

Racial Justice Action Comfort Zone Worksheet

We want to enable more people to act boldly for Black, immigrant & Muslim lives, and shake off the narrative that only people of color have a stake in racial justice. The Black Lives Matter movement has asked us to step out of our comfort zones to take more risk in acting boldly and publicly against white supremacy.

To that end, every one of us has a comfort zone around acting for justice. For some of us, our comfort zone matches up with larger skill sets we have or roles we play. Some of us who enjoy writing letters to the editor, for instance, also have day jobs as academics. And some who tend to be the ones to plan annual celebrations for our groups, and take on tasks like preparing food for meetings, play similar roles at home. There's often something comforting about the roles we play and the tasks we sign up for.

We tend to take the kinds of actions that are in our comfort zone. With this worksheet, we want you and your spiritual community to become more familiar with its Action Comfort Zone. Here's a basic list of the kinds of actions we often take for racial justice... *mark any that your spiritual community has done:*

- Individual Education (internet, social media)
- In-Group Education (book studies, etc.)
- Public Education (speakers, outside audience)
- Recruitment/Base-building (soliciting participation, discussions)
- Coalition-Building (partnerships with other organizations)
- Financial Support (NAACP dinner, MLK breakfast, etc.)

For this worksheet, we're focusing on **direct actions** - using drama & our bodies to influence decision-makers, win new supporters to our side, create new narratives for reporters to broadcast and to shift public opinion.

Non-confrontational Actions:

- **Advocacy & Lobbying** - asking decision-makers to take our opinions into account
- **Holding a Press Conference**
- **Organizing Letter-Writing**

Confrontational Actions:

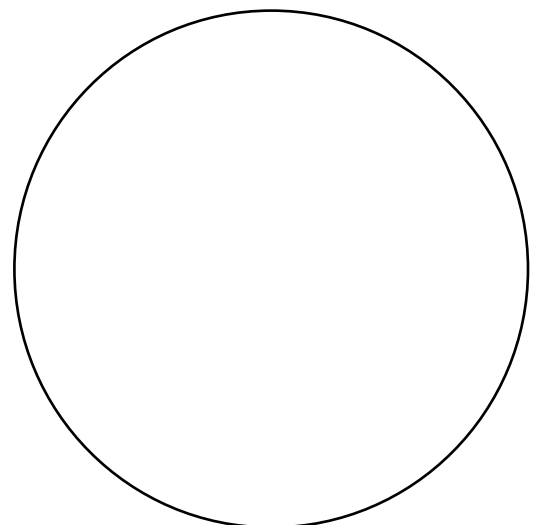
- **Symbolic Demonstrations** - actions that make our views visible, but don't break any rules
- **Disruptive Actions** - interrupt business-as-usual; take personal risks (like arrest)
- **Creating Alternatives to Oppressive Structures** – like creating our own community Police Review Boards

QUESTIONS:

- **Which kinds of action are inside your comfort zone?**
- **Which are a little "edgy" for you - on the edge?**
- **Which are outside your comfort zone right now?**
- **What do you notice about the ones on the outside?**
- **Which ones do you want to get more comfortable with? What support would you need?**

Write-in ways of taking action that are inside or outside your group's action comfort zone

Action Comfort Zone



NOTE: This worksheet was created by national leadership of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) and adapted for use with spiritual communities by the [SURJ Portland Interfaith Action Group](#).

“Why look at our Action Comfort Zone? And why so much emphasis on confrontational actions?”

It has something to do with a theory about how we’ll win more people to our side in the fight for racial justice - in effect, how we’ll shift public opinion, so that more people feel inspired to act. Even though people are supposed to be silent about white supremacy, we can count on some level of public support for being openly against racism (even if in some places, that support is relatively small).

If we were gardeners, that level of support would represent the area of land we’ve cultivated so far - potentially after years of preparing the soil and learning about gardening (and in this case, after “gardeners” of activists of color have shifted public opinion and public policy over many decades). But we want to grow our support outwards, harvesting more resistance as we grow.

Direct actions are the most effective way of preparing the soil to sow the seeds of that resistance.

Black Lives Matter activists started getting national attention as they began occupying highways, police departments and shopping malls. The students at Mizzou and other campuses used direct actions to the same effect - prompting university presidents across the country to scramble to create racial justice task forces, even though Black students had raised those same issues for years.

Why? Massive noncompliance by students culminating in confrontational direct actions: walkouts, occupations, unpermitted protests, the takeover of board meetings, athletic strikes, etc. In each case, although the media has not always told a sympathetic story of Black organizers, public opinion has shifted in their direction - more and more people express support in public opinion polls, donate to Black-led organizations, or have joined groups like SURJ.

Using our bodies to express our outrage and our commitment, while simultaneously telling the story of what we want, liberates bystanders from the narrative of powerlessness that is core to white supremacy. “There’s not much I can do about that.” Our actions tell a different story.

Direct actions help break up the soil - they prepare the people we want to reach, who are on the fence or passive supporters, for a new narrative: we’re living in a time of urgent crisis, and there are people showing up to take action. Of course, gardening doesn’t stop at breaking up the soil - we’ve got to mulch, water, tend to the ground; in other words, to organize, build our base, set ambitious but achievable goals, win new allies, persuade old allies to show up stronger... but we need boldness to break through the old narrative, and to let both our potential supporters and our opponents know there are people who believe we have a lot at stake in the fight for Black liberation, and who won’t be satisfied with going through the usual channels, in the words of Bernice Johnson Reagon, in ‘Ella’s Song’: “Until the killing of Black men, Black mothers’ sons/Is as important as the killing of White men, White mothers’ sons.”

This is a time in which Black Liberation activists are taking bolder actions and greater risks to win their demands, and many have asked us to show up in a more visible and bold way as well.

Of course, one-off actions, no matter how bold, are not enough to win racial justice, and we can’t always count on a national movement wave to amplify our actions - but before we can begin crafting campaigns, which are a series of actions over a short timeframe, we’ve got to understand our Action Comfort Zones, so we can begin preparing ourselves to have a wider range of motion for taking action.