

Emotional First Aid

A small companion for political activists with a special focus on dealing with challenging experiences before, during and after actions.

What is it all about?

Those who are politically active can get into situations where they themselves or friends and comrades are exposed to violence, repression, intimidation or other emotionally challenging experiences. These can be at the hands of the police and/or the state, activists who have differing goals, outcomes or values than they do, or by members of the public who do not support the action. In times like these it is crucial that we organise in the spirit of solidarity, and look after ourselves and one another. For instance, if we do not support the person and their individual needs, people who have a hard time dealing with their experience(s) may withdraw from their political and social circles as a form of self-care.

What you can do as a group

BEFORE an action talk about how you are doing and where your limits are. Come to an understanding about who will support you during unforeseen circumstances, including who will come with you if you need to walk away from a situation.

DURING the action, check in with your buddy, your affinity group, and your comrades. Look out for signs of distress or discomfort in those around you. If you see somebody who looks like they might need assistance, either physically or emotionally, offer to guide them to the Green Zone/Safer Spaces tent.

AFTER the action, talk about how things went. Make a space for everybody who participated and wants to talk about their experience, where they were, what happened, what they saw/hear, what they think about it and how they feel about it.

Remember, **everybody experiences things differently**. Even if you did not find a similar situation intense, distressing or emotionally challenging, it is crucial that you do not undermine the experiences and/or feelings of somebody else. Trauma comes in many shapes and forms.

How to support your friend

Ask ‘What do you need?’, rather than ‘How are you?’. This gives your comrade and loved one the opportunity to think about what would be most meaningful for them at that given moment. This could take the form of talking, crying, having some water/food, going for a walk, having time by themselves, or removing themselves from the space entirely.

Be proactive – don’t wait until someone reaches out for help. Traumatized people often isolate themselves. The days afterwards are crucial times for people to share, listen and support one another.

Remember, not everybody wants advice. Sometimes people just want an opportunity to share their experience and know that somebody is willing to be an active listener.

Talking about what happened helps to process it. Gently, without pushing them, encourage your friend or comrade to discuss aspects of the experience that might have triggered some negative feelings, past experiences, or strong reactions. Discuss how these might have impacted their experience during the action and what a good plan for future actions might be.

Support without judgement and remember that your friend or comrade may want these experiences to remain **private**. Always check in with them when discussing private matters and keep things confidential when it is appropriate to do so.

In the case of sexual assault or police brutality, these matters should be and are taken extremely seriously. Ask firstly how they would like to deal with it, and if your comrade is comfortable sharing their experience, encourage them to record what happened as soon as possible.