

# Notes on Affinity Groups and Support

## Affinity Groups (AGs)

- A group of 5-20 people who have an affinity for each other, do social change work together, and support each other
- **History**
  - People often form themselves into small groups, bands, or tribes — it is a natural arrangement
  - The term “affinity group” comes from the civil war in Spain in the late 1930’s when the anarchists organized themselves into “grupos de afinidad”
- **Reasons for working in affinity groups**
  - Eliminate the isolation of being one person in a large crowd
  - Provide a way to organize ourselves so that everyone works and makes decisions directly with people they know — turn a rabble of 1,500 people into 100 organized groups of 15
  - Provide emotional support for every person: “together we stand, divided we freak out”
  - Make everyone accountable to someone else — if they get freaked out and act strangely, then there is someone there to help them out and keep them from causing problems
  - Help prevent *agents provocateur* from disrupting our actions
    - **Example:** In 1977, of the 47 people arrested at the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant, 2 were undercover deputy sheriffs from Santa Barbara County and San Luis Obispo County — one carried a large knife

## Forming an Affinity Group

- With whom?
  - Often a group of friends or people who work together
  - Sometimes people who only meet when preparing for nonviolent action
- Nonviolence Prep Workshop — learn about the particular nonviolent action, learn about nonviolent action and how it works, discuss and then practice what you might do in different scenarios
  - A chance to think about what you want, how the action will go, what support you need from others, what you can offer others
  - A chance to work with others and get to know them better
  - Decide whether you trust them
- **Structure of AGs**
  - In a nonviolent action, usually 5-10 people who risk arrest and 5-10 supporters
  - **Supporters** are **very** important — at least as important as everyone else (f not more so)
    - Support people do all the mundane work and often don’t receive much recognition
    - Direct support for people in jail — feed the cat, water the plants, call employers and freaked out parents/children, pay rent, baby-sit, perhaps do their paid job for them
      - If people have help with these things, more people can participate (and risk more)
    - Emotional support — provide smiles and hugs, listen, call or write letters to people in jail; active listen after action is over
      - With good emotional support, more people feel safe enough to risk themselves
    - Action support — convey information about the action to the news media and others, raise legal funds, etc.
  - **Media spokesperson** to talk with news media
  - Quick decision **facilitator**
  - **Medic** to take care of people who are hurt
  - **Spokesperson** to convey the affinity group’s ideas and decisions to other AGs
  - **Legal observer**
- **Examples of funny AG names:** Endangered Species, Imagine, Equinox, Solstice, Bumps in the Road, Big Raisin, Love and Rage, Narcoleptics (work so hard they’re always falling asleep at odd hours), etc.
- **Philosophy** (principles of unity)
  - It helps if you have agreement on certain basic things: how active, how spiritual, how nonviolent, how touchy-feely, your overall political perspective, etc.
  - Or may just all work together at a job, all be Dead Heads, friends who hike together, all drive Cadillacs, etc.
- **AGs can be an-going group**
  - Work together doing political work or other things
  - Learn together — learn more about the world, politics, nonviolent action, consensus decision-making, etc.
  - Play together, discuss your lives — be a support group

## Responsibilities of Support People

- **Before the action**
  - Know the people in your affinity group by name and by description (see the sample AG support form)
  - Know the needs of those in your AG (both risking arrest and not) for family support, etc.
  - Know the medical needs of everyone in your AG
  - Know the plans of your AG and cluster of AGs
  - Be in contact with the Action support network, legal collective, etc.
  - Know where arrested people will be taken
- **During the action**
  - Hold ID, money, keys, and other belongings of those risking arrest
  - Arrange transportation for yourself and those risking arrest
  - Arrange food for yourself and those risking arrest
  - Observe all arrests and get each individual's name, time and nature of arrest, activity of person arrested, behavior, name, and badge number of arresting officer (if possible)
  - Give emotional and physical support to other support people
- **At the courthouse, jail, holding area, etc.**
  - Keep track of...
    - Name of judge or magistrate conducting arraignments
    - Name of demonstrator (anonymous Jane/Joe Doe number if applicable)
    - The charges and offense numbers
    - The demonstrator's plea
    - Court date for trial, bail amount, released into custody of whom
    - The sentence — jail time, fines, community service time, etc.
  - Stay in contact with the legal collective
  - Give emotional and physical support to other support people
- **During jail time**
  - Call family, friends, and employees and anyone else who needs to be informed about the status of each person — call regularly as appropriate
  - Be prepared to bring needed medication to jail or wherever and follow-up on whether it has reached the person who needs it
  - Visit or call your AG members in jail if possible, or arrange to sit by the phone waiting for their calls — write letters to people in jail
  - Keep track of arrestees' belongings
  - Go to trials or other court appearances
  - Arrange transportation for people when they are released from jail
  - Stay in contact with the action coordinators and legal collective — let them know when people are released from jail
  - Arrange media coverage, set up vigils, etc. related to jail
  - Give emotional and physical support to other support people
- **After the action is all over**
  - Watch out for burn-out in others and yourself
  - Give lots of emotional support to arrestees and other support people
    - Let everyone tell what happened to them — several times if necessary — everyone needs to talk through their experiences — share the joy and excitement of the action and how empowered you felt
    - Provide a safe environment for arrestees and other support people to express their fear, grief, joy, and hurts about the action and the people they worked with and opposed — everyone needs the catharsis of emotional discharge (allow/encourage lots of crying, laughing, and so on)
  - Arrange to help carry some of the load of peoples' lives (if possible) for a few weeks until their emotional scars have healed
    - Note that it may take as much time to come down off an action as it took to prepare for it (many months)

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