

CYBERACTIVISM

& you

AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO
ORGANISING
IN THE DIGITAL AGE



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WHAT IS THIS?

This illustrated guide touches on topics that surround being an activist today, from the importance of encrypting your messages, to the key phrases you need to remember while at an action. It will focus on how to keep yourself and other organisers safe both online and offline, and what steps we can take to reduce potential risks while organising.

WHO IS THIS FOR?

This guide is for anyone who feels that they want to be involved in demonstrating for the social justice causes that they believe in, be it gender equality, immigration rights, bodily autonomy or climate justice. Just like the communities we belong to, all of these causes are intertwined with each other, and we cannot fight for one without advocating for the other.

This guide will hopefully bring to light the ways we can organise as safely and securely as possible, and inspire those who are interested to take the right steps going forward.

WHY SHOULD I BE WORRIED ABOUT SAFETY & SECURITY?

With the increase in troubling news stories and current events, a lot of people may feel spurred to act quickly, without fully considering the risks of what they're getting involved in.

Not thinking about the wider factors surrounding safety can risk harming the most vulnerable members of our communities, and our actions may endanger instead of protect.

Starting out by just asking yourself questions like...

'Who knows I'm going to this protest?'

'Who knows I'm a part of the organising team for this action?'

'Is everyone comfortable with the actions going ahead?'

'How will I communicate with the people I've protested with today?'

...can set you on the right track to keeping yourself and your fellow organisers as safe as possible while demonstrating.



ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media platforms have given us forms of communicating that were once impossible, and the ability to connect with other people like nothing else. They can be especially useful for organising, for example, using Instagram to reach people you want to come to your next open meeting, or looking through Twitter to find protests happening near you. However, aspects concerning privacy and encryption online are often overlooked by users, which can lead to disadvantageous outcomes for yourself and other activists.



What is encryption and why does it matter so much?

Encryption is the process of information or data being turned into code to obscure it, protecting sensitive information from being intercepted. If a messenger, like WhatsApp or Signal, has end-to-end encryption, it means only the sender and receiver are able to read what has been sent. As activists, it is essential that communication between organisers is completely secure, as leaked information can be used by police in intelligence gathering - your safety, and the safety of your community depends on how well you can keep private information private.

*“When we encrypt our messages to each other, that’s us **doubling down** on our commitment to care for one another, to keeping each other safe. It is a **practice of intention**, and one of our many weapons against carceral surveillance technologies.”*

- Olivia McKayla Ross, activist & computational artist

KEY TIPS

- don’t offer sensitive information to anyone who asks; confer with others in your group before doing so
- assume that any calls or messages that don’t take place in-person are public, as platforms like Zoom and Facebook Messenger have been known to work with law enforcement
- clear old chat threads/servers regularly
- don’t hand out contact information of others without their knowing
- ask your group to download Signal, and advise others to do the same
- if you can, set your profile to private
- whenever possible, talk about very sensitive details in person

ORGANISING AS A GROUP

Taking part in the fight for social justice can be extremely difficult on your own, and may seem impossible to start out if you don't have anyone backing you. But this work doesn't have to be done alone. We are always stronger as a collective, and having a support system you can trust and work well with is vitally important. Reaching out to people in similar circles, whether it's through a protest you've attended recently, or a feminist school group you're a part of, can begin to form connections with others who want to create change. Here are some key things to remember when organising with others, and how you and your group can be as secure as possible when planning actions.

- make sure everyone understands the importance of keeping organisers' identities hidden. if any members do not, and are careless with information (e.g; posting about private meetings on social media), then address this with them - you're only as secure as your weakest link.

- communication is key and we are involved in very sensitive work! when talking to your fellow organisers, remember to be using secure methods of messaging, and wherever possible, discuss plans for upcoming actions in person.



- when planning an action or event, make sure everyone in your group is aware of all risks presented by what you're planning - only those who are fully informed on what they're taking part in and how it could be tricky should take part; for example, do you know if there'll be a high police presence at the action you'll be attending? are all members comfortable with potentially being questioned or filmed by police while participating?

- consider the needs of everyone in your group, and check-in regularly with others - some people may need more accommodation than others such as needing more breaks during marches, or having an interpreter present. be mindful about this, and prepare to make changes where possible.

- if any issues should arise, they should be addressed immediately - for example, if a member has been accused of harassing another, have one or two members talk to them privately. if the issue can't be resolved, the accused party should be asked to leave. in order to create an environment where members can trust each other and feel safe, matters like these should be dealt with swiftly and seriously.

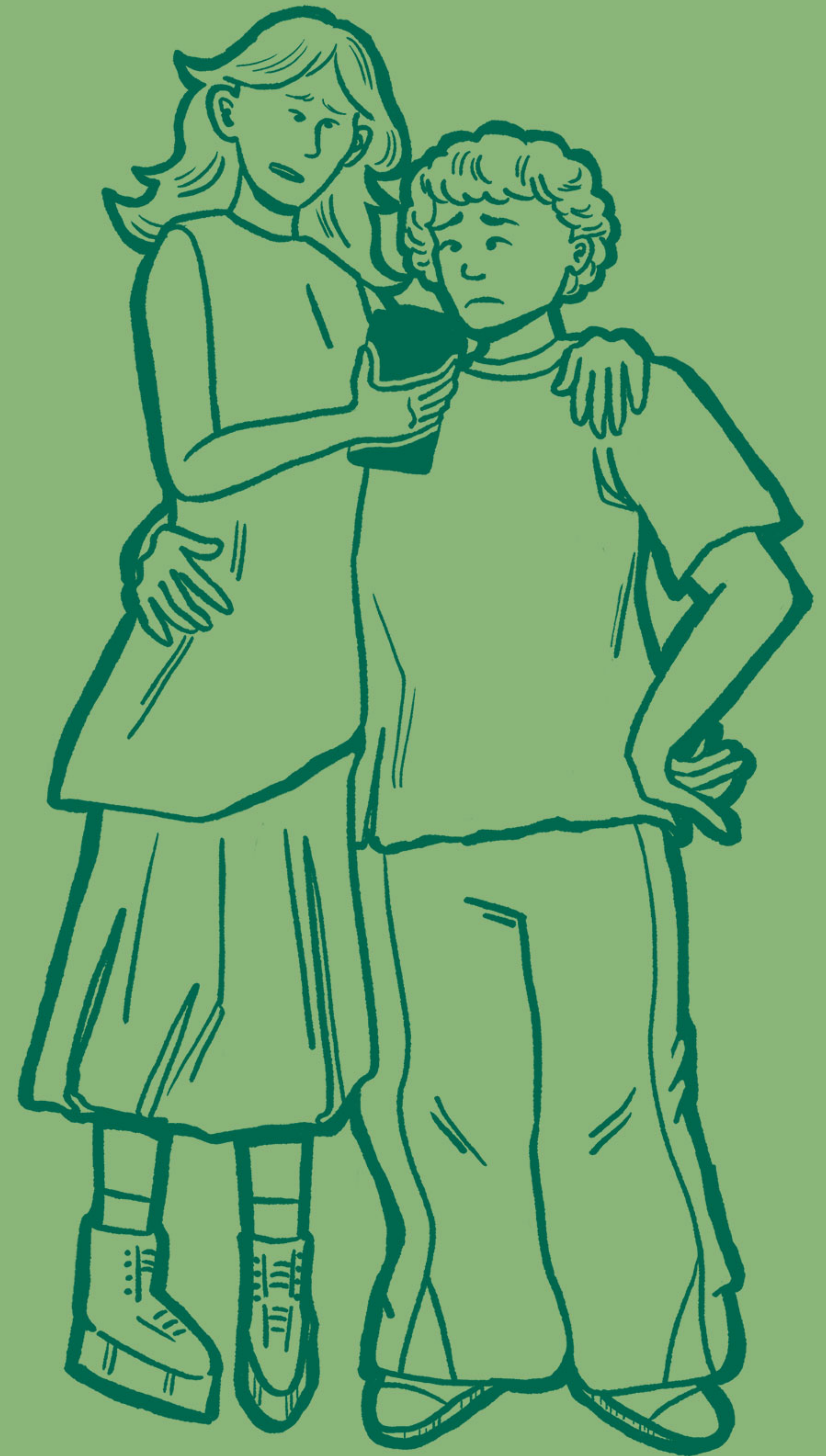
ON WELLBEING

PROTECTING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH AS AN ACTIVIST

Organising can take a lot out of you and your fellow activists. This could range from physical exhaustion after many hours of carrying equipment on marches, to emotional exhaustion from filtering through discriminatory remarks and negative messages on social media.

A lot of activism stems from feelings of anger, whether it's directed at the criminal justice system, at the government, or at authorities, so it's natural that at some point tensions will rise. Turning these intense emotions into tangible actions can be fulfilling experiences, but when we put so much of ourselves into fighting for social causes, it can quickly become draining.

It's important to regularly check-in with your team before and after an action, to gauge how people are feeling, go over what went right and what could be improved for the next time. Try to alternate between duties to share the work between yourselves, and to give each other breaks when needed. Other actions like muting or blacklisting certain words or topics that could be potentially triggering on socials, blocking accounts that are not open to reasonable dialogue, and being kinder to yourself when things go wrong are all essential things to remember if you're in this for the long haul.



ON LEGAL

KEY PHRASES TO REMEMBER AT A DEMONSTRATION

NO COMMENT

You do not need to answer police questions, so don't. The police will try to pressure and deceive you into incriminating yourself. Instead of trying to decide when it seems 'safe' to answer, just say "No comment" to all questions - during 'informal chats', in the police van and especially in interviews.

NO PERSONAL DETAILS

You do not have to give personal details under ANY stop and search power, so don't. As a default, you do NOT have to give your personal details to the police at any point during the arrest process. If you have been arrested and taken to the police station you may wish to give your name, address and date of birth at the custody desk to speed your release.

WHAT POWER?

Ask "What power?" to challenge the police to act lawfully. Some police officers rely on you not knowing the law. If you are asked to do something by a police officer, ask them what power (i.e. what law) they are using and why they are using it. Make a note of what was said, by whom (numbers) as soon as possible afterwards.

NO DUTY SOLICITOR

The "duty solicitor" is the solicitor who is present at the police station. They may come from any firm of solicitors, which means they almost certainly know nothing about protest. Always use a recommended solicitor with protest experience (solicitor information provided on the back of this booklet).

NO CAUTION

Cautions are an admission of guilt. Offering you a caution is a way the police may ask you to admit guilt for an offence without having to charge you. It is an easy win for the police, as they don't have to provide any evidence or convince a court of your guilt. At the very least, you should never accept a caution without taking advice from a good solicitor.

Green & Black Cross also runs regular 'Know Your Rights' and Legal Observer trainings - find out more @GBClegal

FURTHER READING

+ RESOURCES

▪ **GREEN & BLACK CROSS** - independent grassroots project set up to support social and environmental struggles within the UK.

greenandblackcross.org

▪ **BRISTOL ANARCHIST BLACK CROSS** - provides prisoner support and protest defence

<https://bristolabc.wordpress.com/defendant-solidarity/>

▪ **SPROUT DISTRO** - independent anarchist zine distributor, covering a wide range of topics surrounding activism

<https://www.sproutdistro.com/catalog/zines/security/>

▪ **SECURITY CULTURE: A HANDBOOK FOR ACTIVISTS** - a comprehensive zine about security within activist circles

<https://ia600700.us.archive.org/19/items/SecurityCulture>

[AHandbookForActivists/security_culture_handbook.pdf](https://ia600700.us.archive.org/19/items/SecurityCulture/AHandbookForActivists/security_culture_handbook.pdf)

▪ **SISTERS UNCUT** - feminist action group fighting against gendered violence

<https://www.sistersuncut.org/>

▪ **GND RISING** - climate action group dedicated to fighting for a GND

<https://www.gndrising.org/>

ADVICE ON ARREST

Say “**NO COMMENT**” to all police questions during casual chats, 'booking in' & interviews. At the police station you may wish to give your name, address and date of birth to speed your release. For your protection and that of others don't answer further questions.

Do **NOT** accept a **CAUTION** without advice from a recommended solicitor. This is an admission of responsibility and goes on the police national computer.

You have the right to **FREE LEGAL ADVICE** at the police station. Duty solicitors don't always have experience with protest law, instead ask the police to contact one of the following:

Kelly's: 01273 674 898 / 0800 387 463 (out of hours)
HJA (Hodge Jones & Allen): 0808 274 8226

You have the right to have someone informed of your arrest (make that the **Protest Support Line** unless otherwise arranged: **07946 541 511**).

You have the right to an interpreter if English is not your first language.
If you are or appear under 18 an appropriate adult should be called.

LEGAL QUESTIONS ABOUT PROTEST?

STOP AND SEARCH: You're not legally required to give your name and address under any stop and search power, see below website for more details. Legally you must be told the reason and the power that you are being searched under.

If you witness an arrest, want support or have legal questions about protest:
courtsupport@protonmail.com or call **07946 541 511**

Legal Observers are independent volunteers who gather evidence on behalf of protesters and act to counter police intimidation and misbehaviour.

Read more about your rights and protest legislation:
www.greenandblackcross.org

After arrest &/or you have a court date & want advice email
courtsupport@protonmail.com

If you're in Bristol, you can also contact
bristoldefendantsolidarity@riseup.net or ring 07510 283424

Remember, there are no “friendly” chats with the police. They cannot be trusted. Avoid talking to them; everything you say can be used as evidence or intelligence against you or others.