



POLICE STATION SUPPORT GUIDE

Being arrested and held in police custody is unpleasant. People often appreciate being met by a friendly face when they are released. This is a guide to doing effective police station support.

The information you record outside the police station will help XR Arrest and Legal Support contact the arrestee for support, and can make the difference between a conviction and an acquittal.

This guide contains information about how to prepare for police station support; what to do at the police station; tips on liaising with lawyers and appropriate adults; what information to collect for follow-up support and a guide to some basic First Aid and acute mental health support.

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1. YOUR ROLE

Your presence outside the police station can have a dramatic impact on how the arrestee reflects upon their arrest and is an important action of solidarity to support protest as a whole.

Simply being outside a police station to meet someone released from custody is valuable and appreciated.

Your role as police station support is:

- To **greet** and **emotionally support** arrestees as they leave the police station
- To gather **contact details**, and where possible **information** about the arrest and release
- To offer something to **eat and drink**, and to help with **transport** and somewhere to **stay**
- To **liaise** with the XR Back Office, any appropriate adults and the staff of the police station to ensure that all those arrested receive the right support
- To **pass on information** about what to do next and what practical, legal and emotional support is available

Doing station support on your own is not a good idea - always try to work with other people unless unavoidable.

2. WHY YOU MIGHT END UP DOING POLICE STATION SUPPORT

You might have planned in advance to be doing station support for arrestees from a particular action or it may have come as a surprise.

Setting up a Station Support Crew in Advance

If you're planning an action it's a good idea to plan station support in advance, especially if you think arrests are likely (and remember that police behaviour is often unpredictable so it's best to be prepared just in case!)

- **Gather together** a group of people who are willing to do station support. This may be people who will be at the protest or other people sympathetic to the cause. If someone has access to a car this is even better, as arrestees could be taken to a police station that's far away from where they need to get back to.
- Ensure that people doing station support are not at risk of being **identified as suspects** while outside the police station
- Make sure everyone has **read this guide** and understands their role.

- Make sure to liaise with the **Police Station Support Coordinator (PSSC)** who can give you information about what time is most needed; details on joining PSS chats are below
- If you can, try to build up a few **station support kits** containing the items set out below. Aim to have one kit per police station
- Join the station specific group chats, a map of which you can find at tinyurl.com/pssmap , N.B you **MUST NOT** share the personal information of arrestees on these chats. This information will be communicated 1-on-1 via Signal or phone with the PSSC where necessary
- Have someone on the ground who's in communication with the PSSC and can be responsible for safekeeping the names of arrestees being held
- A few days after the action and the station support, you may find it useful to have a **debrief** or to call each other to check how you're all doing. Support is valuable and appreciated, but can also be draining, feel free to contact xr-legal@riseup.net if you want help with debriefs or would like to chat things through with someone

If You Witness an Arrest and Want to Support

- Try to **find out** where the arrestee is being taken by asking **Legal Observers**, or, if there are none around, the **arresting police officer**
- If it hasn't been already, make sure to report the arrest on arrestwatch.info or by calling the **XR Back Office** (07749 335574)
- You don't need to go to the police station as soon as you see an arrest - it usually takes a while for arrestees to be taken to the station and booked in. Use this time to gather some **other people** to support with you, especially if you're not sure if support is already organised
- If you want to head out to offer support, you should liaise with the **PSSC** first, so that they can be clear on who is at what station
- Make sure to join the right group chat for the station you're heading to, a map of which you can find at tinyurl.com/pssmap (Again, please **DO NOT** share personal info of arrestees in these chats)
- Share this guide with your fellow supporters, and make sure they're also added to the chat

If You Receive a Custody Call and Want to Support

You may receive a call from the police station from a friend or family member who's been arrested. In the call, make sure to find out what **station** they're at, and advise them to use a trusted protest solicitor.

- Try to ask them all of the questions on the guide from the informeddissent.info/custody-call site
- **Inform** the XR Back Office of the name/alias of the arrestee, what station they're at, and any other information you have about their arrest or, if you can't, fill out the info at arrestwatch.info . Let them know that you're heading to the police station.
- See if you can get some friends to do support with you, and take this guide, some food, and as many of the other items listed below as you can along with you
- Make sure to join the station specific group chat at tinyurl.com/pssmap

3. WHAT TO TAKE WITH YOU

It is usual for arrestees to have their belongings taken away by the police – phones, wallets, and sometimes clothes.

See if you can take with you:

- **This guide**
- A **mobile phone** and **charger** and lots of **credit**
- **Food and drink** - for yourself and for the arrestees once they are released
- Try to ensure that this meets dietary requirements of arrestees (vegan, halal, kosher, allergen-free etc.) and is high-energy
- Link to arrestwatch.info/pss to fill out as people are released
- [Arrestee Information Leaflets](http://Arrestee%20Information%20Leaflets) / tinyurl.com/info-leaflet-xr (one for every person who's been arrested)
- Some **money** to pay for taxi fares, food, hot drinks, and possibly accommodation for released arrestees (keep receipts, XR ALS can reimburse you!)
- **Pens/pencils** and a **notebook** - you may want to make extra notes
- Plain **travel cards** (if applicable) for arrestees to use after release
- **Warm clothing, foil blankets** and **raincoats** - you could be hanging around late at night
- A **pen torch** in case it gets dark
- A few bustcards
- Basic **first aid and health** supplies, if you have them such as plasters (see more in Appendix)
- **Phone numbers** for:
 - The XR Back Office **on 07749 335574**
 - The **solicitors** you know or think the arrestees will use (should be on the bustcard)
 - Any friends or family members who want to be kept in the loop

- o The **custody desk** for the police station you are at
- o A few local taxi numbers
- o Safer spaces, local B&Bs or other local accommodation wherever possible
- **Information** about local transport and accommodation
- **Entertainment**, such as a book and playing cards
- **Patience, empathy and listening skills**

Please don't bring:

- Anything **illegal**: bringing weapons or illegal drugs will make you vulnerable to arrest, preferably police station supporters should do so from outside custody!
- **Enemies** (sitting outside a police station with someone you strongly dislike is not conducive to a supportive atmosphere!)
- **Attitude** - being seen as confrontational or rude by the cops could condemn arrestees to longer in custody

You don't need to go to the police station right away after someone's been arrested - it usually takes a few hours for them to be taken to the station and be booked in, before being held, interviewed and released. It's a good idea to make sure you're ready and have everything, including people who can take over support during the night or later on, before heading to a station.

If you're not sure where an arrestee has been taken, ask a Legal Observer if they know and phone the **XR Back Office**, as they may have more information.

4. LIASING WITH THE PSS COORDINATOR

On a large action, the XR Back Office has many volunteers ready to take calls, alongside specialist volunteers who coordinate station support (PSSCs)

For this reason, please **check in** with the PSSC when you arrive at the police station, to give:

- The name and telephone number you are using
- Your location and how long you can stay for
- Details of any interactions that you've already had with the police station front desk or solicitors
- Whether you have all the information you need or if there is anything more that you need
- Information on any other local supporters who might be able to help out with accommodation, transport, food, etc.

Please also say:

- When someone is released, and if they filled out the form at arrestwatch.info/pss
- To check out when you are leaving the police station
- If you have any queries

5. WHAT TO DO AT THE POLICE STATION

You may feel perfectly able to walk into the police station and open a dialogue with the desk staff. Desk staff are human beings and will hopefully respond to you. If not, or if the station is closed, then you'll have to hang around outside and rely on the Back Office to keep you informed.

Be nice and the desk staff and police might be nice back – but do be prepared – sometimes it can be very difficult to get any information or any cooperation at all from the front desk. The police might even lie to you. Be tenacious but not pushy - the cops are likely to get pissed off at very frequent requests for information. Be confrontational and you may condemn your friends to several hours more detention (yes it does happen!) or even face arrest yourself.

If the police do cooperate, try to find out and make a note of anything you don't already know:

- How many people are they holding?
- Who they are holding?
- Are they OK?
- Are they being charged?
- What they are charged with?
- Any indication of a release time?

Some arrestees will choose not to give their name to police officers, so don't ask about individual people in custody unless you are sure of what name they are using. If you want to get information about a specific person, you can say something like, 'Is the young person with black hair and a white shirt who was arrested at a protest today OK?'

You can try to get 'treats' (eg. chocolate), newspapers, books or dry clothes to arrestees, but this is up to the police station staff, and tends to be rare. Be nice and don't show your annoyance if they refuse. If you know the arrestee personally, you might want to use this opportunity to make sure the police know about people's dietary and medical needs.

Ask the police to make sure that they release people into your care and not out of a side exit - but don't be shocked if they say they'll do that and then do the opposite. If you have enough people, see if you can have supporters monitoring different exits, or take regular trips to check side doors.

Be aware of your own boundaries and wellbeing and that of your buddy. See if you can work in shifts with other people, and take it in turns to have breaks, such as going for a walk.

7. LIAISING WITH APPROPRIATE ADULTS

If an arrestee is under 18 or a vulnerable adult, they or the cops will have called an appropriate adult just after the arrest or from inside the station. The appropriate adult will need to be present at the interview and the arrestee will be released into their care.

If the arrestee is under 18, their appropriate adult will often be their parent or legal guardian. They may be another over-18, such as a friend, other family member, or employee of the local Youth Offending Team. Some local authorities have appropriate adult schemes, especially for vulnerable adults.

Check if the Back Office has contact details for any appropriate adults and if they have any updates on, for example, when they are going to arrive. This can be useful information to relay to the desk staff, to pass on to the arrestee.

Some appropriate adults are experienced and understand their role well, whilst others may be confused, unsure and/or upset. Try to create good communication with appropriate adults if you can. As well as offering them food and conversation, you can tell them about your role and the 5 Key Messages, especially No Comment, No Duty Solicitor and No Caution. Let them know the importance of calling a good solicitor, who will provide advice for free at the police station, and recommend a solicitor from the bustcard for them to use. If the arrestee is 16 or under, let the appropriate adult know that they can refuse to let the young person's photograph and fingerprints be taken.

Give appropriate adults a bustcard and an [Arrestee Information Leaflet](#) / tinyurl.com/info-leaflet-xr, and encourage them to call the Back Office if they have any questions.

8. MEETING ARRESTEES ON THEIR RELEASE

For some people, police custody may have been fine, for others it might have been traumatic. You need to deal with whatever situation arises and provide appropriate support.

To many people, being arrested is a really big deal. They might be very excited or upset and want to talk about it. Bring your listening skills with you, and some nourishment!

Remember the the 7Fs for release from a police station:

- **Food** and drink, being conscious of dietary requirements
- **Friendly** and empathetic to the needs and emotions of the arrestee
- **First aid** and mental health support
- **Fill** out the online release form at arrestwatch.info/pss with as much information as they are happy to give - preferably at least contact details so that the XR Legal Support Team can offer ongoing support
- **Future** of the case - give them an Arrestee Information Leaflet and outline legal, practical and emotional support available
- **Finance:** ensuring that the arrestee has money for transport and knows where they are going to stay
- **Finish** by contacting the PSSC to let them know who has been released

See Appendix for information on First Aid and mental health support.

9. INFORMATION FOR ONGOING SUPPORT

Once the arrestee has taken a moment to enjoy their freedom, and perhaps over a cup of tea, it's important to ask them for information.

Use the arrestwatch.info/pss to record information. Contact details are most important, so that the XR Arrestee and Legal Support team can follow up to offer further support, and make sure arrestees have good legal support if needed. XR ALS not only assist defendants with their defence, but also offer advice on how to sue the police.

Arrestees should have a release form given to them by the police - this will have details on it to help answer questions about the conditions of their release.

It's ideal if the arrestee can fill out the online form there and then. If this is not possible or if they just want to get home, make it clear that they can fill it out at any time (details are on the post arrest leaflet) to receive information about follow up support.

Encourage people to write up a statement as to what happened at the time of their arrest, while it is still fresh in their mind, and to keep it safe.

Check they have a solicitor - ask who it is and encourage them to contact one from the Arrestee Support leaflet if they don't have one or if they took the duty solicitor.

If they don't want ongoing support, ask whether they are happy to give information about their arrest even if not giving their contact details or future court/bail dates - this will help us to understand police/CPS tactics and know who has been arrested and released.

It is also useful to make a brief note of their appearance: in many cases an arrest is called into the back office with a description of the person but not their name. Your description might help to tie together the reported arrest with the arrestee themselves.

In some cases you might like to install the arrestee into a corner of a nearby warm cafe while you wait for others to be released or while you arrange for them to get a lift home.

10. ONCE EVERYONE IS RELEASED OR WHEN YOU ARE LEAVING

Please check out with the PSSC when you're leaving, to check who is still in custody, if anyone. If you're switching shifts with more station support people, make sure to give them all the information you've got so far, and to pass this on to the Police Station Support Coordinator.

Sooner or later all arrestees are likely to be out of police custody. If arrests have taken place in the afternoon or evening this might be the following day (remember that people can be held for up to 24 hours without any additional authorisation).

Some arrestees might be held for longer 'on remand', in which case they will be held and put in front of a judge the morning of the next weekday.

11. APPENDIX: FIRST AID

Suggested First Aid Kit

This is a suggested First Aid kit list based on what we have found most useful for dealing with the types of injuries people commonly have after arrest and being held in custody. Don't worry if you don't have everything on this list - just take whatever you can. If you want to buy supplies in advance, [Medisave](#) often has First Aid kit at good prices.

- Disposable gloves
- Antibacterial hand sanitiser
- Hot and cold packs
- Wet wipes
- Blue plasters
- Coban
- Medical tape
- Ambulance dressing
- Aftersun
- Sugary sweets or glucose tablets

- Disposable razors
- Menstrual products

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Everyone deals with the experience of arrest and being held in custody in different ways. Some people might have found it okay, and others may have found it deeply traumatic. You can never predict what arrest may have been like for someone.

If you've been arrested yourself in the past, it's often not that helpful to talk about your arrest, as other people may have had a totally different experience. Instead of entering a situation with preconceived ideas about how another person might feel, try to be open-minded and non-judgemental, and ready to listen.

A helpful acronym to remember for mental health crisis support is RAISED.

- **Risk:** Consider and balance the risks to yourself, the arrestee and others associated with helping the arrestee and decide whether and how much to intervene.
- **Affect:** Consider the overriding emotion of the crisis (depression/suicidality, panic, perceiving a different reality etc.) and adjust accordingly.
 - If the person is **panicking**, reassure them of the safety and support systems they have and offer assistance to work through or minimise stressors if you can. Don't minimise the stressors, but assure the person that they're up to the task.
 - If they're **depressed or suicidal**, talk about future plans, reassure them that problems can be dealt with, and act as if it's assumed that they'll be around to take part in future activities. If you know the arrestee, it can be helpful to plan a low-key meet-up the day after or a few days after the arrest.
 - If they're **perceiving a different reality** to you, don't contradict their perception unless they ask you to or told you to do so in advance. Ask questions to help you understand what they're perceiving, such as 'That sounds pretty overwhelming, do you think you'd be able to explain how that's making you feel?'
 - If they're **nonverbal**, provide time and space, reduce possible stressors (including environment) and offer paper or a digital notebook to pass messages.
 - If they appear to be 'splitting' or having **sudden emotional swings**, respect that the person's emotions are real in the current moment and not 'fake feelings' or equivalent. However, try not to internalise behaviour or language about yourself or others if it is different to how the person usually behaves. Use neutral language, such as 'It looks like you're feeling really frustrated right now.'

- **In and out:** Try to find out when the person last took in food, water, medication and other substances and see if you can provide or limit any of the above. Often arrestees haven't had adequate food, which can exacerbate panic and feelings of disorientation.
- **Stressors:** Consider what factors in the person's life are making things worse, and consider a plan to remove or deal with these (quiet space, somewhere to stay overnight, follow up support).
- **Environment:** Consider environmental factors such as noise, temperature, dangers, triggers and people and see if these can be removed. This often means supporting arrestees to go somewhere safer, away from the police station, and potentially travelling with them to get there.
- **Diagnosis:** Last and least importantly, consider any (informal or otherwise) diagnoses that arrestees may have, and adjust accordingly.

BASIC FIRST AID

Major injuries will usually be handled by police medics and hospitals, but it's good to know some basic First Aid for minor injuries and damage.

Before doing any First Aid, make sure to put on **gloves**. Encourage arrestees who have been injured during arrest or in custody to make a record of the injury (eg. by taking pictures of the injuries and visiting a GP or walk-in clinic), as they may want to use this as evidence if they later bring a civil claim or complaint against the police.

- **Sprains and bruises:** Remember the acronym RICE - **R**est the injured area as much as possible, apply **I**ce (wrap a cold pack in some cloth and hold it against the spain/bruise), apply **C**ompression (such as with coban) and **E**levate the injured area.
- **Loss of feeling in thumbs:** Handcuffs commonly cause minor nerve damage, which can mean that arrestees feel a loss of sensation around their thumb, wrist and/or back of the hand and fingers. Reassure arrestees that this is common and usually clears up on its own, but encourage them to visit a GP or a walk-in clinic if it's still a problem after a few days.
- **Grazes:** First stop any bleeding by applying pressure to the wound using a clean and absorbent material. Then clean your hands, wash the wound using water (not antiseptic) and apply a sterile adhesive dressing, such as a plaster.
- **Someone is cold:** Warm them up slowly, especially if they got cold over a long or unknown period of time. Try to make sure they're wearing dry, warm clothes and encourage them to wrap themselves in a foil blanket. Place heat packs under their armpits and help them to move to somewhere warm and dry, if possible. Please don't give people who are very cold hot drinks - this will cause blood to rush to the stomach and can cause loss of consciousness.

- **Someone is hot:** Offer them sips of water and move to a cool, shady area. Place cold packs under their armpits. If someone is hot and stops sweating; has a throbbing headache; feels sick and is losing consciousness, these are signs of heatstroke - call 999.
- **Someone is losing consciousness:** If someone is rapidly moving from Disoriented to Irritable to Combative, this is a sign that they're losing consciousness - call 999.

QUESTIONS? CALL THE XR BACK OFFICE ON 07749 335574

This is an XR-adapted guide based on the 2020 version produced collaboratively by Green & Black Cross, Activist Court Aid Brigade and Queercare, which was based on the original version by the Activist's Legal Project. It is licensed under a [Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International \(CC BY-NC-SA 4.0\)](#) license (which means please share it!).