

We don't say that you need nonviolence training before you go out on the street and hold up a placard or give out a leaflet. Not in most countries anyway. However, the whole process we refer to as nonviolence training—analysing issues, envisioning alternatives, drawing up demands, developing campaign strategy, planning actions, preparing actions, evaluating actions or campaigns—can increase the impact your group has on others, help you to function better in action and cope better with the risks and problems it poses, and expand your action horizons. Basically, nonviolence training helps to create a safe space to test out and develop new ideas or to analyse and evaluate experiences.

Nonviolence training can help participants form a common understanding of the use of nonviolence in campaigns and actions. It is a participatory educational experience where we can learn new skills and unlearn destructive and oppressive behaviours society has taught us. Nonviolence training can strengthen a group, developing a community bond while people learn to work better together and clarify their intentions. Nonviolence training can help us understand and develop the power of nonviolence. It gives an opportunity to share concerns, fears, and feelings and to discuss the role of oppression in our society and our groups. Individually, training helps build self-confidence and clarify our personal interactions. The goal of nonviolence training is empowering the participants to engage more effectively in collective action.

Nonviolence training can prepare people for participation in nonviolent direct action, teach strategy development techniques and the skills needed to engage in the strategy, and work on group process and issues of oppression. Nonviolence trainings are often used to prepare people for specific actions, to learn about the scenario, to develop a plan and practice it, to understand the legal issues, and more. They are an opportunity for a group to build solidarity and to develop affinity groups. Through role playing (see 'Role Playing' Exercise, pX), people can learn what they might expect from police, officials, other people in the action, and themselves. It can help people decide if they are prepared to participate in the action.

Nonviolence training has also been used as a tool for mobilisation and movement building. Many movements and campaign's have used dedicated training to build power, and nonviolence trainings can help to distribute power throughout a movement by empowering activists at the grassroots. Nonviolence trainings bring people in a community together together to explore issues and concerns, build trust, and work out how they can act together. There have been many examples of nonviolence training helping to strengthen a movement, from the civil rights movement in the USA, to Faslane 365 (an anti-nuclear weapons campaign in the UK) to the People Power movement, which overthrew the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines.

Nonviolence trainings can range from several hours to several months, depending on factors such as the campaign's needs and timeline, the goals for the training, the experience, available time and other resources, and availability of the participants and trainers. (see 'tasks and tools for organising and facilitating trainings')

Role of Trainers

A nonviolence trainer is someone who can facilitate a group through a learning process. A trainer must be knowledgeable regarding the topics of the training, but should not be a know-it-all. A trainer's goal is to guide the participants to develop their own ideas, not to tell people what to think and do.

Not all groups and communities who want nonviolence training have local trainers. But when people understand what skills are needed to conduct a training, they may realise they have already developed some of those skills and used them in different contexts. You can create a training team of co-facilitators who together can add their combined skills and experience. If possible, the training team should reflect the participants, consisting of people of various gender, age, and ethnic backgrounds.

Trainers need:

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Good group process skills and an awareness of group dynamics. It is the role of the trainer to make sure everyone participates and feels able to share insights and experiences.

- An understanding of nonviolent actions and campaigns. If no one has experience, the trainer needs to use case studies and exercises to help the group learn.
- To learn how and when to use the right exercises, being sensitive to the needs and styles of groups.

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