

❧ What Do We Mean By Direct Action? ❧

Direct Action: Using planned tactics to confront a primary or secondary target with specific demands for change

- Direct Action is most successful when we plan and prepare before acting
- Direct Action is most successful when we are knowledgeable about our targets and their sources of power
- Direct Action is most successful when actions are directly linked to our goals
- Direct Action is most successful when we use collective action to build power

According to the Midwest Academy,
the purpose of direct action is to:

1. Win concrete improvements in people's lives
2. Make individuals aware of their own power
3. Alter power relations

"Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue." —Martin Luther King, Jr.

Direct Action Can:

- Raise awareness
- Educate and inform
- Show power
- Build movement
- Disrupt
- Empower
- Raise political and economic costs
- De-legitimatize institutions and programs

Civil disobedience is a form of direct action. It involves the use of direct and nonviolent tactics to disobey unjust laws, policies, rules, or regulations. This intentional noncompliance usually results in sanctions from those who have the authority to enforce them (e.g., arrest, termination/dismissal, etc.).

- Strictly construed and in the traditional sense, tactics such as boycotting or marching would not be considered civil disobedience since they are legal forms of protest, while occupying a public or private establishment (e.g., a sit-in) or refusing to pay taxes or drinking from a “whites only” water fountain would be considered civil disobedience.
- Broadly construed and in a contemporary sense, civil disobedience often describes any direct resistance to authority in which the goal is to change an unjust law or policy.
- The purpose of civil disobedience is draw attention to and change unjust laws and policies by publicly disobeying them and appealing to the conscience of those in authority and the general public. It is a moral appeal for social, political, or economic change.

Should you be engaged in civil disobedience?

Consider these reflection questions:

1. What is motivating you?
2. Who is supporting you?
3. Who will benefit? What will be gained?
4. What are the potential costs? Are you willing to bear the risks?
5. Do you have the time, energy, and resources to see it through?

Civil Disobedience: The Buddy System

A buddy system is helpful when engaging in any form of direct action, including civil disobedience, in which participants could potentially be arrested or physically harmed.

Buddies are teams or small groups who engage in direct action together, take care of each other, and NEVER leave a member behind.

You should:

- know if your buddy has any special needs
- know where his/her medication is located
- have a list of your buddy's emergency contacts
- check on your buddy to be sure he/she is still with you
- make sure that your buddy is physically ok
- make sure that your buddy is psychologically/emotionally ok
- find food/drink/warm clothing/medical attention if your buddy needs them
- leave with your buddy if he/she wants to go (for any reason!)
- provide comfort and support as necessary
- get legal help and notify family and friends if your buddy is arrested