

Time:

40 minutes

Goal or purpose:

To identify different kinds of fears we will face when taking part in direct action (legal consequences, risks of the action itself, losing control and acting violently, failing the group...)

To promote awareness of ourselves and the group, and an understanding of how we respond in different situations.

Preparation/materials:

A printed handout with the description of four risky situations, a pen or a pencil.

It can be useful to know the kind of actions that the group usually organises (or is planning to organise), to adapt the sentences to situations that the group could potentially face.

How it's done/facilitator's notes:

In groups of four, participants are presented a scenario in a nonviolent action which involves a particular risk. In each situation, there are four options possible responses. Each person has a printed handout of the scenarios, with four possible options of how to respond.

Each person is assigned a different scenario, and everyone takes some time to read it through and decide how they would respond. For each scenario, the group takes it in turns to decide how they think the person assigned that scenario would respond, and explains why. After the group have given their ideas, the person assigned that scenario explains what they think they would do in that situation and why.

The same exercise is done four times – in each round the four members of the group reflect on a different person (it should take about five minutes per round).

Examples of risky situations and of options (to be adapted depending on the group's actions):

1. You are part of a group of six people, chained together in an outdoor setting. Your initial plan was to stay until the morning, since that's when it is really strategic to be there. However, unexpected rain makes you feel very cold, and makes it more difficult to stay there all night long. If you quit, the action ends. In this situation do you:

A. Quit the action as soon as possible because you cannot manage to stay until the morning.

B. Try to stay at least a few more hours. Cold is psychological and I have to learn to resist.

C. Decide to stay for as long as possible because you are very few and you can't fail to the group.

D. Explain the problem to the rest of the group, and try to find a solution.

2. An angry protester is leading you in to a trap, and policemen are threatening to use violence. You are part of your affinity group, but tension and panic are making it difficult to keep the situation under control. In this situation do you:

A. The most important thing is to keep the group together, even if this means being more static. My effort, whatever it is, is to keep the group together.

B. I stay with at least some colleagues and try to persuade them not to be in the demonstration.

C. I run away as fast as I can! Once I am safe I'll be able to take care of the others, but right now it's best to escape.

D. I feel nervous and angry because of the behavior of the police, and I start insulting them.

3. You plan to take part in a nonviolent action that could have legal implications. On the way, you realise that you fear the legal implications, and that you do not feel as sure as you did during the group meetings. In this situation do you:

A. Abandon the action at the last moment, inventing some sort of excuse.

B. Abandon the action at the last moment, but before it starts, telling the rest of group the truth, that you fear the legal consequences.

C. Take the risk and do the action, aware that if there are arrests, you might be able to escape.

D. Assume the risk of my decision, accept the possibility of being arrested, and go ahead with the action

4. Your group is preparing a nonviolent action to be held at a military base, that requires discretion and secrecy. There is a rumour that there is an infiltrator in your group. In this situation do you:

A. Don't believe the rumour and ignore it.

B. Propose the group should hold an urgent meeting about it as a whole group.

C. Propose to cancel the action because it can be too dangerous.

D. Try to discover by yourself who the infiltrator is and what the group should do with this person.

Debriefing:

Debriefing should go in two directions: discuss the types of fear that can arise in nonviolent actions, and consider what it is good to know about other people in the group. Use the follow questions to help guide a discussion;

- Did the groups guess correctly the option that other members of the group think they would take in risky situations? How well do we know ourselves, others in the group, and the reactions we could have in a risky situation?
- What kinds of risky situations/fears have been tackled in the exercise? Are there other risks/fears that can be present in nonviolent actions that have not been mentioned in the exercise?
- How do we handle risk when taking nonviolent action?
- Which individual and group strategies do we already use to manage fear? How do we currently take care of others who are fearful? What else could we do?

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