

Handout Two – Myths and Misconceptions of NV

NONVIOLENCE IS NOT

- Nonviolent action has nothing to do with passivity, submissiveness, and cowardice; just as in violent action, these must first be rejected and overcome
- Nonviolent action is not to be solely equated with verbal or purely psychological persuasion. It is a sanction and a technique of struggle involving the use of social, economic, and political power
- Nonviolent action does not depend on the assumption that people are inherently “good”
- People using nonviolent action do not have to be pacifists or saints; nonviolent action has been predominantly and successfully practiced by “ordinary” people
- Success with nonviolent action does not require (though it may be helped by) shared standards and principles, a high degree of community of interest
- Nonviolent action is at least as much of a Western phenomenon as an Eastern one
- In nonviolent action there is no assumption that the opponent will refrain from using violence
- There is nothing in nonviolent action to prevent it from being used for both “good” and “bad” causes
- Nonviolent action is not limited to domestic conflicts within a democratic system; it has been widely used against dictatorial regimes, foreign occupations, and even against totalitarian systems
- Nonviolent action does not always take longer to produce victory than violent struggle would

Source: Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (3 Vols.), Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973.

NONVIOLENT TACTICS INCLUDE

- Challenging power structures in society
- Dramatising actions
- Creative Disorder such as demonstrations, marches, sometimes civil disobedience
- Non-cooperation: strikes, boycotts, refusal to follow orders
- Intervention: blockades, sit-ins, direct action
- Direct action just doing whatever it is you want yourself, not persuading someone else to do it. Often symbolic
- Alternative institutions to bypass unjust systems eg: using LETS schemes rather than banks
- Coercion, persuasion and person to person contact

GOALS OF ACTIVE NONVIOLENCE

- To even up the power of groups in conflict so negotiation or mediation can happen
- Alter social, economic or political structures ie caste barriers, land issues
- Replace groups in power
- Achieve Human and Civil Rights
- Make something happen or stop something happening

Turning the Tide QP&S 1996

NINE BASIC RESPONSES TO DE-ESCALATING VIOLENCE*

Don't act frightened

Don't behave like a victim; demonstrate respect for yourself.
Be gentle, but firm. Pleading induces more cruelty.

Connect humanities

Speak to the assailant as a person of dignity.
Become a person to the assailant.
Humanise self and them (say "I"). Ask Questions.
If the victim is violent in return, the attacker feels justified.

Remain calm

Breathe deeply. Keep your voice low.
Silence can disarm.

Listen, listen, listen

Show the person you have heard what they are saying.
Do not rush into faster and faster speech.
Only interrupt if person personally abusive.
Hearing does not mean agreeing.

* Adapted from CPC Training 1993

Watch body language – your own and assailant's
Avoid sudden moves. Use slow, gentle hand movements.
Use non-threatening eye contact.

Use the unexpected to create wonder and surprise
Use humour, distraction, introduce yourself to the person
Shake hands.
Interrupt the process somehow – possibly by trying to sit down, offering coffee etc.

Empathise
Remember the assailant has all the fear that you have.

Know that the assailant is a human being capable of love
Pay attention to the need to be loved.
Trust that the person wants to act positively.

Allow a way out
Both physically, as in a door, and 'saving face'.

“Calming a potentially violent person is :
56% facial expression and body language
37% tone of voice
7% what we say”
J Reuwer, MD