



# Police Station Support Guide

**Being arrested and held in police custody is unpleasant. People often appreciate being met by a friendly face when they are released. This is a guide to doing effective police station support.**

If you're [organising a protest](#), it is really helpful to prepare for Police Station Support in advance, even if you think the risk of arrest is low. We can never predict what the police will do. It's always better to be prepared.

The information you record outside the police station will help Activist Court Aid Brigade (ACAB) support the arrestee, and can make the difference between a conviction and an acquittal.

This guide contains information about how to prepare for police station support; what to do at the police station; tips on liaising with lawyers and appropriate adults; what information to collect for follow-up support and a guide to some basic First Aid and acute mental health support.

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You don't need to go to the police station right away after someone's been arrested – it usually takes at least an hour for them to be taken to the station and be booked in, before being held, interviewed and released. It's a good idea to make sure you're ready and have everything, including people who can take over support during the night or later on, before heading to a station.

If you're not sure where an arrestee has been taken, ask a Legal Observer if they know and phone the Protest Legal Support Helpline / Legal Back Office for the action, as they may have more information.

*This guide is an updated version of the Activist's Legal Project guide to arrestee support, created collectively by [GBC Resources](#), [Activist Court Aid Brigade \(ACAB\)](#) and [Queercare](#).*

## Preparing for Police Station Support in Advance

If you're planning an action it's a good idea to plan station support in advance, especially if you think arrests are likely (but remember that police behaviour is often unpredictable so it's best to be prepared just in case!) Here are things to think about:

Make a **group chat** (ideally on a secure messaging app such as Signal) with a **group of people who are willing to do Police Station Support (PSS)**. This may be people who will be at the protest or other people sympathetic to the cause. If someone has access to a car this is even better, as arrestees could be taken to a police station that's far away where they need to get back to. However, this is not a necessity – GBC can always help with transport costs where it's needed.



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If applicable, the people doing Back Office may wish to join the PSS group chat to make communication easier. Some groups have a designated person coordinating station support; others coordinate station support through the Back Office; and others coordinate themselves through a group chat or via other means. Find out what works best for your group.

Make sure everyone has **read the [Police Station Support guide](#)** and understands their role. There is a useful summary at the start of the PSS guide.

If you have time, sort out a rota with shifts and buddies. How formal or informal this will be depends on the size and nature of the protest and supporters. Most importantly, ensure there are at least two people available at all times, and **a few people who can cover shifts overnight** and into the early hours of the morning.

If you can, try to build up a few **station support kits** containing the items listed on the [PSS guide](#). Aim to have one kit per police station. If it's a small action this will likely be one or two stations.

Have someone on the ground who's in communication with the Legal Back Office / Protest Legal Support Line and with station support crews throughout the action and after, reporting any arrests to the people who are planning to head out to support. Legal Observers will also ring the Protest Legal Support Line/ Legal Back Office to report any arrests they witness.

A few days after the action and the station support, you may find it appropriate to have a **debrief** or to call each other to check how you're all doing. Support is valuable and appreciated, but can also be draining and invisibilized work.

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## 1. Your Role

Your presence outside the police station can have a dramatic impact on how the arrestee reflects upon their arrest and is an important action of solidarity to support protest as a whole.

Simply being outside a police station to meet someone released from custody is valuable and appreciated.

Your role as police station support is:

- To **greet** and **emotionally support** arrestees as they leave the police station
- To gather **contact details**, and where possible **information** about the arrest and release
- To offer something to **eat and drink**, and to help with **transport** and somewhere to **stay**
- To **liaise** with the Legal Back Office / Protest Legal Support Line, the solicitor(s), any appropriate adults and the staff of the police station to ensure that all those arrested receive the right support
- To **pass on information** about what to do next and what practical, legal and emotional support is available

Doing station support on your own is not a good idea – always try to work with other people unless unavoidable. See if you can work in buddies, so you're always with someone else.

Information on what support we offer can be found in the [I've been Arrested!](#) guide.

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## 2. Why You Might End up Doing Police Station Support

You might have planned in advance to be doing station support for arrestees from a particular action or it may have come as a surprise.



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## Setting up a Station Support Group in Advance

If you're planning an action it's a good idea to plan station support in advance, especially if you think arrests are likely (and remember that police behaviour is often unpredictable so it's best to be prepared just in case!)

- **Gather together** a group of people who are willing to do station support. This may be people who will be at the protest or other people sympathetic to the cause. If someone has access to a car this is even better, as arrestees could be taken to a police station that's far away where they need to get back to.
- Make sure everyone has **read this guide** and understands their role.
- Sort out a **rota** with shifts and buddies. How formal or informal this will be depends on the size and nature of the protest and supporters. Most importantly, ensure there are at least two people available at all times, and a few people who can cover shifts overnight and into the early hours of the morning.
- If you can, try to build up a few **station support kits** containing the items set out below. Aim to have one kit per police station.
- Set up a form of **communication** for the station support crew. A good way of doing this is through a group chat on a secure messaging app such as Signal. If applicable, the people doing Back Office may wish to join this chat to make communication easier. Some groups have a designated person coordinating station support; others coordinate station support through the Back Office; and others coordinate themselves through a group chat or via other means. Find out what works best for your group.
- Have someone on the ground who's in communication with the Legal Back Office / Protest Legal Support Line and with station support crews throughout the action and after, **reporting** any arrests to the people who are planning to head out to support.
- A few days after the action and the station support, you may find it appropriate to have a **debrief** or to call each other to check how you're all doing. Support is valuable and appreciated, but can also be draining and invisibilised work.

## If You Witness an Arrest and Want to Support

- Try to **find out** where the arrestee is being taken by asking **Legal Observers**, or, if there are none around, the **arresting police officers**. If they don't know or don't tell you, call the **Legal Back Office / Protest Legal Support Line** (07946 541 511) to say that you want to be kept updated.
- You don't need to go to the police station as soon as you see an arrest – it usually takes a while for arrestees to be taken to the station and booked in. Use this time to gather some other people to support with you, especially if there's not a station support group set up already, and as many things from the below list as you can.
- Share this guide with your fellow supporters.

## If You Receive a Custody Call and Want to Support

You may receive a custody call from a friend or family member who's been arrested. In the call, make sure to find out what **station** they're at, and advise them to use a [trusted protest solicitor](#).

- **Inform** the Legal Back Office / Protest Legal Support Line of the **name/alias** of the arrestee, what **station** they're at, and any **other information** you have about their arrest. Let them know that you're heading to the police station.
- See if you can get some **other people** to do support with you, and take this **guide**, some **food**, and as many of the other **items listed below** as you can along with you.

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## 3. What to Take With You

It is usual for arrestees to have their belongings taken away by the police – phones, wallets, and sometimes clothes.



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See if you can take with you:

- This guide
- A **mobile phone** and **charger** and lots of **credit**
- **Food and drink** – for yourself and for the arrestees once they are released
  - Try to ensure that this meets dietary requirements of arrestees (vegan, halal, kosher, allergen-free etc.) and is high-energy
- **Police Station Release Forms** (one for every person who's been arrested).
- **Arrestee Information leaflets** (one for every person who's been arrested)
- Some **money** to pay for taxi fares, food, hot drinks, and possibly accommodation for released arrestees
- **Pens/pencils** and a **notebook** – you may want to make extra notes
- Plain **travel cards** (if applicable) for arrestees to travel after release
- **Warm clothing, foil blankets** and **raincoats** – you could be hanging around late at night
- A **pen torch** in case it gets dark
- A few **bustcards**
- Basic **first aid and health** supplies, including Queercare RAISED cards (see Appendix for suggested First Aid kit list).
- **Phone numbers** for:
  - The Legal Back Office for the action the arrestees were arrested it (if applicable), or otherwise, the Protest Legal Support Helpline: **07946 541 511**
  - The solicitors you know or think the arrestees will use
  - Any friends or family members who want to be kept in the loop
  - The custody desk for the police station you are at
  - A few local taxi numbers
  - Safer spaces, local B&Bs or other local accommodation wherever possible
- **Information** about local transport and accommodation
- **Entertainment**, such as a book and playing cards
- Patience, empathy and listening skills

Please don't bring:

- Anything **illegal** (weapons, drugs etc.) – there is a small chance you could be stopped & searched so don't incriminate yourself
- **Enemies** – sitting outside a police station with someone you strongly dislike is not conducive to a supportive atmosphere!
- **Attitude** – being seen as confrontational or rude by the cops could condemn arrestees to longer in custody

You don't need to go to the police station right away after someone's been arrested – it usually takes a few hours for them to be taken to the station and be booked in, before being held, interviewed and released. It's a good idea to make sure you're ready and have everything, including people who can take over support during the night or later on, before heading to a station.

If you're not sure where an arrestee has been taken, ask a Legal Observer if they know and phone the Protest Legal Support Helpline / Legal Back Office, as they may have more information.

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## 4. What We Need to Support You

On a large action, there may be a Legal Back Office using its own number, which often coordinates station support. Otherwise, the Protest Legal Support Helpline often has information on arrestees and can offer valuable support & advice

**If you are unsure whether there is a Back Office, or who they are, give the Protest Legal Support Line a ring on 07946 541 511.**



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Please **check in** with the Back Office / Protest Legal Support Line when you arrive at the police station, to give:

- The name and telephone number you are using
- Your location and how long you can stay for
- Details of any interactions that you've already had with the police station front desk or solicitors
- Whether you have all the information you need or if there is anything more that you need
- Information on any other local supporters who might be able to help out with accommodation, transport, food, etc.

Please also phone:

- When someone is released
- To check out when you are leaving the police station
- If you have any queries

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## 5. What to do at the Police Station

You may feel perfectly able to walk into the police station and open a dialogue with the desk staff. Desk staff are human beings and will hopefully respond to you. If not, or if the station is closed, then you'll have to hang around outside and rely on the solicitor to keep you informed.

Be nice and the desk staff and police might be nice back – but do be prepared – sometimes it can be very difficult to get any information or any cooperation at all from the front desk. The police might even lie to you. Be tenacious but not pushy – the cops are likely to get pissed off at very frequent requests for information. Be confrontational and you may condemn your friends to several hours more detention (yes it does happen!) or even face arrest yourself.

If the police do cooperate, try to find out and make a note of anything you don't already know:

- **How many** people are they holding?
- **Who** they are holding?
- Are they **OK**?
- Are they being charged?
- What they are **charged** with?
- Any indication of a **release** time?
- **Some arrestees will choose not to give their name to police officers, so don't ask about individual people in custody unless you are sure of what name they are using.** If you want to get information about a specific person, you can give a **description** such as, 'Is the young person with black hair and a white shirt who was arrested at the climate protest today OK?'

You can try to get 'treats' (eg. chocolate), newspapers, books or dry clothes to arrestees, but this is up to the police station staff. Be nice and don't show your annoyance if they refuse. If you know the arrestee personally, you might want to use this opportunity to make sure the police know about people's dietary and medical needs.

Ask the police to make sure that they release people into your care and not out of a side exit – but don't be shocked if they say they'll do that and then do the opposite. If you have enough people, see if you can have supporters monitoring different exits, or take regular trips to check side doors.

If the police station is closed, you may be able to reach the custody desk using a phone or intercom outside. However, this doesn't always work and the police may be uncooperative. In this situation, you'll have to wait outside and rely on the Protest Legal Support Line, solicitors and appropriate adults for updates.



**Be aware of your own boundaries and wellbeing and that of your buddy.** See if you can work in shifts with other people, and take it in turns to have breaks, such as going for a walk.

## 6. Liaising with the Solicitor(s)

The arrestee should have been able to call their [chosen solicitor](#) from inside the police station.

The Back Office may also have called the solicitors to let them know about the arrests and they may have received calls from the police on behalf of arrestees.

**Introduce yourself** and your role to solicitors and **ask to be kept informed**. Suggest that they pop out and chat to you once in a while so that fellow activists and legal support know what's happening. It's all too easy for them to swan into the station and be in there for hours with police station support outside none the wiser (and in some cases not even sure that they have arrived!)

## 7. Liaising with Appropriate Adults

If an arrestee is **under 18** or **seen as a 'vulnerable adult' by the cops** ([PACE Code C](#)), they or the police will usually have called an **appropriate adult** just after the arrest or from inside the station. The appropriate adult legally needs to be present at any interviews and the arrestee should be released into their care.

If the **arrestee is under 18**, their appropriate adult will often be their parent or guardian. They may be another over-18, such as a friend, other family member, or employee of the local Youth Offending Team (YOT). The cops usually want the appropriate adult to be a legal guardian or YOT employee, so whilst other people aged over 18 are technically allowed to take this role the police may not allow it.

Some [local authorities or local voluntary groups](#) have appropriate adult schemes.

Check if the Back Office / Protest Legal Support Line has contact details for any appropriate adults and if they have any updates on, for example, when they are going to arrive. This can be useful information to relay to the desk staff to pass on to the arrestee.

Some appropriate adults are experienced and understand their role well, whilst others may be confused, unsure and/or upset. Try to create good communication with appropriate adults if you can. As well as offering them **food** and **conversation**, you can tell them about **your role** and the **5 Key Messages**, especially **No Comment**, **No Duty Solicitor** and **No Caution**. Let them know the importance of asking custody to call a good solicitor, who will provide advice for free at the police station, and recommend a solicitor from the [Netpol Lawyers List](#) for them to use. If the arrestee is 16 or under, let the appropriate adult know that they can refuse to let the young person's photograph and fingerprints be taken (more information on this [here](#)).

Give appropriate adults a [bustcard](#) and an [Arrestee Information Leaflet](#), and encourage them to call the Protest Legal Support Line if they have any questions.

## 8. Meeting Arrestees on their Release

For some people, police custody may have been fine, for others it might have been traumatic. You need to deal with whatever situation arises and provide appropriate support.



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To many people, being arrested is a really big deal. They might be very excited or upset and want to talk about it. Bring your listening skills with you, and some nourishment!

Remember the the 7Fs for release from a police station:

- **Food** and **drink**, being conscious of dietary needs
- **Friendly** and empathetic to the needs and emotions of the arrestee
- **First aid** and mental health support
- **Fill** out the [Police Station Release](#) form with as much information as they are happy to give – preferably at least contact details so that the Legal Support Team can offer ongoing support.
- **Future** of the case – give them an [Arrestee Information Leaflet](#) and outline legal, practical and emotional support available
- **Finish** up by ensuring that the arrestee has money for transport and knows where they are going to stay
- **Phone** the Back Office / Support Line to let them know who has been released.

See [Appendix](#) for information on **First Aid and mental health support**.

Using the [online release form](#) is ideal, but if needed here's a [printable](#) release form.

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## 9. Collecting Information for Ongoing Support

Once the arrestee has taken a moment to enjoy their freedom, and perhaps over a cup of tea, it's important to ask them for some **information**.

Use the [Police Station Release Form](#) to record information. **Contact details** are most important, so that ACAB and/or the Legal Support Team of the group organising the protest can follow up to offer further support, and make sure arrestees have good legal support if needed. ACAB not only assist defendants with their defence, but also offer advice on how to sue the police.

Arrestees should have a release form given to them by the police – this will have details on it to help answer questions about the conditions of their release.

**If someone is (understandably) wary about giving you their details, ask them to seriously consider getting in touch later on the Protest Support Helpline (07946 541 511) and to check out this website.**

Encourage people to write up a **statement** as to what happened at the time of their arrest, while it is still fresh in their mind, and to keep it safe.

Check they have a **solicitor** – ask who it is and encourage them to contact one from the [Netpol Lawyers List](#) if they don't have one or if they took the duty solicitor.

If they don't want ongoing support, ask whether they are happy to give **information about their arrest** even if not giving their contact details or future court/bail dates – this will help us to **understand police/CPS tactics** and **know who has been arrested and released**.

It is also useful to make a brief note of their **appearance**: in many cases an arrest is called in with a description of the person but not their name. Your description might help to tie together the reported arrest with the arrestee themselves.

In some cases you might like to install the arrestee into a corner of a nearby warm cafe while you wait for others to be released or while you arrange for them to get a lift home.

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### 10. Once Everyone is Released or When You're Leaving

Please check out with the Protest Legal Support Line / Back Office when you're leaving, to check who is still in custody, if anyone. If you're **switching shifts** with more station support people, make sure to give them **all the information** you've got so far.

Sooner or later all arrestees are likely to be out of police custody. If arrests have taken place in the afternoon or evening this might be the following day (remember that people can be held for up to 24 hours without any additional authorisation).

Some arrestees might be held for longer 'on remand', in which case they will be held and put in front of a judge the morning of the next weekday.

Check with the Protest Legal Support Helpline / relevant Back Office or Police Station Support Coordinator that your figures match – ie. the number of people arrested equals the number released and you haven't forgotten anyone! If you're still up for it, ask if there are other locations that need police station support.

Please **return your completed forms with any notes to ACAB as soon as possible** – scan completed forms and email to [courtsupport@protonmail.com](mailto:courtsupport@protonmail.com), or type up the information into an email. Please ensure you send information from a **secure email address** (such as Protonmail or Riseup).

**Make sure to check in with your fellow police station supporters after you're done**, such as by having a debrief a few days later or texting each other more informally. Police station support is essential and appreciated but it can also be draining, physically and emotionally difficult and work that often seems invisible within movements. We are able to do better support for everyone when we support those who are doing support!

**You've been awesome. Thank you.**

**Any Questions? Ring the Protest Legal Support helpline – 07946 541511**

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### 11. Appendix 1: First Aid Kit

#### Suggested First Aid Kit

This is a suggested First Aid kit list based on what we have found most useful for dealing with the types of injuries people commonly have after arrest and being held in custody. Don't worry if you don't have everything on this list – just take whatever you can. If you want to buy supplies in advance, [Medisave](#) often has First Aid kit at good prices.

- Disposable gloves
- Antibacterial hand sanitiser
- Hot and cold packs
- Wet wipes
- Blue plasters
- Coban
- Medical tape
- Ambulance dressing
- Aftersun
- Sugary sweets or glucose tablets
- Disposable razors
- Menstrual products





- [RAISED.cards](#)

If you are building a First Aid kit for protest or station support and would like access to supplies and training, you can get in touch with [Queercare](#) at [protest@queercare.network](mailto:protest@queercare.network).

## 12. Appendix 2: Mental Health Support

Everyone deals with the experience of arrest and being held in custody in different ways. Some people might have found it okay, and others may have found it deeply traumatic. **You can never assume what arrest may have been like for someone.**

If you've been arrested yourself in the past, it's often not that helpful to talk about your arrest, as other people may have had a totally different experience. Instead of entering a situation with preconceived ideas about how another person might feel, try to be open-minded, non-judgemental and ready to listen.

A helpful acronym to remember for acute mental health support is **RAISED**.

- **Risk:** Consider and balance the risks to yourself, the arrestee and others associated with helping the arrestee and decide whether and how much to intervene.
- **Affect:** Consider the overriding emotion of the crisis (depression/suicidality, panic, perceiving a different reality etc.) and adjust accordingly.
  - If the person is **panicking**, reassure them of the safety and support systems they have and offer assistance to work through or minimise stressors if you can. Don't minimise the stressors, but assure the person that they're up to the task.
  - If they're **depressed or suicidal**, talk about future plans, reassure them that problems can be dealt with, and act as if it's assumed that they'll be around to take part in future activities. If you know the arrestee, it can be helpful to plan a low-key meet-up the day after or a few days after the arrest.
  - If they're **perceiving a different reality** to you, don't contradict their perception unless they ask you to or told you to do so in advance. Ask questions to help you understand what they're perceiving, such as 'That sounds pretty overwhelming, do you think you'd be able to explain how that's making you feel?'
  - If they're **nonverbal**, provide time and space, reduce possible stressors (including environment) and offer paper or a digital notebook to pass messages.
  - If they appear to be 'splitting' or having **sudden emotional swings**, respect that the person's emotions are real in the current moment and not 'fake feelings' or equivalent. However, try not to internalise behaviour or language about yourself or others if it is different to how the person usually behaves. Use language to describe their feelings, such as 'It looks like you're feeling really frustrated right now.'
- **In and out:** Try to find out when the person last took in food, water, medication and other substances and see if you can provide or limit any of the above. Often arrestees haven't had adequate food, which can exacerbate panic and feelings of disorientation.
- **Stressors:** Consider what factors in the person's life are making things worse, and consider if these can (plan to be) removed or dealt with.
- **Environment:** Consider environmental factors such as noise, temperature, dangers, triggers and people and see if these can (plan to) be removed. This often means supporting arrestees to go somewhere safer, away from the police station, and potentially travelling with them to get there.
- **Diagnosis:** Last and least importantly, consider any (informal or otherwise) diagnoses that arrestees may have, and adjust accordingly.

Some people might want to talk about the experience of arrest they've just had, and some might not at all – don't pressure people either way. When listening to someone share how they're feeling or what's happened to them you may like to remember the acronym **PROBLEMS** for active listening:



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- **Pause:** Make sure to leave space for the person to talk and don't be afraid of silence.
- **Rephrase:** Paraphrasing something the person has said back in your own words to check an/or illustrate that you understand.
- **Open-ended questions:** Ask questions starting with words like 'What' or 'How' rather than those which have yes or no answers.
- **Body language:** Don't impose same norms on everyone but mirror some aspects of the person's body language if you can, such as eye contact/
- **Label emotions:** Name emotions, such as 'it seems like you're feeling really frustrated about this' or 'that sounds like it felt really scary' as a way to validate and show you're listening even if you don't agree or can't relate at all to the actual content of what they're saying.
- **Encouragers:** Brief sounds or gestures like 'uh-huh', 'I see', nodding etc show that you're paying attention without interrupting.
- **Mirror :** This is the cliched therapist thing of repeating back a few words from someone's sentence. Don't overdo this but it can be helpful if you're stuck about what to say – mirroring and leaving a pause can be good way to encourage someone to expand.
- **Summarise** – after you've been speaking to them, summarise to check that you've understood what's happening with the person and how they feel about it.

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## 13. Appendix 3: Basic First Aid

### Basic First Aid

Major injuries will usually be handled by police medics and hospitals, but it's good to know some basic First Aid for minor injuries and damage.

Before doing any First Aid, make sure to put on **gloves** to protect yourself from germs. Encourage arrestees who have been injured during arrest or in custody to make a record of the injury (eg. by taking pictures of the injuries and visiting a GP or walk-in clinic), as they may want to use this as evidence if they later bring a civil claim or complaint against the police.

- **Sprains and bruises:** Remember the acronym **RICE** – **R**est the injured area as much as possible, apply **I**ce (wrap a cold pack in some cloth and hold it against the spain/bruise), apply **C**ompression (such as with coban) and **E**levate the injured area.
- **Loss of feeling in thumbs:** Handcuffs commonly cause minor nerve damage, which can mean that arrestees feel a loss of sensation around their thumb, wrist and/or back of the hand and fingers. Reassure arrestees that this is common and usually clears up on its own, but encourage them to visit a GP or a walk-in clinic if it's still a problem after a few days.
- **Grazes:** First stop any bleeding by applying pressure to the wound using a clean and absorbent material. Then wash the wound using water (not antiseptic) and apply a sterile adhesive dressing, such as a plaster.
- **Someone is cold:** Warm them up slowly, especially if they got cold over a long or unknown period of time. If you warm someone up too fast it causes blood to rush to the extremities and can cause unconsciousness. Try to make sure they're wearing dry, warm clothes and encourage them to wrap themselves in a foil blanket. Place heat packs under their armpits and help them to move to somewhere warm and dry, if possible. Please don't give people who are very cold hot drinks – this will cause blood to rush to the stomach and can cause loss of consciousness.
- **Someone is hot:** Offer them sips of water and move to a cool, shady area. Place cold packs under their armpits. If someone is hot and stops sweating; has a throbbing headache; feels sick and is losing consciousness, these are signs of heatstroke – call an ambulance.
- **Someone is losing consciousness:** If someone is rapidly moving from **D**isoriented to **I**rritable to **C**ombative (and eventually to **C**omatose – **DICC**), this is a sign that they're losing consciousness – call an ambulance.