

STRATEGIES FOR AUTONOMOUS EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

When resisting various forces of domination, you may be met with repression taking many forms: (police) violence (or the threat of it), surveillance, criminalization, incarceration, among other things. We must be prepared for this. But also, when we are erecting our own occupations, or opening up gaps in the totality of state control, it is important to learn how to take care of one another in the everyday as we learn to combat internalized conflicts as well. This how we can avoid losing capacity or burning out; this is how we avoid losing people.

CHANGE OF ENVIRONMENT

If folks are panicking or experiencing anxiety, a good first step is to suggest a change of environment. If you're inside, suggest going outside. If you're outside, suggest going in. If this is not an option, offering to accompany the person on a short walk is a great idea.

"OWL EYES"

Often people, especially if they have a history of contact with violence, do not know how to vocalize their need for help, and tend to isolate themselves. A good part of doing emotional support (and perhaps being a caring comrade in general) is to be keeping an eye out for folks on the fringes, who look confused, who are getting really silent, and to reach out to them to check in on how they might be doing. Some of us like to call this keeping our 'owl eyes' out for one another.

ACTIVE LISTENING

Listen with your whole body. Pay attention to the physical and environmental cues that a person might be conveying. This can include many things like the relative position of the two of you (i.e. Is one person sitting and another standing?), facial expressions, tone of voice, or periods of silence. It is also important to decompress for yourself because this kind of empathetic listening can have a great affect on the listener.

ORIENTING

This is great to do in a case of increased immediate threat, or during an intense situation. This should take about fifteen seconds. Stop to notice your surroundings, move your eyes and neck around to scan the environment, taking note of 1 or 2 things that are visually striking to you. If you can't see anything beautiful, use your imagination. Focus on these things, returning to them over and over. This can help with grounding and creating space in your body, or de-escalating the immediate stress and confusion. Awareness of your surroundings settles the self, allowing your system to focus and move through whatever tension you might be holding in your body.

LARA method

This is a great de-escalation method you can use in the case that you are in a dispute with someone causing rage you don't want to act on. It stands for Listen, Affirm, Respond, Act. 1) Listen with an intent to understand. Listen for common underlying principles, cultural values, or emotions in what is said. Listen for the person's underlying needs. Observe body language and tone which may provide additional meaning. 2) Affirm some common aspect of what was said, or simply a feeling expressed (i.e. "you care strongly about x"). Affirming is not agreeing, but it is acknowledging what is shared. This can also be done by repeating or rephrasing 3) Respond to the issues that were raised and the underlying needs. Ask questions about what was said. 4) Add information to the conversation. After seeking to understand, seek to be understood.

HOLD SPACE

Immediately following traumatic situations, make calming warm environments for folks to rest in. Do not ask too many questions! People need to process and forcing them to use their analytics mind can further exacerbate the trauma.

"Do not retraumatize the victim"

Sometimes when we offer care to folks who have experienced violence or the loss of bodily autonomy, we might jump into touching their body in order to move a limb or asking direct questions about an experience. It is important to be mindful not to retraumatize the victim, and ask before you provide care. Avoid asking folks to explain a potentially traumatizing situation immediately after it has happened. This can leave folks feeling confused, or worse, attacked. Sometimes it might be useful to get documentation of an event close to when it happened, but as medics it is better to prioritize the wellbeing of the affected person over the 'evidence' or 'narrative'. There will be enough time for them to come forward with information if they choose to do so.

Reflect

Find some time after an action to talk about how things went. Make space for everyone who participated and wants to share to talk about their experience, what they think and feel about it. Not only people with injuries need support, but the supporters require help as well, and often need to be reminded of their needs and limitations.