



Planning an Action

Planning ahead will help keep you safe and confident on an action. Contact us as early as possible to discuss how we can support you.

Many people are worried about the arrest and police intimidation at actions they are planning. Police repression of protests can be difficult to predict, but the risk is often smaller than you may think. One of the most important things you can do to help counter it is for all participants to be aware of their [key rights](#).

If you have time, it can also be helpful to [attend one of Know Your Rights trainings](#), which will go through these key messages and other useful information to know when protesting.

We can help with briefings, providing legal observers and phone support, and follow-up support if arrests or police brutality occur. We understand that actions aren't always predictable, but the sooner you talk to us, the more we can do!

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1. Before the Action

The most important thing you can do ahead of an action is ensuring that you and all participants are aware of our key messages about legal rights.

We will happily answer **hypothetical questions** about the law and what to expect from the police, before protests via the phone line (07946 541 511).

With sufficient notice, we may be able to run a [Know Your Rights workshop](#) tailored to your group, which can increase people's confidence and ability to keep themselves and each other safe during a protest. Alternatively, check-out our [upcoming public training dates](#). Remember: ignorance of the law is not a defence and will not help you in court.

The [Independent Legal Observers Network](#) may be able to provide [legal observers](#) to support your action on the day. They may try and help with last minute requests if they are able to but they are much more likely to be able to provide support if you give them **at least 2 weeks notice**.

Our aim is for groups to ultimately be autonomous. If you are planning an action lasting several days, or are a group that frequently runs actions, then we will support you to build up your own legal team, including [training legal observers](#), offering guidance on [police station support](#), and skillsharing with members of your group to answer the phone line on your days of action. [Contact us](#) to discuss this further.

Even if you do not want legal observers, we can provide [bustcards](#), or you can print your own.

2. Should I Notify the Police?

We advise against talking to the police ahead of demonstrations whenever possible. Your legal obligation to do so depends on the type of demonstration.



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If you inform the police of your upcoming demonstration, you may risk a greater police presence at your action, and you give the police more of a chance to impose conditions on your assembly under [section 12/14](#) – e.g. demanding that you change route or asking you to provide stewards.

Talking to the police ahead of an action also risks you being singled out as an ‘organiser’ and provides them with an easy way to get your details, and potentially those of other people involved. Occasionally, the police initiate contact with people they believe to be organisers, ahead of demonstrations. If this happens, we advise you answer “[No Comment](#)” to all questions, and [please inform us](#) of the use of this tactic.

Static demonstration

You have no legal obligation to notify the police of a ‘public assembly’ and we strongly advise against doing so.

If your protest is staying in one place – e.g. a static demonstration at a set location, a die-in, or a vigil – then you have no legal duty to notify the police.

March

There is a legal obligation to notify police of a planned march, although people often choose not to do so.

Communicating with the police ahead of an action can be problematic, as discussed above. However, the law states that if you organise a march or procession you must give the police **6 clear days notice** in writing. This applies if the march/procession is: intended to show support for or opposition to the views or actions of any group; publicise a cause or campaign; mark or commemorate an event. The law does not state a minimum number of participants – even 2 or 3 people could be counted as a march.

The law relates specifically to the **organiser** of the protest – individual participants do not have to check whether the police have been notified.

In practice, it has proved very difficult for the police to prove who has **organised** a march – unless it is obvious from names on Facebook events or emails. If a march is organised **non-hierarchically**, it is unclear legally who (if anyone) is obliged to notify the police.

Advance notice does not need to be given where it is not reasonably practical to do so, if for example it is spontaneous or very short notice.

Many people choose not to notify the police of their planned march. We are aware of only two attempts to bring such a case in the last 16 years, both of which were dropped. Regardless of whether or not you have notified the police of the march, the march itself remains legal and protected by articles 10 and 11 of the Human Rights Act.

If you are trying to decide whether or not to talk to the police ahead of an action – [give us a ring](#).

3. Will we be Arrested?

You cannot completely prevent arrest, but you can take steps to protect yourselves if it does happen.

Many people contact us wanting to know whether the action they are planning is likely to lead to arrests. This question is difficult to answer: a knowledge of common [laws used at protests](#) can be helpful, but is not a definite guide, as the police frequently arrest first and then decide the charges later. Reassuringly, the risk of arrest at most of the actions we support is low – [get in touch](#) with us if you want to discuss a possible action. Distributing our [key advice](#) may help participants feel more confident.



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You will often get some warning before arrests occur: either direct warnings, or a change in the police atmosphere. How your group responds to this will depend on the risks you are prepared to take: it may be helpful to discuss this in advance.

It is really helpful to **plan in advance how your group could help with [police station support](#)** if needed. A few people available to meet arrestees at stations makes a huge difference. See our guide on [preparing for police station support in advance](#) for more information.

For some actions – e.g. affinity group actions – arrest may be expected. If this is the case, you should be aware of [what is likely to happen in custody](#). Make plans for [police station support](#), including noting preferred solicitors for each participant.

4. During the Action

Please keep in touch with us if arrests occur.

Make sure everybody has a [bustcard](#). Write the phone numbers of the Protest Support Line, and [a good solicitor](#), on your arms. Our protest support line is available 24/7, so do call us for any on-the-day queries. It is really helpful if you keep us updated with significant events on the ground e.g. changes of location, arrests, or police brutality.

Do not pass on messages that you hear from police officers to other protesters or on social media – this is doing the police's work for them and you could make people more vulnerable to certain charges.

If we have sent out legal observers, they will be distributing [bustcards](#), monitoring police and recording arrests.

We may [tweet](#) relevant legal advice – please re-tweet to your followers.

In the event that anyone is arrested: Police station support is the responsibility of protest groups to organise, unless otherwise agreed. GBC is a voluntary organisation and does not have a bank of volunteers ready to offer station support at any time. We are able to answer legal questions and liaise with solicitors via our 24/7 helpline 07946 541 511, and we can also cover expenses incurred by people doing police station support. However, protest groups themselves, as far as possible, need to find people who are able to support outside the police station and coordinate this support. If this has not been previously organised and you are struggling to find volunteers, give us a ring and we can do a call out on our social media for supporters. **Remember to collect information from arrestees when they're released so that we can offer follow up support.**

5. After the Action

Keep in touch with us after the action so we can best support everyone involved.

For most actions, the hope is that the action will have ended without trouble from the police. If so, we hope you will be planning your next action, and [skilling up](#) to run your own autonomous legal support!

If arrests did occur, [police station support](#) may be ongoing over the hours and days after the action. We rely strongly on allied groups and individuals offering their solidarity to support arrestees – [call us](#) if you can help with this.

We will collate any evidence we have from the day (e.g. witness statements, legal observer notes, phone call notes) that may be useful for arrestees or for [holding the police to account](#). If you witnessed arrests or police violence, then please contact us, [write a statement as soon as possible](#), and encourage others to do the same.



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If arrestees have given us their contact details, we will contact them individually to [offer further support](#). We may need your groups' help in ensuring all arrestees are aware of this. For actions where many people have been arrested, we help arrestees to set up defendants campaigns, and protest groups are sometimes also involved in supporting these. Please let us know if you're able to help.