

## DE-ESCALATING, PEACEKEEPING, SECURITY AT EVENTS & ACTIONS

Peacekeepers volunteer to watch for and diffuse trouble during a nonviolent action or event. The police, counter-demonstrators, and angry passersby can be the starting points for conflicts that change the focus and message of the action or event. Opponents of an issue can discredit protesters by provoking them into impulsive acts. Peacekeepers are on the lookout for trouble, no matter the source, and keep the action directed towards the issues. *Different titles for this role are used, such as “de-escalator” or “security,” but this resource uses the term “peacekeepers.”*

### Philosophy of Peacekeeping

- Peacekeepers have an eye out for the safety and well-being of everyone. They are looking for, and are prepared to deal calmly with, unusual events of any sort.
- In any nonviolent action, both escalation and de-escalation of conflict may be called for. Peacekeepers are willing to work with these ebbs and flows, for the sake of the crowd and its message.
- Nonviolent discipline requires that people (even opponents or obnoxious supporters) be treated with respect, dignity, and fairness. Peacekeepers may have to be firm, in the interests of everyone’s safety, though it is important not to be bossy.

### Some How-to’s

#### ***Be alert, yet relaxed.***

Watch the edges of the crowd, overhead passes, passing cars, members of the crowd who behave oddly, and police officers for trouble before it occurs.

#### ***Be available to help.***

People with special needs—the elderly, parents with young children, differently abled, those struggling with banners in high winds—may need help from time to time. Encourage cooperation and consideration by your example.

#### ***Know the trouble spots.***

Familiarize yourself with potential sources of trouble, and potential places where trouble might come up (see box at right).

#### ***Peacekeeping is a full-time job.***

Don’t hand out leaflets or get signatures on a petition, or take on some other task while you’re peacekeeping. Your job is to have all your antennae up and watching for potential problems and to be completely free to respond to trouble.

### Potential Challenges

- The speaker’s platform may be rushed or infringed upon.
- At the tail-end of a march hecklers may tag along or some participants might fall behind.
- Counter demonstrators: familiarize yourself with who and where they are, and their mood.
- Counter-demonstrators may mix with the crowd and attempt to engage people in arguments or fights.
- People on the edges, especially people with leaflets or signs, may be heckled, or perhaps hassled by cops.
- TV camera crews can up-stage speakers, single out (and thus encourage) the rowdiest people, and generally get in the way.
- Pace of the march: are people getting left behind? Are traffic lights dividing the group? –Slow the front down to keep the group together.
- Rock throwing is likely to come from the back of a crowd, while people in front are likely to get punished for it.
- Don’t count on the self-control or goodwill of the police; they can be nervous or frustrated; and some may be volunteers.
- Tensions may erupt as people are leaving the event. Stay until the very end.

### ***Come early and stay late.***

Arrive at the event early to see the territory, to get final instructions, and to learn last minute information. It is important to get your bearings before things start. Also, be prepared to stay until the very end, because trouble can happen when the event is breaking up.

### ***Work in a group.***

Team up with another peacekeeper or three and cover a certain area of the event together. Get to know each other so it is easier to make quick decisions together.

### ***Make yourself identifiable.***

Use armbands, hats, or some clear way to identify yourself as a peacekeeper (this should be the same thing the other peacekeepers wear). When you are talking with someone, identify yourself as a peacekeeper in a respectful way.

### ***Know who to get answers from.***

Be sure to know who the organizers are. Where is the first aid? Who are the legal observers or media spokespersons (if any)? Where do you go if you find a problem you can't solve? Be careful about rumors!

### ***Wait to be arrested last.***

If the event includes civil disobedience, where people are risking arrest, and you want to risk arrest as well, try to be one of the last. After you are in custody, you will not be able to do much peacekeeping.

### ***You're on duty all the time...***

...not just when the march starts. Help the crowd congregate, and be a friendly presence all through-out the day. Even help folks exit/depart!

## **Containment tactics**

- Draw trouble-makers out of the crowd.
- Listen attentively to argumentative people.
- Move the crowd away from troublemakers or create a neutral area between them.
- Surround troublemakers with peacekeepers; link arms if necessary.
- Ask the crowd to sit down to help isolate a person.
- Divert attention: Start a song, do something silly or funny, create some theater, pass out balloons or flowers.
- In the event of violence against protestors (by police, for example, or an organized attack by counter-demonstrators), remind people to cover their heads, don't grab legs, etc, and help people make quick decisions.
- Keep thinking creatively!

## **Checklist for the Prepared Peacekeeper**

### **Know your logistics:**

- Schedule of events
- Cues and signals
- Legal Observers
- First aid location
- Media spokespersons
- Route of march/plan

### **Other stuff:**

- Cell phone fully charged
- Identify problem locations
- Identify problem people
- Find strategies to handle these
- Wear your identifier
- How can people avoid arrest

## **Quick notes on Police & Marshals**

- Maintain contact between yourself and the police whenever possible.
- Inform police of your intentions, rather than asking permission.
- Be open to their legitimate concerns, such as traffic flow.

*Created by Betsy Raasch-Gilman and Will Pipkin of Future Now: A Training Collective in 1991, and updated by Betsy Raasch-Gilman and Matt Guynn in 2011; also includes materials from the War Resisters League Organizing Manual (1981).*