

Six Steps for Nonviolent Direct Action

STEP ONE: INFORMATION GATHERING

Identify the issues in your community and/or school in need of positive change. To understand the issue, problem or injustice facing a person, community, or institution, you must increase your understanding of the problem. Your investigation should include all sides of the issue and may include formal research and listening to the experiences of others.

STEP TWO: EDUCATE OTHERS

It is essential to inform others, including your opposition, about your issue. In order to cause change, the people in the community must be aware of the issue and understand its impact. By educating others you will minimize misunderstanding and gain support and allies.

STEP THREE: PERSONAL COMMITMENT

Check and affirm your faith in the philosophy and methods of nonviolence. Causing change requires dedication and long hours of work. Meet with others regularly to stay focused on your goal. Prepare yourself to accept sacrifices, if necessary, in your work for justice.

STEP FOUR: NEGOTIATIONS

Using grace, humor and intelligence, confront the individuals whom need to participate in this change. Discuss a plan for addressing and resolving these injustices. Look for what is positive in every action and statement the opposition makes. Do not seek to humiliate the opponent but call forth the good in the opponent. Look for ways in which the opponent can become an ally.

STEP FIVE: DIRECT ACTION

These are actions taken to convince others to work with you in resolving the injustices. Direct action imposes a “creative tension” into the conflict. Direct action is most effective when it illustrates the injustice it seeks to correct. There are hundreds of direct action, including:

- Boycotts --- refusal to buy products
- Marches and rallies
- Letter-writing and petition campaigns
- Political action and voting
- Public art and performance

STEP SIX: RECONCILIATION

Nonviolence seeks friendship and understanding. Nonviolence does not seek to defeat the opponent. Nonviolence is directed against evil systems, oppressive policies, and unjust acts, not against persons.

Adapted from the essay, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”, Martin Luther King Jr.