

# NVC to Support Extinction Rebellion

(was De escalation Handout for Participants - also available as [www.deescalate.info](http://www.deescalate.info) )

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# What is nonviolence?

Nonviolence works because it inspires, builds trust and opens doors for large numbers of people to get involved and express themselves. It also models the world we want to live in by committing to causing no harm.

Beyond blame and judgement, nonviolence recognizes that all of us are part of this system and that we live interdependently (what happens to you affects me and vice versa) and all of our futures are at stake.

Some core elements of nonviolence are:

- Non harming
- Moving beyond blame and judgement to seek to understand the position and perspective of the other
- Truth-telling from a place of Courage, compassion and love.
- Interdependence
- Self-connection or inner peace

*"Nonviolence is the courage to speak truth with love...and love is the full radical acceptance of the humanity of every person."* - Miki Kashtan

## **What is Nonviolent Direct Action?**

Nonviolent Direct Action (NVDA) is a strategy of organising in groups to put your bodies in direct contact with or to directly oppose a force that you see as destructive or causing harm. NVDA strategies as we know them now developed out of the Nonviolent campaigns to end British rule of India, most commonly associated with Gandhi, and in the struggle for Civil Rights in the US in the 50s and 60s, most commonly associated with Dr Martin Luther King.

## **What is Nonviolent Communication?**

Nonviolent communication (NVC) is another expression of Nonviolence. NVC was developed by Marshall Rosenberg who drew on the humanistic psychology of Carl Rogers and the nonviolence of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, and give you the tools to approach actions and organising in a way that includes your own needs, while considering others' and the needs of the wider environment, so that unintentional harm is more likely to be avoided.

Some Core elements of NVC are:

- Moving beyond blame, judgment, 'should', 'have to', or being in a place of 'no choice'
- Communicating from a place of choice
- Foregrounding the act of listening, as a precursor for speaking, and to de-escalate tense situations
- Expressing yourself by trying to communicate undisputable reality (of observations, feelings and needs) rather than emotion-laden and unconscious interpretations

This material is an Intro to NVC De-escalation skills, specifically designed for Extinction Rebellion (XR) and for use in other social change movements utilising NVDA to support these movement cultivate a stronger culture of nonviolence.

# NVC De-escalation skills

These skills are relevant for tense situations in actions and also meetings and planning.

Remember these 5 elements as you go into an action. (Does the acronym BREATHE help you?)

**Breathe** - Ground - Notice support

**Remember** the humanity of all

**Empathy** before education

**Ask first** (Is other person ready  
to hear your perspective?)



**breathE** - Ground - Notice support

Nonviolent Communication for tense situations

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Here are recordings of recent practice sessions...

**Available recordings - they all follow a similar format and include different hosts and participants, bringing different scenarios**

[2019\\_09\\_18-Ceri](#)

[2019\\_09\\_13 with Laura and Marta](#)

[2019\\_08\\_28 with Ceri](#) (and Marta (new longer session))

[2019\\_07\\_18 with Laura](#) (and Marta)

[2019\\_07\\_17 with Marta](#) (and Andy)

[2019\\_07\\_10 with Marta](#) (and Ceri)

[2019\\_04\\_11 with Sarah](#)

[2019\\_04\\_06-Verene](#) (audio)

[2019\\_04\\_05 with Emma](#) (Gina and Ceri) why not to say sorry (if you don't mean it)

[2019\\_04\\_03 with Andy](#)

[2019\\_04\\_10 with Neil](#)

[2019\\_04\\_09 with Neil](#)

[2019\\_04\\_02 with Ceri \(Audio\)](#)

Also acknowledging Shona's and Sibongile's session which we don't have recordings for.

**This recording with Rowan has a different format and is an excellent intro to large crowd de escalation**

[2019\\_04\\_06 with Rowan](#)

creative De escalation for Large Crowds with activist, Rowan. And [Here](#) is the handout for this session. (Good on acknowledging vulnerability for some people in walking towards and taking action in tense situations). Please listen (or read handout) if you don't have much experience on actions and you are curious about ways that have developed over the last 20 years for dealing with escalated situations, particularly with the police.

### **BREATHE De-escalation skills**

1. **B**reathe. Ground. Notice your sources of support.
2. **R**emember The Humanity of All
3. **E**mpathy Before Education
4. **A**sk First - Is the other person ready to hear your perspective? **A** is also for **A**uthentic expression
5. **BreaT**HE. Debrief with Support

### **Principles:**

Connect to the human response in tense situations.

Someone who has the experience of being heard is more likely to calm down and listen to you.

Be curious and open to feedback. There's always something to learn from people's anger and frustration. It's impossible to be curious and afraid at the same time.

Where the attention goes, the energy flows.

1. **B**reathe. Ground. Notice your sources of support.

Connect to the human response in tense situations.

**We are hardwired for fight/flight/freeze so know what supports shifting out of these responses into social engagement.**

It's the function of the nervous system to respond to threat. In tense situations, our ability to think and hear becomes compromised so we need to slow down and add greater emphasis to listening to ourselves and others.

More is understood by your behaviour posture and tonality than your words

What are ways of grounding yourself in tense situations?

### Grounding

Breathe down into feet.

Connect to the Earth.

Imagine roots extending under feet.

Notice how the ground (or chair) is meeting your feet (or legs and bum).

Feel your feet as if that's all there is to do.

Be curious about what's happening. (You can't be curious and afraid at the same time.)

Notice your sources of support

What in your immediate environment is a source of support right now?

(buddy, affinity group, a reassuring item of clothing, a colour in the crowd, trees or plants nearby).

(Give participants the opportunity to connect to them now)

Remind participants to remember to shake out tension.

*How do you feel after trying the strategies of Grounding, Noticing your support and Shaking?*

*Practice each of them every day from now on.*

*Notice what happens as you practice daily. Does the practice become easier?*

Further questions:

**What body posture and tone of voice helps to de-escalate?**

Soft, open posture, arms by sides, open hands, soft face, glance don't stare, tone, tempo and volume DOWN, speak slower.

When by car – give space (couple of feet) don't crowd over driver.

**What aggressive or defensive behaviour tends to escalate situations?**

(Much of this is unconsciously transmitted.)

Speaking loud, Speaking fast, clenching hands, folding arms, head tilted forwards staring, crowding around etc.

**Trauma-informed tip:**

Notice if you or people in your affinity group have gone quiet. Invite yourself and each other to take a breath. Breath is one of the most effective ways we can calm down our autonomic nervous system. Make sure you keep breathing deeply.

## 2. Remember The Humanity of All

- Give this protest situation. A road has been blockaded and buses, cars and access is disrupted. Someone is trying to a job interview.
- Say: What this person is feeling?
- Gather 4-5 feelings from participants.
- Say: What do they need in this moment? Think of things that matter to all humans.
- Gather 4-5 needs or values e.g. ease of getting where they need to go, reliable transport, cooperation, calmness, sustainability (getting a job), moving on with their life purpose.
- You might want to add an NVC teaching point. 'Our feelings arise because of what's really important to us, our needs. So this person is feeling tense because they need ease of getting where they need to go.'

**What is 'Felt Sense'?**

This is your body sensations eg racing heart, dry mouth, heavy legs, tension in shoulders.

Eg. I feel my heart racing (felt sense).

### **What are 'Feelings'?**

Feelings words describe in a slightly more abstract way what's going on as a body sensation.

Eg. I'm feeling anxious (feeling)

## **3. Empathy Before Education**

There are a few alternative ways of expressing this:

- Reflecting not reacting
- Feelings before facts
- Connection not correction

Fundamentally, you are listening and communicating in a way that connects to the humanity of all people in a situation. You can do this by:

### **Reflecting back what you are hearing or seeing**

Eg: **Bystander**: "I get what you are trying to do. It's your tactics i don't agree with. You are just disrupting ordinary people...These people will get criminal records. Where does that get you?"

**Activist**: "So although you see the aim, you also feel that it's pointless occupying the bank?" Is that right?

**Bystander**: "Yes, it doesn't get you anywhere and these people will get criminal records for nothing. I'm sure there are better ways of getting the message across."

**Activist**: "Right, yes, you are really doubting this will get us anywhere and there is high cost to pay for doing this, and you have a sense there are better ways of being heard and bringing about change."

**Activist** (notices the pause and decides this could be the moment to offer their perspective): "**Do you want to hear a bit from me about what we are doing here and why?**"

**Bystander**: "Yeah, ok."

**Activist** "Well, I'm afraid for my children and for all next generations. I am devastated by my generation's lack of effective action. I see so much destruction of nature happening and i want us as a global community to act, to prioritise reducing carbon emissions and to change our lifestyle which the banks are part of. To reduce carbon emissions effectively, we need to wake up and act. That is why we are here. It may not seem connected, but it is."

END OF DEMO

Say "So, as you can see we empathised and then asked and got a yes before explaining."

“This is step 4 Ask First. A is also for Authentic expression”

“This may feel ‘weird’ and it’s really supportive for the other person to feel considered.

This step helps to create a nonviolent culture of consent and choice”

“Asking for consent, prepares them in a small way for listening, so they are more likely to take on board what you are saying.”

When you practice notice how it feels doing it.”

### **Step 4 Authentic expression.**

Before we move onto practice, let’s spend a moment to connect emotionally with your reasons for being involved with XR. What is it that deep within you is motivating you to spend hours, days, weeks organising and going to the streets, with the consequences of arrest if you get arrested.

Give your own example e.g. ‘ I am fearful for my children and for all the next generations. I am devastated by my generation’s lack of effective action. And i deeply want a more just future where everyone’s needs are important and people’s basic needs for safety, health, community and purpose are met. And i love nature and I receive so much peace and joy from being in it, i want to protect it.

As much as possible for now, stay on our heartfelt truth about this. The heartfelt truths are indisputable and can be connecting for people to hear.

You may want to add something about choice of strategy and how NVDA is the only way to get people’s attention eg. “It may seem paradoxical that we are blocking traffic to make a point about our planet, but i really want us all to shift into action. We wouldn’t be having this conversation if we hadn’t (stopped the traffic, or whatever)”

Ask people to take a breath and (online) ask a few people for their Authentic expression about why they are active in XR. This is usually very powerful and moving and people enjoy connecting to this.

### **Practice 1 (People who disagree with strategies but will engage in dialogue)**

In groups of 3 practice one of you being the bystander and two of you being activists (then changing around)

The two activists reflect back this bystander’s concerns. While one of you reflects back, the other’s role is to breathe, be present and a calming support.

You will have good practice by using the same example but if you really want to use a different example, you can.

**Feedback question:** What response from the activist was connecting for the bystander? What response made you feel heard/respected? (It’s not always visible to everyone else, so it’s useful to hear what it is that makes a difference).

### **Practice 2: Very Angry people and Drunk people Practice:**

## Talk through these tips

**With angry people**, there are some other strategies that might work in addition to what we have just practiced.

- a. listen, allow space for their expression
- b. If they are irritated by attempts to reflect back to validate their experience, then listen in silence
- c. saying a genuine sorry
- d. reassuring the person about exactly how long it will be before the traffic starts moving again
- e. In some circumstances, you can meet the scale of their anger, with the depth of your anger or concern about what's happening in the world, and that this requires urgent action. Eg 'I hear you are furious about being blocked here today, and i am furious about what is happening to the world.' This could have the effect of 'meeting' them where they are emotionally and could lead to more dialogue. If it seems to escalate, then back away.
- f. if they say, "Go away", then it's best to go away

## With a person who's drunk / high

- a) staying focussed on connecting with that person
- b) listening for their underlying concerns / needs
- c) connecting by e.g. finding a topic / subject you have in common or using humour
- d) distraction, such as asking a question (scrambles the brain) or using humour
- e) inviting them to sit down
- f) walking and talking whilst moving in the direction you'd like them to go e.g away from the peaceful protest area
- g) speaking personally and from your heart
  - Begin with ONE of the Starter lines below and improvise de escalating the situation. Choose between de escalating the angry person or the drunk person.
  - Have 1 role-player and 2 de-escalators
  - Freeze the role-play at any time and get support or suggestions from observers and trainer
  - Get someone else to take over if you get stuck.
  - Have a go, try it out and see what has a de escalating effect.

## Starter lines

**Very angry person starter line:** "What the fuck is going on here? Let me through! Let me through!! You losers, you layabouts ....!"

**Drunk person starter line:** "I'm gonna die, you're gonna die, we're all gonna die!!" (disrupting a camp or action and not respecting the no drugs/alcohol intention)

**Note: as far as possible always approach a deescalation situation with someone alongside you**

## 5. Brea**THE** - Self-check in.

Notice your sources of support. e.g. empathy, movement, checkin. Plan to access them

Don't forget that the impact of an action (or meeting) can leave people in a triggered/hyperaroused state and have sleep and tension issues.



De-Escalation may need to continue well after the action.

Make sure you bookend each action (or meeting) with a Debrief, or maybe a couple of Debriefs.

We know from trauma work that Trauma is not in the event, it's held in the body. Shock is invisible.

Use the tools of:

Breath,

Shaking,

Space (for everyone to speak)

Expressing (Reflecting not reacting, feelings before facts)

### **More considerations for follow up reading and reflection.**

#### **Feelings before facts (Expressing feelings, your own or guessing those of another)**

a) "My wife is really sick at home and I need to get home to her. This is outrageous."

Eg. "I'm hearing that you are worried as your wife is sick and you really need to get back to her."

b) Feelings before Facts way of asserting your perspective (from CLARA method - see below)

"I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when (you) \_\_\_\_\_ because it's important to me that \_\_\_\_\_. What I'm hoping we might try is \_\_\_\_\_."

This helps de-escalate as you are keeping the focus on yourself and not resorting to putting the other person in the 'wrong'.

#### **Connection not correction (Naming a shared value)**

When we are affected by others, it can be extremely helpful to give feedback on how we were impacted.

It can be a great de-escalation skill to name **a value which you are pretty sure is shared by the people present.**

Eg I feel uncomfortable with what's happening **and I really want everyone to be safe.**

It helps remind people of the undisputable human needs for safety, harmony, community, progress etc.

#### **'Don't stick your but(t) in the other person's face.'**

Don't be tempted to add-on your own perspective to this reflection. The founder of Nonviolent Communication, Marshall Rosenberg said 'Don't stick your but(t) in the other person's face.'

Avoid saying "I get that you are feeling really annoyed and frustrated that you are being held up like this, but it won't be for long and it's the only way to get climate change onto the agenda."

Your 'but(t)' statement undoes the helpful impact of your attempt at listening to the other person. People will only hear the last thing you said and they won't have the felt experience that you have got their perspective.

Instead say ‘I get that you are feeling really annoyed and frustrated.’ (Silence. Space. Pause. See what else comes from the other person.)

### **Resistance to the Resistance is Fertile!!**

- Listen to people’s criticism of XR with curiosity and receive it as feedback.
- When people resist what you are doing and saying, and criticise XR choices around strategies and actions, know this is fertile ground for connecting across differences and building engagement.
- If you can hear people’s concerns in an undefended way, you are more likely to inspire them with having had a positive interaction with you.
- You might be in a place of absolute certainty that direct action is the only way of creating change in the current moment. You are likely to have to face feedback about the cost (disruption, inconvenience, life-threatening delays) of doing these actions.
- What reactions do you typically have when hearing this feedback? e.g. ‘You’d better get used to it!’ / “We have no choice. This is the only way to be heard.”
- The challenge is to be aware when you are responding from a place of ‘No choice’ and ‘Scarcity’. These are not generally motivating for people. Responding from a place of listening, empathy, connection builds bridges between you and bystanders and is more likely to inspire a positive experience.

### **CLARA Action Steps**

When we act, we often act in relationship to others. When considering which actions may be most constructive when acting amongst others, the following tools may be helpful.

When engaging with others, often the best thing we can do is to listen, and to affirm what is being said. Too often when we are not speaking, we are also not listening with an intent to understand – we are simply waiting our turn to speak, then we jump to respond without affirming a single thing we heard.

#### **Centre**

Take deep breaths and Ground

#### **Listen**

Listen with an intent to understand. Listen for underlying principles, cultural values, emotions, and issues behind what is being said. Listen for commonalities. Observe body language and tone of voice which may provide additional meaning. Listen for inherent needs and interests, not just what is said.

#### **Affirm**

Affirm the principles or issues in what was said, or simply the feelings or emotions that were expressed (“you care strong about this”). Affirming is not agreeing, it’s acknowledging or recognizing what is shared. This can be done by simply repeating or rephrasing what was said.

#### **Respond**

Respond to the issues that were raised and the underlying needs behind them. Ask questions about what was said.

#### **Add**

Add information to the conversation. After seeking to understand, seek to be understood.

#### **Assertion Statements (also known as “I” Statements)**

One way to engage conflict constructively is to communicate our desires and interests to others and share the rationales behind those interests. When we are affected by others, it can be extremely helpful to give feedback on how we were impacted. The assertion statement framework is especially effective when used in the “Add” part of the CLARA method (above) but can also be used on its own.

“I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when (you) \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_. What I’m hoping we might try is \_\_\_\_\_.”

The formula above is best used by adapting it to your communication style, “voice” and culture. What’s most important is that all 4 key elements are included in your communication, regardless of the order.

- Identify and share your *feelings and emotions* about the situation.
- Identify and articulate the *cause* of those feelings.
- Provide lots of context and explanation for *why* those feelings are caused – the more the better!
- Identify and articulate what your needs and desires are – what your ideal looks like – and frame it in a way that invites others into a conversation about how that might be achieved, what their role in your vision might be, and how their own interests might be satisfied as well.

<https://www.nasco.coop/sites/default/files/srl/Bystander%20Training.pdf>

## **Know your rights**

One element of De-escalation is to [Know your Rights](#) and for anyone who has a De-escalation role to know our rights.

Netpol seeks to monitor public order, protest and street policing, and to challenge and resist policing which is excessive, discriminatory or threatens civil rights.

<https://netpol.org/know-your-rights/>

## **Core Messages**

The core messages that everyone should remember are:

### **No Comment**

You do not need to answer police questions, so don’t.

### **No Personal Details**

You do not have to give them under ANY stop and search power, so don’t.

### **No Duty Solicitor**

Instead use a recommended solicitor with protest experience.

### **No Cautions**

Accepting a caution is an admission of guilt, so don’t.

### **What Power?**

Ask officers what power they are relying on to challenge them to act lawfully.