

Notes On Being A Peace Monitor

It has been found, in numerous demonstrations of the past, that the effectiveness and nonviolence of an action is greatly enhanced by the participation of people with special skills. These specialized participants, or peace monitors, perform specific facilitating roles for the action. However, even if you have not decided to specialize in the role of peace monitor, you may find yourself in a conflict situation in which peace monitor skills will be useful. In a nonviolent action everyone is, to some extent, a peace monitor.

Our job as peace monitors is to promote the goals of the event as stated by the event officials and their literature, and to maintain the safety of participants, officials, counter-demonstrators, and policing authorities. We use only nonviolent means and we encourage nonviolence from all of the above groups.

PEACE MONITORS:

- 1. Set the tone for the action.** They establish a positive and affirmative atmosphere by being warm and helpful to participants, by leading songs and chants, and by providing needed information to the group as a whole.
- 2. Act as a communication network.** They act as an important face-to-face communication link between the coordinators of the action and the participants.
- 3. Provide emergency medical and legal aid.** Peace monitors are frequently the first people on the spot when a medical or legal emergency arises. They can play an important supportive role for the person who needs assistance. They also can direct the problem to the appropriate medical or legal representative.
- 4. Maintain the internal self-discipline of the action.** Peace monitors facilitate the movement and action of large groups of people by directing traffic, encouraging people to walk and not run, and providing information to the group. Peace monitors are also prepared to handle conflicts among demonstrators.
- 5. Act as mediators between authorities and demonstrators.** It may be important to have people as buffers between law enforcement officials and/or counter-demonstrators and participants in our own demonstration. Peace monitors help to maintain the nonviolent self-discipline of the demonstration and act as mediators in confrontations between these groups. Peace monitors have primary responsibility to the participants in the action, but they should be prepared to protect legal authorities and counter-demonstrators from our own demonstrators, if necessary.

SOME GUIDELINES TO HELP PEACE MONITORS DO THEIR JOBS:

- 1. Be warm, friendly, and helpful.** The tone of the demonstration depends on how you respond to your fellow demonstrators, police, the media, counter-demonstrators, and the public. Our attitude should be one of openness, friendliness, and respect toward all. Peace monitors are not junior police, and this is no place for authority trips.
- 2. Be creative.** Nonviolence does not mean being aloof or failing to act. You must be creative in your attempt to intervene and reduce the chance of, or amount of violence. No matter what the provocation, peace monitors will not respond with violence. We will not call names or make hostile or threatening remarks or gestures, and we will discourage participants from doing so.
- 3. Be firm, but not rigid.** If you have agreed to be a peace monitor you must have agreed to uphold the nonviolent principles of the demonstration. This occasionally means asking people to do things they do not want to do. Stick to your commitment to nonviolence and strongly encourage

others to do the same.

4. Be forthright. Deal fairly and honestly with people engaged in a conflict, no matter what they have done. If you don't know the answer to something, say so. Peace monitors will explain the necessity of whatever rules of conduct are in effect, and will politely request compliance.

5. Work as a team. You don't have to do everything yourself. Use and rely on the support you can get from other peace monitors and from your fellow demonstrators.

6. Do your job. If you feel you cannot perform a specific task due either to physical, emotional, or moral reasons, inform a peace monitor coordinator so that a person can be found to replace you. It is not a disgrace to say, "No, I can't do it."

7. We take our direction from event officials. If policing authorities ask to do something different from what we've been told by event officials, those authorities are to be referred to the police liaison. We don't make event policy and we can't change it except to keep people safe in an emergency.

8. Be calm. It is a rare person who does not become angry or afraid under stress. Don't think that you are weak if you have fears. The important thing in being a peace monitor is learning how to control your feelings by remembering the overall goal of the action. Try to deal with fears and angers before the demonstration rather than during it.

Remember that an excited crowd is extremely vulnerable to suggestion--good as well as bad. Your calmness will influence others. Peace monitors will not run at any time. In case of a disturbance, encourage those around you to protect themselves nonviolently, either by walking calmly from danger, or, if no movement away is possible, by sitting or laying down and assuming the nonviolent defense position (see below).

9. Be forgiving. Give up resentment over the wrong you are trying to set right. Gandhi said, "Hate sin, and love the sinner." This applies to conflict between demonstrators as well as to conflicts with police, counter-demonstrators, and others who do not agree with our position.

REMEMBER: Peace monitors are servants of the action. You are not nonviolent police. Your authority rests on the demonstrator's loyalty to the purpose of the action, to the agreed upon nonviolence principles, and to the people who are coordinating the action. Build the support of your fellow activists, don't alienate them. If you see a fellow peace monitor abusing the role, discuss the matter with them and, if necessary, with other peace monitors.

STRATEGIES OF NONVIOLENT PEACE MONITORING

For the most part peace monitors are engaged in three types of peacekeeping activities:

1. Conflict anticipation: Peace monitors will be encouraged to be on the lookout for potential problems and conflicts and to intervene before they surface. Conflict anticipation involves positive tone setting and figuring out solutions to potential problems so that if conflict does occur its intensity will be less than if preplanning had not been done.

2. Conflict regulation/violence avoidance: This type of action has as a goal the limiting the chances of, and the amount of physical or psychological harm that is done to an individual or group in the demonstration as a result of conflict. Peace monitors involved in conflict regulation are not necessarily trying to resolve a conflict as much as they are trying to limit its effects. Handling drunks, hecklers, or people with extreme psychological problems falls into this category.

Peace monitors will attempt to discourage action participants from engaging in arguments with hecklers.

Peace monitors will be alert for potential trouble spots. Alert other peace monitors to developing situations and be prepared to insulate people from harm.

3. Conflict resolution: Once the emotional intensity of the conflict has been regulated so that the possibility of escalation into violence has been lowered, then the peace monitor can focus on

resolving the issues involved in the dispute (if appropriate or necessary)

RESPONDING TO VIOLENT CONFLICTS:

Behavioral violence involves people in direct physical conflict. For many of us who have lived sane and comfortable lives, the prospect of this kind of violence is frightening. Although nonviolent action is a way to regulate and minimize violence, at least from the side of the activists, it does not guarantee that physical harm will not result.

In the event that a violent or potentially violent situation arises, there are two central questions that must be considered in the development of a nonviolent response: (1) how does the individual who is being physically harmed respond to their attacker, and (2) how should onlookers respond when a co-participant or friend is being attacked.

Personal response to violence: Two problems are involved when considering responses to personal attack: (1) what kind of a relationship can be established with a potential or real assailant, and (2) what can be done to provide maximum physical protection during an assault.

The relationship that is established between an activist and a potential assailant may make the difference between a brutal attack and a productive human encounter. There are several guidelines that may be helpful in avoiding overt physical conflict.

Building a relationship with an opponent: The first goal of the activist faced with a hostile situation is to build some type of human contact with the potential assailant. The awareness of a common identity as human beings frequently will control the intensity of a conflict. This type of contact can be made through body language by keeping your hands open and at your sides, by maintaining an attentive but non-aggressive stance, by making predictable movements, by maintaining eye contact, or perhaps by sitting down and inviting your adversary to do the same.

If you have a chance to talk, it may be helpful to introduce yourself and ask your adversary their name. Finding something that you hold in common may help to build communication because it blurs the conflict and helps counter the polarization that precedes conflict escalation.

One crucial activity that the activist can do to help prevent conflicts from getting out of hand is to listen. People who are angry want to be heard and they want to change the mind of their opponent. If the activists can demonstrate they are hearing what is being said—"Let me get this straight, you believe. . ." --it may be possible to keep the conflict on a verbal rather than physical level. Another hint about listening: People who are angry do not need to be argued with. When they are in the grip of their emotions they will not be able to hear a rational argument. Doing verbal battle with them may only cause the conflict to escalate. Acknowledge the validity of their concerns, even if you don't share them. People who are angry need to be listened to and helped to release verbally some of their feelings. Only after some of the anger has been discharged will a rational discussion of the issues be possible, although probably not a necessary part of the peace monitor's job description.

An important attitude to develop that helps to resolve conflicts is that each person, no matter how much you disagree with them, has some good in them and has a part of the truth. Seek your common ground. If your opponent feels that you respect them as a person even though you disagree with their ideas, it can help to limit the escalation of a verbal conflict to a physical level. Cultivating this attitude can also help you to keep control over your own feelings and to maintain your nonviolent discipline.

Remember also that many times your goal is to simply stop the conflict from escalating--particularly in a conflict with a counter-demonstrator, it is not necessarily your role or even necessary to actually resolve the conflict or to reach agreement.

Responding to violence to yourself: Occasionally, either because one or both parties in a conflict lose control, or because one of the parties has planned to do violence, physical conflict erupts. Participants in nonviolent action need to be prepared to respond to either spontaneous or organized violence.

There are several responses that can be made by the victim of a violent physical attack. One

option is to stand and take it, maintaining as brave and proud, and yet relaxed a stance as possible. During the Indian civil disobedience campaigns for national liberation, the response of an individual bravely accepting a physical beating was believed to have an unsettling effect on the attacker. Richard Gregg, a noted nonviolent theorist, called this the “moral ju-jitsu” effect.

Another possibility is to remove yourself from the area. Calmly walk away from the attacker.

A third response, also used in many social change movements, including the U.S. civil rights campaigns, is “the turtle.” This action involves self-protection. On the ground, the hands are clasped over the head, elbows drawn in to hold the head stable, and the knees are drawn up so as to form the person into a ball. This position protects the head, breasts, stomach and genitals.

Responding to violence being done to others: Being in the presence of violence being done to others can be as emotionally devastating as receiving the attack oneself. In the event of an attack on a person, people around them may want to intervene as a third party and stop the physical harm being done. There are a variety of levels and methods that can be used.

The simplest and least threatening intervention is **physical presence**. Standing close to a physical conflict and watching may help to limit the amount of harm being done since people generally do not like to be watched while they are doing cruel things. The presence of a TV camera or a photographer can also be helpful.

A more active intervention involves talking to either the assailant or to both parties in the conflict and encouraging them to “cool off,” or warning them of an escalated intervention—“Here come five other people who can break this up.”

Physical interposition, placing a third party between the attacker and the victim, is another means of responding to violence. Naturally this requires a willingness on the part of the intervener to take the violence intended for the victim of the attack. The actual physical interposition of a third party frequently makes an attacker pause to reconsider their action, but it can also escalate the situation if the assailant believes that the third party is an ally of the victim and thus a second target to assault. Intervention should be done in as non-threatening a way as possible so that the attacker does not suddenly feel “ganged up” on.

If at all possible you should not touch a person doing physical violence. Such action is likely to escalate the conflict, and you might also be charged with assault.

Peace monitors will not get involved in any situation involving a weapon, except to calm and insolate bystanders. Authorities will be alerted immediately.

Note: If you are a peace monitor at an action which involves a planned civil disobedience action: People who have consciously chosen to be involved in a civil disobedience action (i.e., are choosing to break a law to protest a wrong) have make a decision to risk arrest, which may involve physical mistreatment by authorities. It is therefore very important for the participants in a civil disobedience action where there is a potential for violence to decide what the common discipline will be in case of attack. Ways to maintain solidarity when being physically assaulted include silent mediation, words of encouragement and moral support, singing, a common chant, or a personal ritual or motion, or release of feelings.

Other Things to remember: Dress appropriately and comfortably. Think about what that means to you regarding temperature and sun protection. Peace monitors need to be able to move without impediment. Be sure you have enough food and water with you. Keep your hands free. Keep your essential belongings in your pockets or in a knapsack. Always carry paper and pencil or pen to take notes about any incidents that occur. Write down what happened as soon as possible. Also carry change for phone calls.

These are general peace monitor guidelines. Any particular incident may call for adjustments. We all have an inner sense that knows what to do in an emergency to keep our self and others safe. Listen for and trust that inner voice. In the high emotional drama that can accompany conflict and violence, that wisdom is more productive than rational thought, especially if our comment to nonviolence is strong.

(Adapted from Rocky Flats Action Group nonviolence manual)

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