

# **EXTINCTION REBELLION**

## **ACTION WELLBEING HANDBOOK**



**VERSION OCTOBER 2019**

# 1. WELCOME

## 1.1. WHO IS THIS HANDBOOK FOR?

Anyone who is interested in regenerative support at actions organised by XR Groups across the UK. You might already be part of an Affinity Group, a Local Group, or be able to give us a hand during specific actions – anyone is welcome and any level of help is massively appreciated!

The seed of this **ACTION WELLBEING HANDBOOK** was planted and grew out of our experience during April Rebellion and many smaller rebellions. It's been fed and watered by learning from debriefs all over the UK and is a guide for us all to make actions safer and more regenerative. As we are learning, we are still growing and developing the handbook. Please email any questions or comments to [action.xrregen@protonmail.com](mailto:action.xrregen@protonmail.com)

## 1.2. THE PRINCIPLES AND VALUES OF XR

### 1. WE HAVE A SHARED VISION OF CHANGE

Creating a world that is fit for generations to come.

<https://rebellion.earth/who-we-are/#vision>

### 2. WE SET OUR MISSION ON WHAT IS NECESSARY

Mobilising 3.5% of the population to achieve system change – using ideas such as “Momentum-driven organising” to achieve this.

### 3. WE NEED A REGENERATIVE CULTURE

Creating a culture which is healthy, resilient and adaptable.

### 4. WE OPENLY CHALLENGE OURSELVES AND THIS TOXIC SYSTEM

Leaving our comfort zones to take action for change.

### 5. WE VALUE REFLECTING AND LEARNING

Following a cycle of action, reflection, learning, and planning for more action. Learning from other movements and contexts as well as our own experiences.

### 6. WE WELCOME EVERYONE AND EVERY PART OF EVERYONE

Working actively to create safer and more accessible spaces.

### 7. WE ACTIVELY MITIGATE FOR POWER

Breaking down hierarchies of power to ensure more equitable participation.

### 8. WE AVOID BLAMING AND SHAMING

We live in a toxic system, but no one individual is to blame.

### 9. WE ARE A NON-VIOLENT NETWORK

Using non-violent strategy and tactics as the most effective way to bring about change.

### 10. WE ARE BASED ON AUTONOMY AND DECENTRALISATION

We collectively create the structures we need to challenge power. Anyone who follows these core principles and values can take action in the name of/under the banner of Extinction Rebellion.

### 1.3. ACTION WELLBEING IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY

In whichever role you choose to support our rebels, you are so important! A rebellion needs rebels (it's in the name), but the rebels need you as much as water and air. Your presence at an action makes all the difference. Thank you!

There is a whole section later on how to avoid burn-out  
**Here are some basic tips to support you  
to continue to thrive for yourself and the rebellion!**

**BOUNDARIES** Get to know your limits and establish firm boundaries. Stick to them.

**CONSENT** Practice radical consent – slow down your “yes” and be confident in your “no”.

**PASSION** Follow your passion and only do tasks/actions/things that bring you joy.

**GRIEF** Give yourself time to feel – grief opens pathways of love, and melts the parts of you that are frozen.

**CELEBRATE** Dance! Dance some more!

**DEPTH** Deepen your analysis of systems of oppression as fuel to continue in the struggle.

**CONNECTION** You're not alone in this. Reach out when things are hard.

**ALERTNESS** Pay attention to signs of burnout, such as feeling overwhelmed or people telling you they're worried about you. A sign of burnout is denial of being burnt out!

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## 3. WHAT IS REGENERATIVE CULTURE?

'Regenerative Culture' is number 3 in our list of *Values*:

### WE NEED A REGENERATIVE CULTURE CREATING A CULTURE WHICH IS HEALTHY, RESILIENT AND ADAPTABLE.

Regenerative culture is essential to and present in every bit of *Extinction Rebellion* and on every level.

We have several strategies that help us put Regenerative Culture into practice, including:

- encouraging the **buddy** system within and beyond affinity groups
- **check-ins** and thoughtful meeting practices designed to allow meetings to go well and support our whole selves
- **emotional debrief** after actions

Because we're experimenting, we also allow for imperfection and mistakes, giving space to unfamiliar ideas, even if we think they might fail. Failure indicates daring – trying to push beyond our limits into spaces that appear to be impossible. We all get stressed and are all volunteers with lives outside of **EXTINCTION REBELLION**. Holding this framework in mind, it's important to practice empathy, think and feel into other people's shoes, recognise there are multiple competing pressures on all of us.

It's also important for the community to be seen to have a legitimate process to make decisions, and as with complex networks that have lots of interlocking/interconnected parts, it can take time to go through a process with legitimacy. Therefore, we encourage **patience** for other people and groups.

NVDA + the living support of our Regenerative Culture =  
*"The most fun and meaningful thing we could do with our lives.  
Changing ourselves and our togetherness, as we change the bigger picture.  
Join us as we figure this out – our great adventure".*

The rest of this document signposts some tools and practices for ways to look after yourself, each other, and to embody a Regenerative Culture, and we encourage you to read this in your own time and as needed.

### 3.1. PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

We all have our own tools and resources to help support us in these different areas of our lives. Part of taking care of ourselves is reflecting on our capacity and pre-existing physical, emotional, mental, economic and social situation as we enter the rebellion. To do this we need to take **Personal Responsibility** and continuously 'track'/monitor ourselves. We need to be aware of our tendencies in regards to:

- **How much work we take on within EXTINCTION REBELLION.** XR is built on autonomy and holacracy (self organisation and de-centralisation) so we get to choose our level of involvement.
- **The feelings, judgements, desires and expectations we bring with us.** How do we project these onto our fellow rebels?
- **The effect of societal conditioning on us.** For example, the school system can instil in us the idea that there is always someone else in charge of our autonomy (we may carry negative associations around people in authority roles) - we need to own this, not be ashamed of it and not be dictated to by it.
- **Our privilege.** Getting to choose to engage in direct action/organising for system change is a privilege in itself. What other privilege do we have dependant on our gender, where we come from, our class, the different colours and shades of our skin? As people who live in a nation that has accumulated wealth and resource through violence and oppression, how do we grieve this, sit with this and continue to bring awareness into our lives and actions?
- **Get to know your 'edges'.** Where do you struggle? Where are you afraid? This self-reflection allows you to make an informed decision on how/when to challenge yourself.
- **Get confident in your NOs and slow down your YESs.** It can be easy to get swept up in the moment. Take your time, say you'll think about it. No rush! You'll be more sustainable if you are realistic about what you can take on.
- **Don't be ashamed if you do take on too much.** Instead, let someone else know you anticipated being able to do more, and give the task back to the group or get someone else to do it.

## 3.2. NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION

In order to feedback in the most worthwhile way some aspects of **Non-Violent Communication** (NVC) can be useful:

- Expressing how **'I'** am without criticism or judgement.
- Receiving feedback empathically, without jumping to being defensive.
- Expressing observations rather than evaluations - what do you think you are hearing the other person say/do vs. what you think that person's actions says about them.
- Owning how you feel in relation to your observations and the stories that are activated in your head when you experience them.
- Stating your own needs/values without asking something of others to make you feel better.
- **Clearly** requesting specific, concrete actions that would enrich your life, without make this a demand.

**For example** "When I hear ..., I feel ..., because I need/value ..., would you be willing to...?"  
We can use these tools to model collaborative communication to people in our network.

### 3.3. WHAT IS BURN-OUT AND HOW TO AVOID IT

Burn-out can be caused by:

- Taking on a lot of projects at one time,
- Being in a constant state of high-anxiety/stress,
- Loss of external control and experiencing/witnessing traumatic events.

After a prolonged period of a heightened state of stress, the body literally starts to work differently, changing your body's hormone systems. Burn-out is a natural response to all of the above. It can result in a range of symptoms such as exhaustion/fatigue, depression, insomnia, headaches, gastrointestinal problems (especially ulcers), frequent colds/flu, weight loss or gain, shortness of breath, hypertension, high cholesterol, coronary disease, impaired speech. More info at [www.emptycagesdesign.org/overcoming-burnout-part-5-the-biology-of-burnout](http://www.emptycagesdesign.org/overcoming-burnout-part-5-the-biology-of-burnout)

#### **BURN-OUT IS YOUR BODY TELLING YOU THAT YOU NEED TO SUPPORT YOURSELF, GET HELP WHERE NEEDED OR TAKE A BREAK.**

Burn-out doesn't always occur straight after an incident or period of high-stress, sometimes it is a delayed response and will only be felt months later. This is why it is so important to have a sustainable, reliable, supportive culture in place.

Burn-out can occur for people who take on or support direct action, including both organising and engaging directly, because we often take on a lot or find ourselves in high energy or anxiety provoking situations, and of course we take this stuff on because we really care.

Anyone who engages in Non-Violent-Direct-Action with **EXTINCTION REBELLION** or independently, needs to think about the following elements:

#### **Self-care** How we take care of our own needs and personal recovery from this toxic system.

- **Also known as:** The inner work
- **It's important because:** We are not machines. We need to look after ourselves in order to better look after each other and achieve what we want to achieve. Also, keeping the population subdued through stress, loneliness, sickness and anxiety is a feature of late-stage capitalism.
- **Resources might include:** knowing our own limits/capacity, nature connection/being outdoors, hobbies/creativity/passions etc. In a time of stress: practicing breath awareness/control, taking your attention to external experiences in the moment, noticing what can you see/hear/smell/touch, and replacing bad/scary stories/narratives with positive affirmations.

#### **Action care** How we take care of each other whilst we undertake direct actions and civil disobedience together.

- **Also known as:** The things we do which prepare us for, train us for and help us recover from taking direct action, including trauma and resilience work.

- **It's important because:** Our bodies, minds and hearts are in a hostile situation, with institutions that want to target, manipulate and control us. Being able to care for our own needs helps us take care of each other and be more resilient.
- **Resources might include:** Snacks, rain gear and warm clothing, physical first aid, somatic first aid, welfare teams, check ins and check outs, groundings and HUGS!

**Interpersonal care** How we take care of the relationships we have, being mindful of how we affect each other, taking charge of our side of relationships.

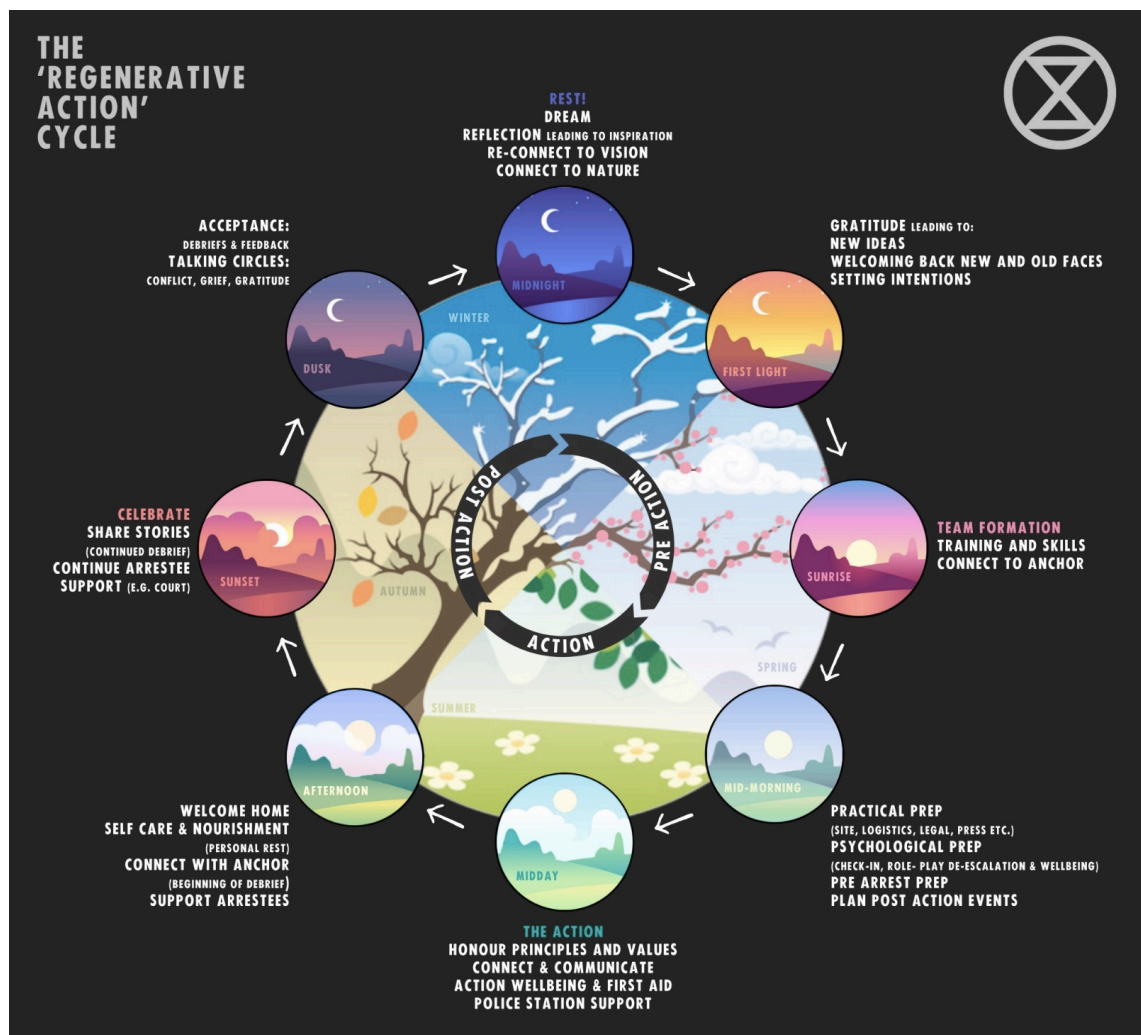
- **Also known as:** This is the "intersectional work", the decolonisation of the self, how we communicate, etc.
- **It's important because:** We are all the product of our environment. We all internalise the violence inherent in our cultures. We have a duty to do the work that can undo those internalised prejudices and behaviours, so we can learn to interact in a healthier way.
- **Resources might include:** Non-violent communication, compassion, decolonisation (thinking about race dynamics in groups) training, resources for dealing with grief....

**Community care** How we take care of our development as a network and community, strengthening our connections and adherence to these principles and values.

**People and Planet care** How we look after our wider communities and the earth that sustains us.



### 3.4. THE REGENERATIVE ACTION CYCLE



When we plan an action, the focus tends to be on the... well, ACTION. The Regenerative Action Cycle (RAC) helps illustrate that every action is embedded in so much more, and that every stage leading up to it as well as afterwards is just as important for us to arrive prepared, leave invigorated and restore our energies afterwards.

Whether you like to think of the RAC as seasons, the time of the day or any other natural or cultural cycle that works for you, it's important to remember that we can't always be active, we need to process and rest as well.

Especially when preparing an action, take a moment and think about the other stages:

- With which motivations and intentions are you arriving?
- Who are the people around you and planning the action with you?
- Are you well prepared for the action? Have you thought through what might happen?
- Have you planned for when you come home how you would like to be welcomed?
- Who will facilitate the debrief?
- When will you dance, celebrate and share stories?
- When will you rest? What do you need for grounding and rooting yourself again?

And then let the cycle begin again, as often as we need to, with love, rage and inner strength.

## 4. THE ROLES OF ACTION WELLBEING

### 4.1. ACTION SUPPORT ROLES

Action Wellbeing is only one of the Action Support Roles. Listed below are other roles that as an Action Wellbeing person (especially if you are coordinating Action Wellbeing for a larger action) it will be helpful to know about.

**Action Coordinator** (NOT the same as an 'organiser' in legal terms) — An excellent communicator, verbally and electronically. Making sure everyone is in the loop and giving the action go-ahead in the moment. Need to think on their feet and be strategically responsive. Advised to not risk arrest and have a back-up co-ordinator. Could have one co-ordinator's phone that is passed on if switching roles. On the ground it is useful to have 3 people in this role, to make quick decisions via consensus together, or individually if the need arises. Ahead of time it is important to have one person bottom-lining/as final decision maker for the project.

**Police Liaison** — Ready to speak to police before/during actions.

**Logistics** — person to lead on gathering equipment required AND taking it away again

**Stewards** — help guide people where to go and speak to the public/ hand out flyers.

**Legal Observers** — Wear ORANGE high-vis. On the ground at an action. Legal observers are trained volunteers who support the legal rights of activists. **Legal observers are independent from the protest and do not participate.** They monitor arrests, collect witnesses and help connect arrestees with support at the police station.

**Media team** — live-streaming, taking footage to edit, interviewing etc.

**Spokesperson** — ready to speak to any press, well-versed on the narrative of your action and core values and Demands of XR

**De-escalation** — person who has good skills at calming a situation, e.g. speaking to a rowdy member of the public or speaking to a crowd to calm an undesired atmosphere

**Anchor** — is a point of stability during the tumult of an action and offers check-ins as needed by rebels on the ground. They might be someone who can't come to the action or wants to support from a distance, thus conserving their energies especially for pre- and post-action support.

**Arrestee Support** — Willing to go and wait at police stations to welcome brave rebels back to the free world: making sure they can get transport home, that they are ok, giving them massive love. Preferably go in pairs. This could involve waiting long through the night so needs designated shifts. This role requires good communication with the back office about where arrestees have gone. AS people must be sober.

The last three are Regenerative Culture roles. In Affinity Groups these roles may be held by the same people as the ones doing Action Wellbeing.

## 4.2. ACTION WELLBEING ROLES

### Between Individuals

- We advise everyone involved in an action to have a **Personal Anchor**. This is someone who isn't at the action and is able to support you remotely especially with check-ins before, during and after an action as needed. Anchors are there to ground rebels and help them re-connect when they return home, especially after an arrest. Anchors are less likely to be swept up by the tumult of an action and can provide a kind, outside perspective that helps rebels to integrate their experiences with their lives and the world around them.
- We think it's important for everyone to have a **Buddy** to help feel connected and supported at an action. This means simply pairing up with someone at the action.

### Within Affinity Groups

- The **Action Wellbeing Advocate** in affinity groups is there to specifically look out for the 8-12 people in their affinity group.
- An **Action Wellbeing Anchor** is someone who reserves their energy (possibly away from the action) in order to support post-action wellbeing such as welcoming home, debrief, talking circles for the whole group.

### Action-Wide

- At actions with more than one or two affinity groups, we try to have additional **Action Wellbeing Supporters** (in blue sashes or blue hi-vis vests) and **First Aiders** (in green first aid vests).
- **Action Wellbeing Coordinators** help in the preparation of an action, for example by creating a rota of Action Wellbeing Supporters and First Aiders, organise training and kits. During the action, they help with hand-overs between shifts. After actions, they organise debriefs for the Wellbeing Supporters and Advocates so we can learn from each other's experience (more about Coordination in Section 4.4).
- At large actions, they will have a **Wellbeing hub** as a calm, quiet space for first aid.

## 4.3. ACTION WELLBEING BASICS

### Action Wellbeing (WB) Supporters (Blue sashes)

The main role of WBs is to provide **physical support** as per needed during the action (e.g. blanket if it's cold, tarps and brolleys if it rains, biscuits if people have a post adrenaline sugar crash); **emotional support** during action, including de-escalation when needed (using NVC techniques) and during arrest (e.g. walk with the arrestee to the van, remind them they are doing something great, wooh conscientious protectors are amazing!) They also **look out for vulnerable people and their wellbeing**.

- It is **NOT the WBs role to take emotional strain from others**, they support people in looking after their own mental health.
- WBs need to be proactive, energetic, compassionate and keep an eye on the situation.

## First Aiders (FA) Green Vests

- First aiders are less involved in the action than WB. First aid station(s) near main action in a safe area, with at 1 FA always at the station (on shift). Other FAs are visible around action.
- **FA qualification** – preferably no longer than 2 years since training; people who have done basic training are to 'buddy up' with more experienced FAs.

## Setting up a Wellbeing Point

- Once you arrive on site and the action has started, find a spot that is close enough to have an eye on the action but a bit separate and safe to set up a wellbeing point. One FA person and one WB person should always be there so people know where to find help if needed.
- People tend to use the point to drop their bags there. Remind them that it is their responsibility and that you cannot guarantee that there will always be someone to look after their stuff (after all, you're there for the people not the things). However, if possible, one person should always be at the Wellbeing Point.
- If you haven't had the chance before, familiarise yourself with the contents of the wellbeing kits and backpacks so you know where things are when you need them.

## Walking around in buddy pairs

- Those not at the Wellbeing Point can walk around at the Action site, getting familiar with the vibe, the people, seeing whether there are any vulnerable people or people who will need some assistance now or later (e.g., warm drinks, blankets, sun screen).
- Have chats with people. Ask them how they are. Why they are here. Chat about their creative placards if they brought any. Most importantly: show off your beautiful blue sashes – seeing your friendly wellbeing faces early on can help set the tone for a peaceful, loving atmosphere at an action.

### In case of...

- Minor injuries: call over a first aider
- Serious injuries: call an ambulance
- Someone feeling overwhelmed/seems distressed: take aside to sit down, offer water/reassurance/to call a friend/family if needed
- Someone feeling unwell and needing to leave the action: ensure they have assistance/company- either a friend or trusted wellbeing person, do NOT send them off with someone unknown, or on their own.
- Someone taking direct action intoxicated or behaving in a way that doesn't adhere to XR's principles and values/the action consensus eg: Being verbally or physically violent: let the person know that we are a strictly non violent movement with a set of principles & values guiding our work and that they either have to stop or leave.
- Being kettled by the police - call the coordinators for advice.

## During arrests

- Cheering and thanking arrestees when they are taken off to the police van or if they are alone accompanying them to the van and being the last smiling and supportive face they see before they are taken away.

## 4.4. ACTION WELLBEING TASKS

The main tasks of Action Wellbeing during an action are detailed below.

### Providing physical support

For example, blanket and hand warmers if it's cold (or people are glued on), tarps and brollies if it rains; water and sun cream on a hot day; biscuits for post adrenaline sugar crash. Helping someone manoeuvre if they have been stuck in an uncomfortable position for a long time, or finding a cushion or bit of cardboard to pad their seat whilst glued or locked on to something.

### Providing emotional support

This may include de-escalation when needed, a listening ear, company to someone glued or locked onto something, or encouraging people to sleep/rest if they seem sleep deprived/burnt out. You might want to support someone by giving them a hug or a shoulder rub. Make sure you ask for CONSENT. Don't assume that they want to be touched. And check in with yourself first, this might not be something you feel comfortable with and that's fine too.

*Pay attention to*

- People who appear to be alone
- People from marginalised communities
- Vulnerable people including children

### Checking-in with arrestables

Before and during an action, check-in with people and see if they are planning to be arrested. If they are, then explore the following with them - **explain that this is not to deter them**, but it is to make sure they are fully prepared to maintain their wellbeing through the criminal justice system:

- **Reasons & Motivations.** "*How did you decide that you want to be arrestable?*"
- **Anxiety/Fears/Concerns/Boundaries**  
"*Do you have any fears or concerns about being arrested?*"  
"*Do you have any concern that any of your traits/qualities may impact your experience at an action or during arrest (e.g. ethnicity, class, disability, sexual orientation)?*"
- **Impact**  
"*What impact do you think this will have on you and your family/friends? What do you think is the worst case scenario?*"
- **Support & Preparation**
- "*How have you prepared yourself for today?*" e.g., attended NVDA, know your rights, informed family) but also
- "*What is your support network like?*" e.g. part of an affinity group, police station support, has an anchor at home, has a buddy with them at the action.
- **Embedded**

“How does today, including any arrests, court appearances etc. link in with the rest of your life, your plans, your values?” - linking back to the motivation at the beginning. Help the rebel to return to a positive place after what could be difficult questions.

## Providing emotional support and safeguarding during arrest

Walk with the arrestee to the van, remind them they are doing something great, Woo! Love to the conscientious protectors! It's really important that they have a smiling friendly face as the last thing of the action they see before sitting by themselves for 12 hours.

Observe

- Are the handcuffs too tight?
- Are people's arms or legs getting twisted?
- Are the police minding for injuries, vulnerabilities?

If something is hurting the person you are supporting, **vocalise it calmly and clearly.**

The police have body cams and speaking to them makes the police pull back. **It is really important to remain very calm in this situation** even if you are friends with the arrestee. Remain centred, yelling at a police officer helps no one.

### Wellbeing Rights in police custody for arrestees during arrest

- Up to 3 Blankets
- Access to a book, notepad, tampons, food, tea
- Right to have the lights off

They won't necessarily be offered these things; they may have to ask!

## Help find Legal Observers (they wear orange vests)

This may be if someone is getting arrested or the police are getting violent/overstepping their remit. If no Legal observers can be found:

- Ask what police station the arrestee is being taken to
- Note down the arresting officer's name and identifying number (found on the pips on their jackets).
- Note down the physical appearance of the arrestee so we can try and figure out who they are. They may not want to give their name so do not ask it.
- Then you or one of the arrestee's buddies to call the back office and pass on the information

## It is NOT the Wellbeing Supporter's role to take on the emotional strain of others.

They support people in looking after their own mental health. If you feel like you are the only person that someone can talk to, your support has gone too far. Your role is to help them identify their own support networks: friends, family, affinity groups, buddy, anchor.

You should always have someone who can help you/somewhere to refer a situation to if it is more than you can deal with. You can refer them to the Trained Emotional Support Network for further support post action (see also Section 6, Support, in this Handbook).

## 4.5. ACTION WELLBEING COORDINATION

Beyond the Affinity Group level, Action Wellbeing Coordination includes some more planning before and after an action. Here are some tasks that should be thought about. In larger groups these may be separate roles within the Action Wellbeing Coordination Team.

**Training** — organising training in Action Wellbeing and/or organise training for FAs (first aid and mental health first aid). Includes setting up a list of trainers to call on.

**Finance and Kit** — Keeping an eye on the budget sheet and inventory, restocking as necessary and encouraging people to return kits after actions.

**Local Connects** — Getting and staying in touch with affinity and other local groups and their Action Wellbeing / Regenerative Culture advocates. Helps with the information flow (docs, videos and guidelines) to local groups, trainings that happen in their areas and feedback from local groups (e.g., communicate the number of rebels involved, trainings still needed and collating debriefs to learn from).

**Communication Advocate** — Keeps an eye on emails and other communication channels. Writes email blasts and facebook posts, connects with integration. Keeps an eye on basecamp flow.

**Debrief Facilitator** — Organise and facilitate action debriefs, at larger actions the daily debriefs.

**Rebel Sanctuary** — A stationary hub running workshops, share circles and facilitated sessions for anyone involved.

**Action Wellbeing Coordinator** — Has an overview of the above and takes on those roles if needed or finds someone to do so. Holds the team together and connects with other working groups as needed, e.g. with the Actions and Logistics team for daily briefs. Puts together rotas of Action Wellbeing Supporters and First Aiders for specific actions. Potentially co-ordinating with the Rebel Sanctuary.

### Numbers...

- It is advisable to have a **minimum of 1 WB per 100 people**, that's one buddy pair per 200 – depending on action (swarming will need more, as groups splinter off. similar issue if there are multiple entrances/roads being blocked or there is a likelihood of kettling).
- It is advisable to have at least **1 FA per 500 people** (or more if a high proportion of vulnerable people will turn out or action involves higher risks).

# 5. HELPFUL SKILLS AND OTHER WELLBEING MAGIC

## 5.1. CHECK-INS AND ACTIVE LISTENING

We want to develop resilience and wellbeing through introspection and deepening our support networks (for arrestables and non-arrestables).

This section contains information on

- Emotional check-ins
- Pre-action check-in
- Check-ins with people considering being arrestables

### Emotional Check-ins

Check-ins allow us to more fully connect with one another. Allowing our buddies, affinity group members, and fellow rebels to see each other, letting them in on how we feel and where we are allows them to hold and support us better when needed. We therefore try and practice emotional check-ins. That is, we share what we feel, what moves us, what makes us grateful, happy or full of grief. Emotional check-ins can help make us more resilient in ourselves and within the groups we connect with.

Some key elements to resilience are

- Connecting to your values and motivations
- Connecting to those you trust and love
- Connecting to a wider movement
- The ability to recognise, observe and explore our emotions
- Prior imagining preparation for future outcomes/uncertainty
- Self awareness of your own common degenerative/destructive habits/behaviours
- Prior exploration of support structures to hold you during and after action

Emotional check-ins can be more or less daunting when someone is new to it because they are not something we are used to do. As the Wellbeing Advocate, you can gently encourage someone by saying what they are like and why we do them or — even better, modelling a good check-in, connecting with yourself and sharing what you feel.

You could meet up one to one, or meet up with a larger group. In groups it may be a good idea to start in pairs and after doing the pair work you can move to the larger group and share some of the insights you gained.

### Stating an intention for your listening and speaking

Our dominant culture has cultivated many unhealthy and often oppressive forms of communication that lead to us blocking or skimming around the surface of our emotions. So before plunging in to the conversation take a few minutes together to breathe deeply and share with each other the particular qualities you wish to bring to your communication.

Here are some basic tips. If you are asking the questions/listening:



- Use **Active Listening** - avoid fixing, self referential or blocking language
- Get **comfortable with silence** before feeling the need to respond. Deep breathing before and after you've spoken can be useful
- Use a talking stick - and stick to it! A talking stick helps allow full expression without unsolicited interruptions
- Feel free to **ask the same question a few times** if you think your partner can go deeper. For example, ask "What fears or concerns do you have for this coming action/the future?" Let your partner respond, then after a healthy pause, invite them to close their eyes take a few deep breaths and then ask the same question again to see if there is anything else emerging.
- Have an allotted amount of time and state the purpose of the session
  - Purpose - is it an equal exploratory process? Or mainly geared towards supporting one individual? Is it to do with preparing for a particular action or event?
  - Time - evenly split? Agreement on time checks, 30 mins each? Or swapping every few questions?

## Pre-Action Check-In

Sometime before any action it might be beneficial to check in with an Action Wellbeing person in your AG, your Buddy or Anchor and connect to yourself and to each other, creating a safe space to **explore your motivations, expectations, thoughts, hopes, doubts and fears**.

**This is particularly important if someone is making the decision to be arrestable and we strongly advise that anyone planning to be arrested explores those questions.**

Doing such an activity before an action has many benefits:

- Allows you to get to a space of emotional safety and connection more quickly
- Anticipates challenging experiences so that you aren't surprised by them and more able to deal with them with wisdom
- Connecting you to your deeper values and reasons why you are doing an action gives us more resilience when things don't go as we planned
- Makes it easier to check-in with each other during an action - to identify our current state, needs and address them
- Explore your boundaries for engaging in an action

Checking-in with an anchor or buddy works best the more time you invest in **deepening your check-ins**. It is useful to spend time outside of rebellion connecting and exploring important issues for wellbeing and resilience so that it is easier to recall them during times of heightened stress.

## Example of a Pre-Action Check-In

### Initial grounding

- Do you have a way of grounding yourself (a way of getting yourself closer to a state of calmness)?
- Describe the process
- Then practice the process together!
- If you don't have a process here is a simple version that can start you off

*Sit or stand with your feet firmly planted and notice the contact of your feet with the floor or ground. Notice your breath. You may want to tell yourself that you are breathing in and out as a way to clear the mind of more complicated or perplexing thoughts. Feel how the earth or chair or whatever you are sitting or standing on is holding you. Get a sense of gravity keeping you connected to the earth. Move your toes. It can feel really good to have bare feet if you won't be cold, or inside your shoes will feel good too. You may want to close your eyes while you ground yourself. Notice your sensations. Notice your emotions. Notice without judging or trying to control. You may want to imagine yourself as a part of nature, that you are rooted and planted in this place at this time. Give yourself permission to just be, to not have to engage with anything other than your breath and the sense of being grounded and in contact with the earth. You can do this for yourself for a brief couple of minutes, or for longer as a meditative practice. You can do this on your own or with others as a kindly way to enter a group process.*

### **Check in**

- How are you feeling? What thoughts, emotions and physical sensations are you noticing at the moment?
- Is there anything you need in order to be more present?
- How often do you think you should check in with each other before, during and after an action?

### **Values & Motivations**

- Why are you doing this action?
- What led you to get involved in XR?
- How is this current action connected to your values and the change you want to see in the world?
- What experiences have you had that has led you to want to carry out an action with XR?
- What experiences have you had that have helped you connect with this ecological crisis and moved you to act?

### **Regenerative Actions**

- What makes an action regenerative for you?
- What would a successful action look like for you?
- What would an unsuccessful action look like for you?
  - An unsuccessful action, especially one in which you feel you could have acted differently, can lead to emotional difficulty. What would help you be present with and not feel overwhelmed by these emotions? Is there anything you'd like to be reminded of? Any activity you could do?
- Have you arranged a post action debrief, talking circle or emotional check-in with you buddies, anchor and affinity group? Have you organised for someone to help facilitate this

### **Wellbeing**

- What does 'doing well' look and feel like for you?
- What does 'doing badly' look and feel like for you?
- Are there any danger signs that indicate you might be burnt out?
- What might be helpful for others to offer you if they recognise you are in a troubled state?
- What support might you call upon to help you? (people, ideas, practices)

- What sustains you? What drains you? (could be related to during an action or outside of an action depending on the context of the conversation)
- What could your buddy/anchor do to support you?
- What do you do to ground yourself?
- What do you do to connect to your deepest values?

### **Support Networks**

- What existing support networks do you have?
- Have you identified an anchor, affinity group, local group?
- Who knows you are attending the action?
- Who is going to welcome you home after the action?
- What do your friends and family think of your decision to be a rebel? Do they know you are carrying out this action?

### **Boundaries and Arrestability**

- Actions morph and change from the original plan. Police attitudes and responses to actions are also unpredictable. It is important to be clear with yourself what you are prepared to do and where your boundaries lie.
- Are you willing to be arrested for this cause?
- What specific action (with a specific intention and outcome) are you willing to be arrested for?
- Have you thought about the consequences of being arrested for this particular action? - e.g. the likely charges as well as the unlikely worst case scenario charges.
- How might this action evolve in to a situation that you no longer feel comfortable participating?
- How will you check in with each other to see if this is the case?

The impact of **conscious and unconscious bias/prejudice** on involvement with actions and arrest

- Our society, the police/criminal justice system and activist movements including Extinction Rebellion are full of conscious and unconscious prejudices and structural disadvantages to people with particular traits (e.g., sexual orientation, disability, gender, ethnicity, class, mental health condition).
- Do you have any worries that you have qualities that may lead to a different experience of an action or of arrest? Are there any particular scenarios that concern you?
- What are your boundaries in terms of engagement in actions that will allow you to feel safe?
- Is there anything you would like your affinity group/buddy to know about you that will allow you to feel better understood and connected? (e.g., personal pronouns, where your fears of systematic bias arise from, how you might behave if you are in need of support)
- Is there anything that others commonly do or say that makes you feel patronised or misunderstood?
- Is there anything you would like others to do at an action to support your involvement in a way that makes you feel safe? (e.g., regular check-ins, understanding of energy levels, understanding of limitations to involvement - e.g. when to leave a situation if heavier police presence, feeling comfortable expressing fears and asking for help.)

## Topics to explore if you are considering arrest

Part of XR's theory of change is to have large numbers of arrest to highlight the inadequacy of a system that seeks to incriminate those that are dedicating themselves to reduce the rate of loss of biodiversity and the amount of human suffering caused by this man-made climate catastrophe. **We thank all those willing to make this sacrifice.**

As a movement that encourages arrest it is also our collective responsibility to highlight the negative impacts of being arrested and support each other through it. Being arrested involves a whole host of uncertainties, you can never fully predict the legal consequences and the implications it will have on your personal and professional life.

**It is the arrestable person's responsibility to engage with the possible consequences of arrest and ensure they have the appropriate support structures in place to help them. As a supporter, you can help them work through some of these questions.** *Exploring the impact is not intended to deter anyone from being arrested - being aware allows us to make a more informed decision about being arrested, and we can start preparing in advance for the consequences.*

**Ensure that the arrestable person makes the decision free from coercion.** Help them sink deep in to their values and explore the consequences to make an informed decision. In the future, if they experience emotional difficulty, their connection with their values and the assurance that they did the right thing can be a source of resilience and wellbeing.

### Motivations

- Why have you decided to be arrested for this cause? How does that link to your motivations and values?
- Why do you believe being arrested will help address the problems you see in the world?
- Have you looked in to the specific scenarios that could lead to varying degrees of punishment by the Criminal Justice System and what you feel comfortable with?

### Fore sight/Fears, Concerns

- Do you have a trait that may disadvantage you on protest and in the criminal justice system (e.g. disability, ethnicity, gender) - any support you need for this?
- Have you considered the existence of institutional racism and prejudice that exists in the police force and society as well as the conscious and unconscious biases/prejudices that structurally disadvantage people with particular traits (including within XR)?
- Have you considered how arrestable you are? Vision some scenarios that are beyond your willingness to be arrested and others that fit within it.
- Actions morph and change from the original plan. Police attitudes and responses to actions are also unpredictable. It is important to be clear with yourself what you are prepared to do and where your boundaries lie. What specific actions are you willing to be arrested for? What are you not willing to be arrested for?

### Support

- What existing support networks do you have and are you well connected to them?
- Have you identified an anchor, affinity group, local group?
- What do your friends and family think of your decision?

- Have you told your family that you are planning to be arrested? It can be useful to let them know in advance so that they can prepare themselves and you don't have to worry as much about their reaction after you've been arrested.

#### Impact

- What are the likely consequences of your arrest, including charges, fines, time in court? What are the worst-case scenarios - how likely or unlikely are they?
- Have you thought about the impact your journey through the criminal justice system will have on your life? Including your career, relationships, finances.
- How will your arrest impact friends, family and dependants?

#### Preparation

- Have you read the XR legal briefing?
- Have you attended the NVDA training, the talk and an XR induction?
- Have you got a Bust card, know what the arrest process is like and when to state No Comment?
- Does your affinity group have an Arrestee Support Advocate? Have you connected with your local arrestee support team?  
For training and support contact [xr-arrestwelfare@protonmail.com](mailto:xr-arrestwelfare@protonmail.com)
- Have you arranged for someone to track your arrest and meet you at the police station afterwards?

## 5.2. SELF-SOOTHING TECHNIQUES

- Focus on your **breathing**, observing your breath, first without changing it and then very gradually lengthening your exhales. Try to only focus on breathing out, trusting that breathing in happens naturally as and when your body needs it.
- Bringing your attention to your feet and feeling **connected** to the immediate ground under your feet, and through it, to the soil, the earth, the planet. You are part of a whole and you are connected to it, through your body and through your feet at all times. You are on safe ground.
- Bringing attention to your **senses** - 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste.
- Broadening out your **vision** (Owl vision), looking as far around you as you can -- all the way up to the sky, all the way down to your feet. All the way to your left and all the way to your right. Our vision sometimes contracts when we are scared and we lose sight of what's important.
- Loosening your shoulders by pulling them up as hard as you can and then letting them fall down. Repeat a few times. Turn your head very slowly from one side to the middle, to the other side, to the middle again. Repeat a few times. We tend to tense around our neck and shoulders in times of stress, actively releasing this tension can help you relax.
- Shake out — Shaking is a normal response to tension in the body, shaking releases the tension and relaxes the muscles which has a direct affect on your nervous system. We love a quick shake out or dance break with a group mid action.

## 5.3. DE-ESCALATION TACTICS

### Taking the Initiative to Act

The most important thing is this: **If a challenging and potentially violent situation emerges please DO TAKE THE INITIATIVE promptly as this may prevent tensions escalating.**

- Get others around you to join in carrying out whichever tactic you are using – they just need to copy you / be in support of you. If you'd like lots of people to join in, establish silence (see below) and then explain clearly, calmly and briefly what you'd like to do and why.
- If someone from an NVC (nonviolent communication) or de-escalation team is immediately contactable, great. If not, most of these tactics are easy to initiate as a group and involve either no or minimal risk.
- However, some people may be more vulnerable or at more risk than others and everyone should already have reflected on which ways it is safe / wise for them to take the initiative. This isn't so straightforward. Some people, such as women or elders may be/feel more vulnerable, but less likely to be at risk in some situations. People of colour may be more likely to be at risk.
- If, for any reason, you don't feel able to take the initiative or think it may be risky for you then please do respect your own reasons, boundaries, or limits on your confidence.
- If you feel able to ask someone else to take the initiative then this is an alternative, and if that doesn't feel possible either, that's ok too. We all have different contributions to bring to the Rebellion and our diversity is our strength.

### One-to-One Situations

Ideally in one-to-one or small group situations get the help of the NVC or De-escalation Teams, or someone well practiced in conflict transformation and de-escalation.

#### BREATHE

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. **BreaTHE**. 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.

## Large Crowds

### Theatre, Fun, Music and Song

- These can all be used to entertain and change the energy.
- If the energy is getting too excitable, music and especially drumming can be used to first meet the energy of excitement and then gradually calm things down by slowing the beat until it is the same as a calm heart-beat.
- When tension is building, start up a calming song, and invite others to join in. Teach and then sing it slowly and calmly.
- If arrests are starting to happen, or if tension is rising for another reason, ask any musicians playing to slow things right down and play something calm, or with a slow heart-beat type rhythm. You might want to ask them to stop altogether, so the crowd can be together in song.

### Establishing Silence

In large crowd situations where the tension is rising, it can be really helpful to establish silence, because it can be calming in itself and because it will enable you then to initiate other tactics, with everyone aware and joining in.

Two methods:

1. One person falls quiet and raises their hand, whilst inviting the people around them to do the same. This works well if enough people are practiced.
2. Project without shouting and say 'Clap once if you can hear me' and then clap once. Say 'Clap twice if you can hear me' and then clap twice. Say 'Clap three times if you can hear me' and then clap 3 times. Each time, more people around you should be joining in, until everyone has clapped 3 times and then fallen silent, waiting for what's coming next.

You can then very briefly and calmly let people know what you'd like to do next and why (why nonviolence and de-escalation are important), invite people to join in with a song or use one of the tactics below.

### Sit Down and Invite Others to Sit Down Too

- This can have a very calming effect.
- Make sure there is plenty of space around the violence / conflict, especially a free route to withdraw.
- It can also be helpful to fall silent. .

### De-escalation Line

This is especially useful for conflict between lines of police or riot police and activists when tension is building too much.

1. Explain to the police that you will be asking activists to give them space and reduce tension.
2. Form a line of people between police and activists with one person facing toward police, one facing towards activists, alternating. Explain to the police that you will be asking activists to give them space and reduce tension.
3. Invite activists to take two steps backward to give the police some space and then sit down.
4. *Remind rebels that through this action rather than 'giving in', they have enhanced their nonviolent stance and strengthened the held space.*
5. Withdraw the line when all is well.

### **Mass Hummm and “Stop” Hand Gesture**

- Ideally, first get the crowd to be quiet.
- Everyone “hummmms” and assumes the “stop” hand gesture towards the aggressive action, arm outstretched. The hand gesture is palm facing towards the situation, fingers pointing upwards.
- Keep the “hummmmm” going.
- We are not shaming and blaming angry people. There’s a lot to be angry about, so we want to support the people in not venting their anger in unhelpful ways. Make sure that there is plenty of space for the people to withdraw from the crowd.

### **Group Chanting**

- Ideally, first get the crowd to be quiet.
- ‘Peace, Love, Respect’ is a sing-song chant that worked very well on Waterloo Garden Bridge in April 2019
- Lots of other possibilities here, or make up your own, keep it simple.

### **This next one is *only* appropriate to use when engaging with *aggressive* police and other people too**

- Then begin saying “We’re nonviolent. How about you?” *think about how you are delivering this. Does it sound gentle and suggestive or confrontational? (see below)*

### **Extreme Anger or Threatening Behaviour**

- If you can’t deal with it, get help elsewhere.
- This is a last resort to be used if someone is going to be hurt. The intention is not to inform on people or create difficulties in people’s lives. The intention is to keep people safe.

We believe engaging with and practicing nonviolence in its broadest, deepest sense can bring huge personal learning, growth and satisfaction. It’s also one of the best, most beautiful hopes we have for creating the world we want to live in.

## **5.4. DEBRIEFS**

Briefs and Debriefs are, in a sense, a deeper version of the check-in. It’s a reflec

### ***Learning and Improving***

It is important as the movement continues to grow that we learn from our achievements and our mistakes. A debrief after an action will afford us the opportunity to recognise our skills and weaknesses, to learn and develop ourselves both as individuals and part of a team, within the movement and our environments.

### ***Emotional Processing***

Although we are doing what we are doing for the right reasons, and often come away from actions full of excitement and joy and energy, they can be emotionally heightened and stressful spaces. It is very likely that people will have been running on adrenaline throughout or at specific moments in the action. During moments of stress our unconscious memory is more active. Debriefing can help process these memories and experiences. After periods of heightened adrenaline people may also have a physical or emotional dip which may leave you feeling unable to communicate, exhausted and experiencing negative thoughts. It is a



completely normal bodily response, but can feel destabilising and unpleasant in the moment. Having a space to share with people can help.

### ***In the long term***

Burn-out prevention can be supported before an action by preparing physically and mentally with guidelines and briefing sessions which allow you to feel ready and to think about what strategies can help you deal with stress in yourself and others. Good debriefing will create the space to process and reflect on that experience of stress.

### ***Getting Excited***

There is so much happening in actions that often you are not aware of all that is going on. Having a space to hear other people's stories from the day can be a total treat. It feels great to listen and be heard.

## **How To Facilitate A Brief / Debrief**

- The debrief is a space for people to listen and be heard; if there are specific discussions that need to happen between a few participants they can be asked to discuss in more detail after the debrief.
- The debrief should be held 1-3 days after the event if possible.
- There should be **2 facilitators for a maximum of 10 participants**. Group sizes any bigger will be hard to manage and may become unsafe to share in. It is important to have 2 in case a group needs to break away into smaller groups, or if an individual needs one to one debriefing. The facilitators need to feel supported too.
- The facilitator
  - holds a framework but does not lead. They should be starting from a place of curiosity, genuinely interested in hearing about people's experiences.
  - does not need to be an expert. If there is distress it is ok just to be with it, it is not their job to 'fix' it.
- If people are distressed beyond the bounds of the debrief, offer external options.
- It is the participants' responsibility to look after themselves.
- There should be a debrief for the facilitators.

## 6. SUPPORT BEYOND ACTION WELLBEING

It's important to remember that it is not the role of Action Wellbeing Supporters to take on someone else's emotional strain. Most of us are not trained therapists and even if we are, we need to respect our own boundaries.

If you encounter a rebel who needs support, these may be helpful resources:

### 6.1. TRAINED EMOTIONAL SUPPORT NETWORK

Many therapists, counsellors and co-counsellors are offering their support to XR through the Trained Emotional Support Network (TESN). To see if there is anyone near you who could help, send an email to [XR-Regen-TESN@protonmail.com](mailto:XR-Regen-TESN@protonmail.com).

### 6.2. CONFLICT TEAM

If there is conflict within your group that you cannot resolve yourself, the conflict team may be able to help. They can be reached on [conflict@rebellion.earth](mailto:conflict@rebellion.earth).

### 6.3. GRIEF WORKSHOPS

There are online events to talk through strong emotions due to climate crisis (grief, anxiety, anger etc). Contact the Climate Psychology Alliance ([www.climatepsychologyalliance.org](http://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org)), Sustaining All Life (<https://www.sustainingalllife.org/>) or search for a local meeting of the [Climate Cafe Movement](#) for further support.

### 6.4. LAND AND RESPITE

Reconnect with nature as a group or as an individual.  
For land based projects contact [xr-landandrespite@protonmail.com](mailto:xr-landandrespite@protonmail.com)