

Non-violence and liberation

Change involves conflict, but there are alternatives to violence and fear. Here, we explore age-old traditions of non-violence as a form of disobedience and resistance and nonviolence as a way to upend systemic power. We acknowledge that the concept of non-violence is debated – not all activists and changemakers believe that non-violence is the only option – and that it is important to grapple with these debates.

Materials: videos or quotes from the videos:

- Interview with [Martin Luther King](#) about nonviolence
- Ted talk by [Minniejean Brown-Trickey](#) on nonviolence

Plenary: Invite participants to think about the meaning of ‘liberation’ in light of the last hundred years.

Many countries around the world, particularly in the Global South, gained their sovereignty and autonomy from occupations and colonial and imperialist power through liberation struggles involving civil wars and the armed overthrow of governments. Many governments currently in power may have betrayed the principles of the liberation struggle over time, but, for some people, this kind of violence has positive associations. Indeed, many of us are socialised to believe in violence as key to retribution or freedom. It’s important to begin this exploration of non-violence with an open conversation of how we see violence in relation to change.

Violence is a central feature of all of our histories. But it is not a given as a means for changing the way things are. Many of those who’ve made change before us recognised the need to disrupt the logic of violence that is so deeply embedded in all unequal forms of power – and also deeply internalised.

Change involves conflict – there’s no way around it. But there are alternatives to responding to violence and fear with more violence, including age-old traditions of non-violent disobedience and resistance.

Small groups: Take turns sharing what you know about the role and nature of violence in struggles for change and liberation in your context – including stories, beliefs, ideas, history, and your own experience.

- What beliefs or practices have been in favour of using violence to create change?
- What beliefs or practices have sought or created change without using violence?
- What are the fundamental differences between these two perspectives?

Create one or more drawings that represent these beliefs, ideas, and practices around violence and non-violence as ways of challenging, changing, or creating power.

Plenary: Post drawings around the room or virtual space. Allow time for everyone to look at them. Invite each group to explain what their drawings are about, and how they see violence and non-violence as ways of engaging with power. Document key ideas on a flipchart.

Present two critical ideas from older generations in quotes and/or full audio-visuals:

- Interview with [Martin Luther King](#) about nonviolence
- Ted talk by [Minniejean Brown-Trickey](#) on nonviolence

Invite discussion comparing these perspectives. Draw out implications for our own work:

- How do the ideas of these thinkers question and disrupt the logic of power and violence?
- How might these ideas be critical to resistance and liberation?
- What does this mean for how we see our struggles and how we organise?
- How do we have conversations with others about the limits of violence, given how important it has been in history?

Individually or in small groups: Invite people to go back to their ideas about reimagining the future. What gives you hope and energy in difficult times?. Ask:

- How might you refine your vision now?