

NONVIOLENCE AND DE-ESCALATION

Active Nonviolence Definitions



Wally Nelson: Nonviolence is the constant awareness of the dignity and humanity of oneself and others; it seeks truth and justice; it renounces violence both in method and in attitude; it is a courageous acceptance of active love and goodwill as the instrument with which to overcome evil and transform both oneself and others. It is the willingness to undergo suffering rather than inflict it. It excludes retaliation and flight. - Wally Nelson, (1909-2002), American civil rights activist who was also a peace activist jailed as a conscientious objector during WWII, a co-founder of the Greenfield, MA, Farmers Market, war tax resister, and a trainer in nonviolent direct action.

Gene Sharp: Nonviolent action is a technique of sociopolitical action for applying power in a conflict without the use of physical violence. Nonviolent action may involve acts of omission, acts of commission, or a combination of the two. Nonviolent action has nothing to do with passivity, submissiveness, and cowardice; just as in violent action, these must first be rejected and overcome. Gene Sharp, (1928 - 2018) was an American political scientist and founder of the [Albert Einstein Institution](#).

Safety And De-Escalation Training And Tips

Video. From Move On: [Calming And De-Escalation Strategies](#) (excellent 4 minute video)

Video: [Hands Off De-escalation and Safety Training](#), 1 Hour

Toolkit: [Hands Off: Event Preparation](#)

Toolkit, Indivisible: [Safety And Security And Digital Preparedness](#)

Toolkit From Greenpeace: [Protest Safety Tips](#)

Toolbox: [Beautiful Trouble](#)

Toolkit: [Training For Change](#)

Nonviolent Direct Action Information And Resources

Direct action encompasses many methods, from silent vigils to mass actions. It also includes risking arrest through civil disobedience, a serious undertaking which requires far more extensive training and organizing than is offered by this resource page.

[198 Methods Of Nonviolent Action](#) These tried and true nonviolent resistance actions are categorized into methods of: nonviolent protest and persuasion, social noncooperation, economic noncooperation (boycotts, strikes), political noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention. From *Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 1973, by Gene Sharp, an American political scientist and founder of the Albert Einstein Institution (<https://www.aeinsteinstitution.org/on-nonviolent-action>). New methods added at the [Commons Social Change Library](#) include: Maps and Maptivism, QR Codes, Digital File-Sharing, Nonviolent Media Hijacking, "Trend" a Hashtag, Influence Search Engine Results, Livestreaming, Check-ins, Self-Surveillance, and Flash Mobs.

Nonviolent Direct Action Agreement/Code of Conduct:

This is one example, created by Sugar Shack Alliance

1. Our attitude will be one of openness and respect toward all we encounter in our actions.
2. We will use no violence, verbal or physical, toward any person. If there are violent or armed counter demonstrators, we will not engage with them. Safety monitors could deal with that.
3. We will not harm anyone and we will not retaliate in reaction to violence.
4. We will not carry weapons.
5. We will neither be under the influence nor bring any non-prescribed drugs or alcohol.
6. We will neither bring dogs nor other animals, except for service animals.

7. During a demonstration we will not run nor make threatening motions.
8. In case of confrontation, we will seek to de-escalate.
9. We affirm that people's lives and safety are more important than property. We prefer to focus on creative actions that do not include property destruction.
10. All participants in Sugar Shack actions intending to risk arrest will receive preparation in nonviolent direct action.
11. Those intending to risk arrest in concert with us will be members of affinity groups represented at a representative body.
12. We support a diversity of non-violent direct action including, but not limited to, civil disobedience.
13. We will uphold the code of conduct and action agreements while participating in actions with Sugar Shack Alliance.

Another example Code of conduct for nonviolent direct actions and civil disobedience. [No Voice Unheard](#) (partnered with [50501](#) and [Build the Resistance](#))

Training

War Resisters International's [Nonviolence Training Handbook](#)

[The Resistance Lab](#) is a series of trainings (next training June 1) that look at how non-violent movements around the world have responded to leaders who seize power in authoritarian ways and the most effective tools and tactics to utilize in these moments. Pramila Jayapal, Congresswoman of Seattle, WA, launched The Resistance Lab, organizing trainings to build our movement and give you the tools you need in this moment. Handouts for this training are here: [Resistance Lab Handouts](#)

Rachel Madow's 3/31/25 [interview with Jayapal](#) on the Resistance Lab.

Local Trainings

There are many skilled nonviolence trainers in Franklin County and beyond who are convening trainings. Stay tuned through information on the [FCCPR.us](#) website for local contacts and to find out more.

Legal Resources

National Lawyers Guild Of Massachusetts

Trainings: <https://nlgmass.org/street-law-clinics>

All National Lawyers Guild of MA trainings are carried out on zoom. Here are several below.

Know Your Rights: Focuses on people's rights regarding police stop and search policies. Educates people, regardless of their immigration status, so when confronted by law enforcement (police, ICE, FBI, etc.), they know their rights and can utilize them.

Direct Action: Supports those who plan to take direct action that may bring them into confrontation with law enforcement, risk of arrest, and/or civil disobedience. Information about arrests and court procedures relevant to Massachusetts.

Legal Observer Training: Under the supervision of an attorney, Legal Observers (LOs) are an integral part of any legal team representing activists. Any legal professional or political activist can as a Legal Observer who serves two functions, as a deterrent for police misconduct and to monitor and record instances of police misconduct.

National Lawyers Guild, NY: [Know Your Rights for Law Enforcement Encounters](#)

American Civil Liberties Union Of Massachusetts

Boston office: 617/482-3170

W MA CLUM attorney Javier Luengo Garrido: 413/727-8515

ACLU's [Know Your Rights: Protesters Rights](#).

Center for Constitutional Rights: [If An Agent Knocks](#)

Ruckus Society: [Security Culture for Activists](#)

War Resisters: [Dealing with Fear](#)

Organizers' Glossary

- Affinity groups (AGs): 8 - 12 people who come together to participate in a campaign or action including support post-arrest, if there are arrests. It can stay together for years, or coalesce around one action. AGs plan for, prepare for, participate in and support each other in actions or campaigns. You have each others' backs. It is important to know each other. If there are infiltrators at an action, they would not be associated with an affinity group and would stand out. Each group member has a role, such as support, communications, risk arrest, safety monitor and more. AGs are the basis for grassroots' decision-making at actions by sending a spokesperson to a decision making council.
- Consensus decision-making: A process that aims to take everyone's concerns into consideration, and reach a decision that has the active consent of all the participants. It is based on listening, respect, and participation by everyone.
- Civil disobedience: Deliberate, open, and peaceful violation of particular laws, decrees, regulations, military or police orders, or other governmental directives. The command may be disobeyed because it is seen as itself illegitimate or immoral, or because it is a symbol of other policies which are opposed. Civil disobedience may be practiced by individuals, groups, or masses of people.
- Noncooperation: Acts that deliberately restrict, withhold, or discontinue social, economic, or political cooperation with an institution, policy, or government. A general class of methods of nonviolent action.
- Nonviolent discipline: Orderly adherence to the planned strategy and tactics of an action and to nonviolent behavior even in face of repression. This is a major factor contributing to the success of a nonviolent struggle movement.
- Nonviolent action: a form of political action based on the decision not to physically harm or destroy human life. It is an alternative to both passive submission and violence, it includes both actions "against" something and constructive actions 'for' an alternative, both legal and illegal.

The technique includes many specific methods, which are grouped into three main classes:

- o nonviolent protest and persuasion,
- o noncooperation, and
- o nonviolent intervention.

The technique's variables include the motives for using it, the objectives, the intended way success is to be accomplished (mechanism), and the relation between nonviolent action and other forms of action.

- Direct action: Any action where individuals or groups act to bring about change themselves, rather than asking or expecting others to act on their behalf. Can be disruptive (blockading a weapons factory) or constructive (guerilla gardening).
- Strategy and Tactic: A strategy is a long term plan which aims to achieve certain objectives (like a campaign goal). A tactic is a specific action – like an event, activity or nonviolent direct action – which contributes to the implementation of the strategy.
- Campaign: organized social action designed to bring about a specific change. Campaigns are run by a group of people with a common understanding and shared vision, and are made up of a series of actions and activities over a specific time frame, with a particular goal and a strategy on how to achieve that goal.
- Movement (or 'social movement'): a cross section of groups and campaigns that associate under a broad banner, such as the environmental movement or the anti-globalization movement. Movement's can last for decades, are often international, with many groups acting under a banner, and can be disputed or hard to define.

Compiled by Sugar Shack Alliance, 2018, 2025. Sources: War Resisters League International and The Albert Einstein Institution.

Additional Resources

[DC Peace Team](#)

[Waging Non-Violence](#)

[Non-violence international](#)

[Training for Change](#)

[War Resisters League International](#)