

Mental Health Action Support

Even if you can't be out on the streets, you can help keep your friends and comrades safe. One way to do this from home is to ask your friends if they'd like you to be their support person in the event of a traumatic event or crisis. Trauma is a tool of oppression, and the police are doing their best to beat, teargas, and arrest us into submission. Don't let them.

You do not need to be a mental health professional in order to help your friend in a moment of crisis. Just by being there for your friend, you're already helping. This guide will just help you be more effective than you already are. We do recommend reading this guide in full *before* the action. If you are familiar with the tools, they will be easier to employ in a moment of crisis.

If you are already your friend's in-case-of-arrest contact, you can also take on this support role. However, these two roles do not necessarily need to be filled by the same person.

Before the action

Talk with your friend about what they are looking for in terms of support, and what has worked for them in the past. For some potential starting points for this conversation, see pages 35-37 in *Mutual Aid, Trauma, and Resiliency*

<https://janeaddamscollective.files.wordpress.com/2018/08/mutualaidtraumaresiliency.pdf>.

If possible, get the contact info of at least one other person who your friend will be with on the streets. If your friend gets separated from their crew and is in crisis, you can help reconnect them.

Gather information that would be useful to your friend in a moment of crisis. In some cities, people have assembled resources listing businesses, churches, etc. that have opened their doors to protesters to get water, use the bathroom, etc., or, in cities under curfew, organized safe spaces to go or rides to get people home. Make sure you know their operating times, locations, and/or contact info, and that this information is up to date. If you have *trusted* friends or comrades in neighborhoods where protests are taking place, consider asking if they would be willing to open their homes in the event of an emergency. Make sure that this information is on hand when you need it.

If you haven't already, download Signal. Make sure your phone is fully charged and set on ring, and that you are available to take calls until your friend makes it home safely.

During the action

If your friend calls you for help, first find out if they are physically safe at this moment.

Are you safe?

If not, what do you need to know to get to a safe place?

Are you in crisis/panicking?

If they are not safe:

Are you lost? If so, where do you need to go? (safe place, home, hospital, etc.)

Are you with people you know and trust? If not, should I contact them with your whereabouts?

Does anyone else need to be contacted and what should I tell them?

Prioritize helping your friend get to safety before extending the conversation to other things, if possible.

If they are in crisis but safe:

Are you aware of your surroundings?

Do you need to process what you're feeling?

Do you need anyone to be contacted with your whereabouts and/or any needs?

Here you can introduce grounding/mindfulness techniques described below (or others that you know), and help process, validate, contextualize, etc. These techniques and questions can be used in any order that you feel would be most effective. Ideally you will have already had a conversation with your friend prior to the action in which you discussed what has worked for your friend in the past and which techniques they would prefer you use.

Techniques:

Describe your environment in detail using all your senses. What colors can you see? Where can you see them? What can you hear? What does it sound like? Is there anything that you can smell or taste? Can you touch something and describe what it feels like? What color is it? What's the texture? Is it warm or cold?

Say a coping statement: for example, “I can handle this, this feeling will pass”, “I’ve survived this”, “I’m safe now” (IF they’re actually safe).

Remember a safe place and focus on everything about that place including the colors, sounds, objects, and textures. Picture the people you care about and the things you’re looking forward to. (Have your friend describe their safe place to you.)

Rhythmic Breathing: Breathe in for four counts and out for six counts. Do this over the course of several minutes. (You can do this breathing exercise with your friend.)

Questions to ask:

Name the emotion: What is it that you’re feeling? What happens in your body when you’re having this emotion? (Try to get them to notice bodily sensations.)

What are your thoughts? Are these thoughts helpful/unhelpful towards reaching your goals? Are these thoughts supported by evidence?

Did you ever have this emotion before? How did you cope/ how were you able to handle it? How long did overwhelming emotions last for?

What are the things that you have control over? What are the things that you don’t?

Remember what your values/what you believe in are and how your actions are in line with your values/beliefs.

As the support person, use reflection (I understand that...I hear you saying that...) to make sure you've heard what your friend is saying correctly. Validate.

After the action

Your support role does not end once your friend makes it home safe for the night. The effects of trauma are not always immediately apparent, so you should continue to check in with your friend about their feelings and needs. Consider what else you can do to continue to support your friend while they are out on the streets. Can you grocery shop for them or coordinate to have food and/or a care package delivered? Can you cook them dinner? Can you visit with them or go on a socially distant walk together? Can you help them access mental or physical health care?

For more information, see our zine *Mutual Aid, Trauma, and Resiliency*:

<https://janeaddamscollective.files.wordpress.com/2018/08/mutualaidtraumaresiliency.pdf>.

As always, all we have is each other. **We keep us safe.**