

DISABLED PEOPLE'S PROTEST GUIDE

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Black people do not owe you the work to make protests accessible. at BLM protests and similar, you are guests and accomplices, keeping yourself safe and your Black comrades safe is **your** responsibility.

don't be heroes, because you are more likely to incur suffering against Black people than against yourself.

thank you to @holeymoley for making sure this got included. white Disabled people are equally complicit in the marginalisation of Black people, Disabled and nondisabled alike, and with every movement we make at protests we need to remember that and act accordingly to protect our Black siblings.

also, some of the action in this guide might incur injury. i haven't advised anything in here that i haven't done, but everyone's threshold is different, so do not do anything you are absolutely sure you can handle the fallout from.

behind the lines work

sometimes, being on the front lines isn't realistic - here are some things you can do behind the lines to help those out on the streets. if you're white, donate. there's a lot of other behind the line work that can be done! these are just a couple of examples

design

- create graphics, resources, infographics
- educating and agitating is as important as organising!

comms

- listen in to police scanners, keep in touch with designated comrades on the ground
- get familiar with signal and telegram
- figure out where to look to find info on counter-demos by white supremacist/neo-nazi groups in your area, warn comrades about them

things to set up before you protest

be honest with yourself about what you can do. think about the worst-case scenarios for this protest, some of which may be:

- stuck standing in a kettle for hours
- being arrested
- being attacked

come up with a 'protest crisis plan' for each of these situations:

- coping strategies to relieve emotional/physical distress or pain
- ways to get out of wherever you will be
- numbers to call of a trusted advocate/medical professional/friend
- long-term coping strategies for when you get home (planning for potential flare-ups, ensuring support is already in place before you go out)

understand the area you'll be in

- make sure you are familiar with the protest route or area
- don't protest in a new area - you need to understand how to get out and where is accessible if you need to

plan an escape route

things you should bring

- medication, medical supplies, info
- a buddy you know and trust. do not let each other out of your sight.

things you should not bring

- any prescription packets that have identifying information on them
- weapons, if in UK
- a phone without touch/face ID turned off

front line work

wheelchair users

a wheelchair is an advantage: use it barricades

- if you are a white disabled person protecting black people, barricade yourselves between them and the police. brakes on. use protest signs/plywood to create a barrier and protect your legs - I would also recommend shin guards, tbh

kettles/lines of cops

- if you are in a kettle or at a barrier of riot shielded police, and you've been directed by protest leaders that they want to break through, wheelchairs are useful. (white disabled people: only do this if you are asked to, Black disabled people, ensure you have support around you to do it)
 - it's best if someone else can do this - focus on a point where two riot shields are next to one another or overlap
 - ask someone you **trust** to shove you at it as hard as they can while you also push
 - do not try and get through the gap, let other protestors push through it until it widens or closes again. if it closes again, repeat from step one.
 - honestly, if your legs aren't properly protected - and even if they are - it can be painful
 - do not do this if you are liable to fractures
 - protect your legs (shin guards or preferably some kind of shield)
- another thing you can do is take advantage of your being lower to the ground
 - cops tip backwards if you grab the bottom of the riot shield and pull up because of how heavy their body armour is.
 - do that.

be aware of moving around and being caught

- as soon as the bloc moves, make sure you are figuring out the accessible routes out of wherever you are
- if the handles of your chair fold down, do it. make it impossible for cops to grab you
- make sure you are secured to your chair and cannot be tipped/dragged out. some ambulatory wheelchair users may not use safety belts: get one.
- if your wheelchair is particularly recognisable (an unusual colour, customisation) either make it as boring as possible (spray paint, duct tape) or at the very least tape over all brand names on it. this isn't cop-proof, and we know cops will send our pictures to the DWP in england. do as much as you can to protect yourself but understand the risk.

those who use mobility aids

ESPECIALLY for Black disabled people:

- crutches and canes are being wilfully misinterpreted as weapons to give cops an excuse to fire
- possible deterrent is bright paint/duct tape (duct tape is preferable as it can be removed after, and make it unidentifiable) over black/metal mobility aids
- but we know cops need no excuse to brutalise.
- shout loud and clear, or ask someone else to, that “this is your crutch/cane and you need it to walk” if an altercation with a cop looks likely. repeat yourself as often as you need
 - if someone is shouting this, don’t shout over them, let them communicate clearly
- white people, if you see a cop threaten a Black person for having a mobility aid, move between them and the cops and block them from any potential assault.
- white wheelchair users particularly, your chair can provide a greater deal of protection than people who walk - use that

those with sensory/processing disabilities

avoiding the biggest crowds is wise

- ear defenders are your friend but we knew that
- try to find a vantage point from which you can see where/how cops are moving and communicate to others
- act as a relay between comms people behind the lines, and the front lines
- stay in groups at potential entrances and exits from the site of the protest, to keep them clear for people to escape if needed and to prevent cops from barricading them
- Black people who need to be behind the frontlines between cops and protestors for any reason can stay a distance back and throw projectiles at barricades/military vehicles. this allows you to stay further out of the crowd. white people at these protests should not be doing this shit as it will incite more violence against the Black people you’re protesting with

visible and invisible impairments

Black visibly disabled people

- there needs to be a team around these folks at all times
- where white disability is seen as nonthreatening, Black disability is seen as weakness
- cops will try to target those they see as vulnerable
- if you're planning on being on the front lines, make sure you have people in proximity to you at all times who can watch your back, even more so than normal.

Black invisibly disabled people

- do not mark out that you have a disability
- cops may use that to target you and as an excuse to harm you in the name of an underlying condition
- do have your medical information with you somewhere, printed on a card or an alert bracelet is good
- make other protestors that you **know and trust** aware of your impairment/symptoms that might flare up, so they can protect you from cops and if you are injured they can speak to EMS.
- make those you know and trust aware of your protest crisis plan

white visibly disabled people

- cops will see you as less threatening. use that
- they are less likely to see you as a threat on the front lines, so you're more likely to be able to surprise them by breaking a barricade
- also less likely to attack you if you put yourself between them and a Black disabled person.

white invisibly disabled people:

- mark somewhere on your person by way of a prominent caduceus/medical alert symbol that you have a disability
- see above for why this helps
- do not hesitate to put yourself between a cop and a black disabled person.

those with respiratory illnesses

- wear a proper mask, with filters, or get out as quickly as you can if tear gas seems likely to be deployed

uk-specific

I don't want to comment on how things work in the US and get it wrong. DM me if you're from the US and can add to how detaining and arrest works for Disabled people there

warning: we know cops work with/will send our pictures to the DWP

detaining and arrest

- most police stations in the uk are inaccessible
- **don't give them an inch**
- ambulatory wheelchair users, do not let them make you walk.
- they have to put time and effort into getting you somewhere accessible to sign papers, time and effort they could be expending elsewhere. be an inconvenience.
- follow the advice on your bust card
- GBC has a protest advice line - write it down somewhere

sectioning under the mental health act

- cops have the power to detain you under s136 if they have reason to believe you have a mental illness and need 'care and control'
 - this power is abused
- they can detain you in a police station for up to 24 hours with a 12 hour extension if needed
- you have a right to see a mental health professional during this time

the mental capacity act

- police have the right to invoke the mental capacity act to "contain, control and restrain" people they believe to be lacking mental capacity
- clearly state you understand what is happening and that you have mental capacity

questions to ask if you are detained:

- ask:
 - if you are being detained
 - why you have been detained
 - under which power you are being detained
 - police have the right to detain you under s136 of the mental health act and under s18, but s18 is only meant to be used if they believe you have evaded care. also s5 of the mental capacity act
- for legal advice
- for an advocate (someone you trust, queercare, other orgs in your city that do this)
 - for the police to tell someone where you are
 - do not answer their questions

this guide is not exhaustive, and is built from my own experience as a white wheelchair user at protests, so some of these are more drawn from lived experience. I hope this helps. if this guide has helped you, donate to any one of the many bail funds in American cities with active BLM actions happening right now, or an anti-racist Black-run mutual aid/activist group in your area.

stay safe

if I have anything wrong or you have things you think should be added, DM me @gender_goblin

thank you to @hattyeru and @holeymoley for additions!