

10 ACTION IDEAS FOR BUILDING A POLICE-FREE FUTURE

*Imagine that you were asked to help create stability in a newly-founded city. How would you try to solve the problems that your friends and neighbors encountered? How would you respond to crisis and violence? Would your *first* choice be an unaccountable army with a history of oppression and violence patrolling your neighborhood around the clock? -- from **Enough is Enough: A 150-Year Performance Review of the Minneapolis Police Department***

What makes a community healthy and safe? This document doesn't have all the answers, but it acknowledges that for many of us, police are not part of the solution. Patterns of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and bullying are too common. When someone is having a mental health crisis, or when neighbors are concerned about a fellow neighbor, or when we feel unsafe-- are the police our only option? Of course, different communities have different needs. Vibrant, dynamic, and police-free communities aren't going to be created by outside groups-- they're going to bloom from the soil that already exists in those spaces. What we can share here, though, is what that process has looked like elsewhere. Here are a few tools, ideas, and strategies:



1. An easy one: STOP calling the police when it's clearly unnecessary.

We can't tell you to never call the police (though some do make that choice). We can challenge you, however, to reflect on that choice, to make sure that calling them isn't an automatic response to each and every moment of personal discomfort or uncertainty. Never forget: an inconvenience for one person, once police are involved, can become a death sentence for another person.



2. Get trained in first aid, crisis de-escalation, restorative justice, etc.

The more skills we have to share with our neighbors and family, the less we have to rely on unaccountable armed paramilitary forces! Find or organize local trainings, and share that knowledge.



3. Build community all the time, not just in times of trouble.

It isn't just about building capacity as individuals; it's about cultivating resilient communities. One of the first steps we can take toward communities that no longer need police is meeting one another. We can know our neighbor's names. We can hold potlucks, volunteer to help our neighbors with simple things like shoveling snow or carrying groceries, and build real relationships. That way, when crises happen, we have other resources to call upon besides the police.

As **Critical Resistance's Abolitionist Toolkit** puts it: *It can be as simple as asking a friend a basic question: "If I needed to, could I call you?" or telling someone "If you ever needed someone, you could call me." We know that this is nothing like a perfect solution. But we have to begin to try out what solutions might work, especially because know that calling the police doesn't.*



4. If you DO need police, go to them instead of calling them to you.

From the zine, "**12 Things to Do Instead of Calling the Cops:**" *If something of yours is stolen and you need to file a report for insurance or other purposes, consider going to the police station instead of bringing cops into your community. You may inadvertently be putting someone in your neighborhood at risk.*

5. With mental health crises, remember to center the person in crisis.

From the article “5 Ways to Help Someone in a Mental Health Emergency Without Calling the Police” (Tastrom): *Remember that the person having the mental health crisis is a person and their wishes should be followed as much as is safe. The best intervention strategies will be things that the person buys into and does voluntarily. Those of us with mental health issues have likely been traumatized by doctors and other practitioners not listening to us or doing things against our will. All of this is contextual and there are no absolutes, but think about trauma when you are considering what actions to take.*



6. Make a list of local services/hotlines you can call instead of the police.

From domestic abuse crisis centers, to shelters for people experiencing homelessness, to mental health support groups, to a range of other kinds of advocates and service-providers, find the people who can deal with the kinds of crises that police so often are not equipped to handle. Find out which ones involve the police as a matter of protocol, and which ones don't. Hang the list on your refrigerator. Keep those contacts in your phone. Make copies and give them to friends and neighbors. **Find some examples in the MPD150 Report at www.mpd150.com!**



7. Support organizations that really do keep our communities healthy.

On that note: where these services exist, support them, whether by volunteering, donating, or lobbying for funding from city/county/etc. government. Some great alternatives to the police already exist; they're just often extremely underfunded. Take this a step further: how might we strategically re-allocate resources from police to services that truly help people? Campaigns to divest from police while investing in communities may offer a path forward.



8. Zoom in and find solutions where you are.

Across the country, activists are finding ways to change the narrative and do this work. Teachers and parents are working on campaigns like Dignity in Schools' "Counselors Not Cops." LGBTQ groups are disinviting police to Pride parades. Formerly-incarcerated people are organizing networks of mentorship and even unarmed community mediation teams. Organizations like the Sex Workers Outreach Project are working to address stigma and criminalization. Churches are pledging to not call the police. From the decriminalization of drugs, to the dismantling of the school-to-prison pipeline, to abolishing ICE, and beyond-- every step gets us closer to a police-free future.



9. Engage in policy work that can prevent, rather than just punish, crime.

When we ask people “what keeps your community healthy and safe?” the answers we hear are often very similar: affordable housing, jobs, youth programs, opportunities to create and experience art, welcoming parks, etc. We can cultivate safer and healthier neighborhoods by getting involved in activist organizations, neighborhood groups, school boards, etc. that have the power to do this preventative work.



10. Dream bigger: there was a time before police, and there will be a time after.

Some of the solutions we need don't exist yet. There are some things we can do now, but this work is also about planting seeds. A vital first step toward a police-free future is simply being able to visualize what that future will look like. We must break out of the old mindset that police are this inevitable, irreplaceable part of society. They aren't. There are better ways for us to keep our communities healthy and safe, ways that do not include the violent, oppressive, unaccountable baggage of police forces. Check out the various sources mentioned here. Do more research, have more conversations, and help build the world in which you want to live.