to the protesters, and then actually communicate it to the protesters.]

**V. Street Tactics** (35 minutes)

- Now we're going to talk about physical tactics that are used to protect people from police violence in the streets.
- These exercises involve some pushing and grabbing. If participants have any injuries that affect how they can participate, they should put some masking tape on that area so everyone knows to be careful.

**A. Sitting**

**Scenario:** Have the participants stand in a group, simulating blockading a street.

Trainers (as cops) march toward them and attempt to push the crowd back using batons. If the cops are touched, they should yell "assault" and escalate the (pretend) violence.

### **Discussion:**

- When cops push, it's difficult and dangerous to hold space by pushing against them.
- People in back don't know what's going on, people in front are getting squished and beat up.
- This escalates the situation
- **Solution:** everyone sits in place. Sitting in place is good because:
  - it's visually de-escalating
  - impossible to push a group that's seated
  - safer than meeting force with force

**Practice:** Practice sitting in place so that everyone can sit without falling all over each other. (Hint: cross your feet at the ankles and sit on them.)

## **B. Amoeba**

**Scenario:** The scenario starts the same, but after the participants sit, the trainers (as cops) target someone, grab them and pull them away from the crowd to arrest or beat up. Cops should be clear about who they are targeting ("There's the organizer! Get her!")

### **Discussion:**

- It's dangerous and scary to be the object of a tug-of-war between protesters & cops.
- There's lots of opportunity to touch (meaning assault) cops.
- Also discuss who gets targeted (people of color, "leaders", people in black, trans, etc)
- **Solution:** The crowd absorbs the target like an amoeba absorbing a morsel of food. The target scoots back, the people behind open a spot and pull them through, the people in the front line close the gap. The targeted person keeps moving until they're pooped out the back of the amoeba
  - Ideally the target should get pooped out the back of the crowd and get away.
  - The cops can't get into the middle of a tight seated crowd.
  - Affinity Groups should practice this together.

**Practice:** Practice this a few times. Each time rotate so that everyone gets a chance to be in the front row. To make it more challenging, cops can go after a new person as soon as their first target gets absorbed.

## **C. Puppy pile**

**Scenario:** Again, start with the same scenario, but this time the cops grab the target before she can get absorbed, and start beating her with batons.

**Discussion:**

- This is a very vulnerable dangerous place to be. The challenge is to protect the target while not "assaulting" the cops or escalating the situation.
- **Solution:** Puppy pile. Basically, people drape themselves over the target with the goal of spreading the attack out over 3 people's butts instead of one person's head.
  - Try to cover the target's head and torso
  - The target should be in the fetal position on their side so they can breathe
  - Everyone should guard their heads and necks with their arms and hands
  - This isn't a free-for-all dogpile. Avoid crushing your friend.
  - Ask for/give consent – some people might not want to be piled on
  - In real life, you will get hit and it will hurt, so be ready for that.

**Practice:** Break into groups of four and practice with three puppy-pile-ers and one puppy-pile-ee. Trainers, go around and tap people on vulnerable or exposed areas. Repeat a few times.

## D. Going Limp

**Discussion:**

- When you're rigid, you're easy to pick up and move. When you're dead, limp weight, you are very hard to pick up and move. Going limp is a good way to make arrests very difficult for the cops.
- [Trainer: Demonstrate going limp with 2 people picking you up by your elbows & knees and 1 person guarding your head to make sure you don't smash it if dropped.]
  - Always! tuck your head – do it by looking at your belly button
  - Make sure you don't flail around and accidentally “assault” an officer
  - Expect to get roughed up at least a little
  - In even medium-sized groups, this can be extremely effective at slowing down the cops

**Practice:** Break into groups of 4 (at least) to practice. Make sure someone is behind the person going limp and has their hands right behind their head to make sure it doesn't hit the ground. Trainers, walk around to make sure everyone's safe.

## E. Dealing With Chemical Weapons

- They suck
- Go to a medic's training and be prepared

## **F. Reducing Arrest Risk** *(5 minutes)*

It's also fun not to get arrested or beat up. How can we reduce our arrest risk? (brainstorm)

- Wear corporate camouflage or dress like a mainstream person
- Scope out the target area ahead of time. Know your escape routes.
- Participate in actions that are low-risk (i.e. not necessarily breaking the law), or that don't involve intentional arrest scenarios.
- Try to disperse when cops say "disperse" - maybe before, if it looks like the cops are getting ready to arrest people and you don't want to get arrested.
- Be aware of what the cops are doing so you can react before it's too late.
- Run

## **VI. Evaluation** *(5 minutes)*

- What did people like?
- What can we change to make the training better?