

OUT OF THE TOOLBOX

Tips for Dealing with Police

In the context of protests, mobilizations, and uprisings, we are often confronted with the police or National Guard. There are many different strategies for dealing with law enforcement, but I prefer the ones that focus on mitigating harm.

When police are on the scene, pay attention to their body postures and movements. Learn to read their energy. Are they chill and standing down, or agitated and poised for attack? Do they have horses or dogs on the scene?

Pay attention to their gear. Do they have batons or handcuffs at the ready? Do they have tear gas masks? Are there horses or dogs? What other weapons or vehicles have they brought onto the scene?

You may want to bring protective gear of your own—goggles, masks, and earplugs.

Make sure you have scouts who are looking around to see where the police are staging in locations that are out of view.

Know your exit strategy from the area. Look around to find places to take cover to protect yourself or nearby stores you can duck into.

Pre-designate people to document with cameras, and organize legal observers who will be a public presence to document the events.

Remember that police work with command-and-control strategies. They expect people to do what they say, and can get agitated and escalate the situation when we don't.

Police typically follow a chain of command, so learn what their uniforms and ranks mean, and observe when the superiors start issuing directions to the troops.

In some contexts you may choose to empower someone to be a *police liaison*. This person keeps the channels of communication open and buys time. When I have taken the role of police liaison, here are strategies that have helped:

I access the part of myself that is authoritative and confident.

It might seem counterintuitive to act authoritatively toward officers, but they are used to following orders and clear communication and direction. It's possible that this strategy works for me largely because I'm a white woman.

I rarely approach the police alone. It is always good to have a team, with one person speaking and the others witnessing.

I approach them with respect, while also asserting our right to do what we are doing. Always assert your rights.

If they say you are violating a code, ask them to show you the code.

Each situation is different. If the officers are stationary and calm, it might not be necessary to speak with them. If the action is more intense and it seems like the officers might come charging in, I try to speak with them and attempt to de-escalate their response.

If the officers begin to escalate, I try to speak with them and point out that they're making the situation unsafe. Safety is a key talking point. If one cop is escalating, it has worked for me in the past to ask a superior to remove them.

I sometimes tell the officers about the reason we're taking action and ask if they know anyone who is affected by this issue to assess if they're sympathetic to the cause.

Remember that officers expect people to do what they're told, even if it violates their rights. Many cities now take out insurance policies for major political events. This shows that they plan to violate people's rights and ensures they'll have money to pay off lawsuits.