Personal Emergency Planning

ACTIVIST CHECKLIST

Last updated on **January 28, 2026** Takes about **1 hour to start, 4 hours to finish**

This copy was made on November 6, 2026. We update our guides often as threats change and as better ways to protect yourself become available. For the latest version, visit **activistchecklist.org/emergency/**

This guide plans for the moments when you cannot think clearly: police or ICE at the door, getting detained at an action, threats from a right-wing group that learned your address, needing to leave home for the night. It walks you through emergency contacts, a primary safe person, home walkthroughs, evacuation planning, and pod-mapping for ongoing community support.

Purpose: "We Keep Us Safe!" includes having plans for our individual safety that we will hopefully never need to use. This comprehensive safety planning tool covers multiple scenarios and approaches to help you prepare for various types of risks you might face.

Background: As the authoritarian regime continues to consolidate its power in the US, we are seeing more criminalization of dissent[1]. Even though the likelihood may be low that any of us are arrested for our political work, it is wise to be prepared for arrests or threats at our home from the opposition.

Emergency scenarios this guide is designed to support:

- You are detained
- You are incapacitated or unreachable
- A government agent is at your door (ex: “just wanting to talk”, search warrant, arrest warrant)
- There is a risk of violent actors showing up to your home and you need to leave quickly
- Some other crisis occurs where you feel unsafe and need support

What this planning covers: This guide walks you through:

- Learning your rights and how to respond to state repression
- Crisis care support and building your personal support network
- Preparing your housemates for what to do if the police are at the door
- Identifying and preparing your emergency contacts
- Collecting important information that your emergency contacts might need if you’re unreachable
- Evacuation planning for quickly leaving your home
- Home safety assessment and improvements
- Building mutual support relationships with neighbors while assessing potential community risks

Adapt to your needs: This tool was created for a specific organization with a specific threat assessment. As you go through the tool, you'll see that sections are ordered in terms of priority (required vs recommended). Each of our lives, communities, and conditions are different. Many of us are facing risk and threats in multiple, overlapping ways. There is no one-size-fits-all plan, so choose what makes sense for your situation.

How to use this tool: You might work through the sections on your own, focusing on the items that are most relevant to your situation. Or you might prefer to pull together a team of friends and community members to work through the planning together and create mutual support systems. Many people find a hybrid approach works well, completing some sections independently and others with trusted people in their lives.

Remember: Security and safety are about progress, not perfection. You don't need to complete every section - focus on what feels most important and doable for your circumstances.

Short version (tl;dr)

If you don't have time to do this whole worksheet, answer these questions:

1. **Who's your one person?** If you got arrested tonight, who would you call? Do you have their number memorized?
2. **Do they have what they need?** Do they have: a list of who else to contact, your medical info, and a legal hotline number? Do they have what they need to care for your pets/kids/etc?
3. **Where would you go if you felt unsafe at home?** If you had to leave your home tonight because you felt unsafe, where would you stay? Does that person know?

Planning worksheet

You can use this planning worksheet template to store the information you share with trusted emergency contacts. If you want additional security, you can store it all on paper instead of digitally.

Copy the planning worksheet (Proton Docs)

Download the planning worksheet (Word Doc)

Section 1: Essentials

- [ ] **Update your emergency contact information with your place of work, organization, or community group**

If possible, pass along 1-2 emergency contacts to your comrades and/or workplace. We recommend these include your primary safe person, if possible (explained in Section 2). Your workplace and/or organizing group would contact these people in case they were to witness you being detained and needed to contact your support system.

- [ ] **Print our “Police at the Door” know your rights poster**

This poster helps remind you and your housemates what to do in an emergency, and it also helps inform people who visit your house about their rights.

HOW TO USE THE POSTER

1. Print our "Police at the Door" know your rights poster →[2]
2. Fill in emergency contacts for yourself and your housemates (more advice on this in Section 2)
3. Put it up next to your door

Read this booklet to learn how to respond to state repression

The Center for Constitutional Rights has a thorough booklet on best practices for responding to state repression[3]. It includes an explanation of tools that the state may use and tactics and rights for individuals to be aware of.

Establish household door-answering practices (if police are at the door)

DO: Practice movement solidarity by remaining silent.

DO NOT: open the door or talk to the cops

Create household protocols for handling unexpected visitors to prevent intrusion and keep everyone safer.

> ***Proposed basic door-answering practices***
>
> 1. **You don't have to open the door:** You can talk through the door or not answer at all
> 2. **If it's law enforcement or government agents:** Do not open the door unless they have a judicialwarrant. Ask to see the warrant through a window or have them slide it under the door
> 3. **If they claim to have a warrant:** Ask them to clearly state their name, agency, and the purpose of their visit before opening
> 4. **Never invite agents inside:** Even if you open the door, you can step outside and close the door behind you
> 5. **Always check who's at the door before opening:** Use a peephole, window, or doorbell camera if available

HOW TO ESTABLISH DOOR-ANSWERING PRACTICES

1. Share the "If An Agent Knocks"[3] resource from Center for Constitutional Rights with others in your household
2. Establish household rules about verifying identity before opening door. See template above.
3. Share door-answering protocols with all household members and discuss (see discussion agenda below)
4. Rehearse what you may say to unexpected visitors (deliveries you didn't order, etc.)

Script for talking to household members unfamiliar with this context:

"I want to talk with you about how we handle unexpected visitors at our door, especially if they're law enforcement or government agents. The work I do sometimes involves challenging powerful systems, and there's a possibility that could lead to unwanted attention from authorities.

This doesn't mean anything bad is going to happen, but I want us to be prepared just in case. Think of it like having a fire escape plan - we hope we never need it, but it's smart to know what to do ahead of time.

The most important things to remember are:

- We don't have to open the door for anyone unless they have a warrant
- We don't have to answer questions from police or other agents
- We can always say 'I don't want to talk without a lawyer present'
- If someone claims to be from a company or service we didn't call, we should ask for documentation

I'm not asking you to become an activist or get involved in my work - I just want to make sure we're all safe and know our rights. Does this make sense? Do you have any questions about why this might be important?"

(Optional) Read Catalyst Project's Troublemaker's Guide

Whereas the CCR guide is largely directed at individuals, the Catalyst Project Troublemaker's Guide[4] provides an organizational understanding of state repression.

Notably, the Catalyst Project is an anti-racist organization. They explicitly make a case for how historically, predominantly white and white-led organizations and groups have been the weakest link when it comes to state repression. If this applies to your context, take what is helpful and leave what may not apply.

Section 2: Personal Safety Planning

This section will help you prepare your emergency contacts with the information they need to support you if you are detained or unreachable in an emergency.

Gather your emergency contacts

Having all these contacts in one organized place saves precious time during an emergency. Below, you will be prompted to share these contacts with your "primary safe person" and other key comrades.

Who will use this list:

- **You:** If you're able to make calls and just need to activate support during a crisis
- **Your "primary safe person"** (described more in the next item): This person will activate support if you're incapacitated
- **Your housemates:** Some of these numbers should be on the "Police at the Door" know your rights poster[2].

HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Who to potentially include:

- **Organization leaders** - this could be your workplace and/or group(s) that you organize with; think about people who could mobilize others in your support and/or have access to movement legal support systems
- **Close friends** - People who care about you and would want to know if you're in trouble
- **Community contacts** - People in organizing communities who might provide specific support
- **(Chosen) Family members** - Parents, siblings, cousins, partners, children
- **Practical support people** - Someone who could care for pets, water plants, handle immediate logistics

What Information to Include for each person:

- Full name and relationship to you
- Primary phone number
- Signal username (if they have Signal)
- Alternative contact method if available (work phone, email, etc.)
- What kind of support they could provide ("can provide legal advice," "has spare key," "good emotional support," "could care for my cat")

Where to store this information:

1. Save it to your phone contacts list (if it is not already there)
2. Save it in a sharable online document so your other emergency contacts can get access to it (we recommend Proton Docs[5]; see our guide to using Proton safely[6]).
3. Write it down on paper and store in a safe place as backup.

Prioritization: We recommend you prioritize this list of contacts as you see fit, both for you and for anyone who will need to activate the list in the case of an emergency.

- Who are the people that should be contacted immediately in the case that you are visited by state agents? In the case that you are detained?
- Are there certain people that you would only want contacted in XYZ case? E.g. only if you are detained for longer than 6 hours.

Identify and prepare your primary safe person

A **"primary safe person"** will hold emergency information for you and be your main contact if you're detained, threatened, or need help thinking through a crisis situation. Choose one person you trust most to help you during a crisis.

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR PRIMARY SAFE PERSON

Who to pick:

- This could be family, a close friend, partner, or mentor - whoever you feel most confident would answer their phone and show up for you when things get scary.
- Look for someone who stays calm under pressure and can keep information private.
- Consider their availability - do they often have their phone off? Can they commit to letting you know when they'll be out of service?
- If you have many people to choose from, pick the most reliable and available one.
- If your support network is small, choose whoever you trust most - having someone is always better than having no one.
- Also consider identifying a secondary backup person in case your primary safe person isn't reachable. This person will hold emergency information for you and be your main contact if you're detained, threatened, or need help thinking through a crisis situation.

How to prepare them:

1. Choose your primary safe person
2. Schedule a conversation with your primary person
3. (If possible) Ask primary person to download Signal messenger app
4. Store and pass along all emergency contacts

> **Sample Script:** I want to talk to you about something important. (As you know,) the political work I do challenges systems of oppression, and because of this, our people sometimes face targeting from government agencies or other hostile groups. This isn't something that happens often, but we want to be prepared and keep everyone safe. I'm asking if you'd be willing to be my primary emergency contact - someone I could reach out to if I ever find myself in a crisis situation. This might mean I'm being approached by government agents, or that I need to leave my home quickly due to threats. If you're willing to do this, I'd need you to:
>
> - Keep this conversation and any information I share with you completely private
> - Never talk to any government agents or police about me or my work without talking to me first
> - Download an app called Signal so we can communicate securely about sensitive topics - and we should only discuss these matters on Signal or in person, never over regular text or email
> - Hold onto some emergency contact information for me
> - I'd also ask you to let me know if you're going to be out of town so I can think about having a back-up person available I hope I never need to use this support, but having someone I trust who's prepared would give me a lot of peace of mind. Do you feel comfortable taking this on? Do you have any questions about what I'm asking?

A note on communicating via Signal: We recommend you and your primary safe person communicate over Signal when possible. In the event of arrest, you will of course contact them via a phone call. However, if a change needs to be made to your safety plan, you are visited by state agents, or you are under threat by members of the opposition, you should immediately alert your primary safe person, ideally over Signal. *Make sure to turn on disappearing messages for your conversations (1 week recommended) and ask that they have notifications enabled so they'll see your messages immediately. Follow our Signal Security Checklist[7] to use it securely.*

Complete comprehensive Safety Planning Worksheet

Follow the steps below to create a comprehensive reference document that serves as your "emergency handbook" — everything your primary safe person would need to help you if you're detained, threatened, or in crisis.

> **Personal Information Concerns:** There are a number of prompts in this worksheet that ask about personal, sensitive information. We encourage you to use discretion in what you feel comfortable sharing with your primary safe person, as well as gathering in one place. Feel free to not include certain information, only share verbally, or split the information between multiple people.

HOW TO COMPLETE THE SAFETY PLANNING WORKSHEET

1. **Document:** You may find it helpful to use this Safety Planning Worksheet Template[8] to organize your responses in one place. You can write down your information on paper or use an end-to-end encrypted platform Proton Docs[5] (see our guide to using Proton safely[6]).
2. **List all emergency contacts** (see Section 2)
3. **Document location of important papers**
   - Driver's license, state ID, passport
   - Birth certificate, Social Security card, Immigration documents (green card, visa, naturalization papers)
   - Health insurance cards and important medical records
   - Marriage certificate, divorce papers, custody documents
   - Will, power of attorney, medical directives
4. **Other documents/information to consider including:**
   - Auto, renters/homeowners, life insurance papers
   - Bank account information and financial documents
   - Lease agreement or mortgage papers
   - Work contracts, professional licenses
   - Utility account information
5. **Other information to consider includes:** Be specific about locations. Include any access codes or keys needed.
   - Where you keep emergency cash and backup debit/credit cards
   - Extra medications and medical supplies
   - Spare keys (house, car, work)
   - Important supplies for dependents (pet food, baby items, etc.).
6. **Medical needs:** Note current medications, medical needs, and doctor contact info. These may be relevant if you're detained or hospitalized.
7. **Include local legal resources contact information:** Research and document contact information for local legal resources that could provide assistance if you're detained, questioned, or need legal support. Consider including organizations relevant to your specific situation and identity. This gives your safe person immediate access to legal help when time is critical.
   - Local National Lawyers Guild (NLG) chapter[9]
   - Immigration legal hotlines and lawyers (if relevant)
   - LGBTQ+/trans legal clinics (if relevant)
   - General crisis legal aid organizations
   - Bail funds or rapid response legal groups
   - Know Your Rights hotlines
   - Any personal lawyers you have relationships with
8. **Share:** Provide primary person with your completed Safety Planning Worksheet

☐ Designate someone who can access your residence and important items

Ensure at least one trusted person has access to your residence and knows where to find essential items in case you cannot access them yourself during an emergency. This may or may not be your primary safe person, depending on if they live near you or not.

HOW TO PREPARE SOMEONE FOR ACCESS TO YOUR RESIDENCE

1. Identify someone to access your residence and find essential items in case of an emergency
2. Give a key to trusted person or arrange key access
3. Show them location of important documents
4. Show them location of emergency money/resources
5. Show them location of medications and medical supplies

Section 3: Home Safety

Home safety is relevant if the opposition discovers where you live and threatens to show up.

☐ Complete a comprehensive home safety walkthrough and take notes

Walk through your home and surrounding area to identify security strengths and vulnerabilities. Take notes on what you observe - you'll use these notes to prioritize improvements in the next section. Consider doing this with a trusted household member or friend for a second perspective. If you're a renter, focus on changes you can make without landlord approval and note any building-level security issues you might want to discuss with your landlord or advocate for with other tenants.

HOW TO DO A HOME SAFETY WALKTHROUGH

1. Start a place to take notes
2. Walk around exterior of home and note entry points (doors, windows, balconies)
3. Test security of doors and windows - check locks and assess how easily they could be forced
4. Evaluate lighting around home exterior, hallways, and entrances
5. Note items outside that could help intruders (ladders, furniture, tools)
6. Assess building-level security (call boxes, multiple doors, building culture)
7. Check what's visible through windows from outside
8. Document current security measures already in place (locks, gates, fences, cameras, etc)

☐ Implement the top 3-5 home security improvements from your assessment

Review your notes from the home assessment and choose the most important and doable improvements for your situation. Focus on changes that feel like the best use of your resources.

HOW TO

1. Review assessment notes and prioritize most important improvements
2. Set a timeline for implementing chosen improvements. Ask for support/accountability from your housemates and/or primary safe person.
3. Track completion of your chosen priority items

☐ Full implementation of home safety measures (as time allows)

It may take a while to complete all these items, so we separated it from the item above.

HOW TO COMPLETE THE HOME SAFETY MEASURES

1. **Get a first aid kit:** Keep a basic first aid kit in a location everyone in your household knows about and can access quickly during emergencies.
2. **Remove items that could assist intruders:** Based on your assessment notes, secure or move anything outside that someone could use to climb up to windows or doors.
3. **Strengthen door and window security**
4. **Improve lighting:** Add lighting in areas you identified as poorly lit during your walkthrough to deter intruders and help you see potential threats.
5. **Get a shredder:** Shred sensitive/personal documents before you recycle them
6. **Set a strong router password:** Update your WiFi router password to a random-but-memorable passphrase[10] to make your network more secure from intruders.
7. **Get a fireproof safe** for important documents.
8. **Consider security cameras or alarm system:** Research privacy-focused security options like Eufy cameras that don't automatically connect to law enforcement.
9. **(If applicable) Work with landlord on building security improvements:** If you rent and identify building-level security issues, talk to your landlord about needed improvements. Connect with other tenants if helpful for collective advocacy.

☐ (Optional) Get other personal safety items (pepper spray, keychain alarm)

Personal safety items like this can be stored at your home, or kept on your keychain if you'd like them with you wherever you go.

HOW TO GET PERSONAL SAFETY ITEMS

1. Consider getting a personal keychain alarm. Check out Birdie[11].
2. Consider getting pepper spray. Check out POM[12]. (Double-check local/state laws. All states allow you to carry it, but some have limits on the concentration.)

Develop situational awareness practices when entering/leaving home

Build habits that help you notice unusual activity, unfamiliar people, or potential threats around your home. Trust your instincts if something feels off.

HOW TO DEVELOP SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Practicing situational awareness in everyday life can help you prepare for higher-risk situations:

1. Practice scanning area before exiting home
2. Look around when returning home before approaching door
3. Notice and remember what's normal for your neighborhood
4. Trust your instincts and change plans if something feels wrong. (Call an emergency contact. Knock on a neighbor's door. Do what feels safer.)

If you want a deeper dive, check out this Situational Awareness 101[13] training from 18 Million Rising and Nonviolent Peaceforce.

Identify neighbors and housemates who might be a risk

Honestly evaluate the people in your immediate environment to identify who might provide mutual support versus who might pose potential risks to your security.

HOW TO

1. Consider **household members**' different security needs and willingness to follow protocols
2. Identify **neighbors and community members** who might be potential security risks
3. Develop **strategies** for managing potentially problematic relationships (some ideas below)

Think through specific approaches for safely navigating relationships with people you've identified as potentially hostile or risky. The goal is to minimize conflict and exposure while not letting fear completely dictate your choices. Different situations call for different strategies — some people need firm boundaries, others need careful avoidance, and some might actually be manageable through strategic engagement.

Strategies for different types of difficult relationships

For hostile neighbors or community members:

- Maintain polite but minimal contact - don't engage in political discussions or respond to baiting comments
- Avoid sharing details about your work, travel plans, or personal life
- Consider having witnesses present for necessary interactions

For housemates who won't follow security protocols:

- Have clear, direct conversations about specific safety needs and consequences
- Focus on behaviors that directly impact your security rather than trying to change their overall attitudes
- Develop backup plans that don't rely on their cooperation
- Consider whether the living situation is sustainable long-term

General safety strategies:

- Never confront someone directly about their problematic views unless you're in a safe, supported environment

- “Gray rock method” - be polite but boring, give minimal responses that don't invite further engagement
- Trust your instincts - if someone makes you uncomfortable, limit contact even if you can't explain why
- Build relationships with allies in shared spaces who can provide support or intervention if needed. We keep us safe.

Remember: You don't owe anyone your time, energy, or personal information, even if they live near you or share community spaces. Your safety comes first, and it's okay to be strategic about how you navigate difficult relationships.

☐ Build mutual support relationships with trusted neighbors

This is about creating the kind of community power that keeps everyone safer, when and where it's possible to do so. Strong neighbor relationships are a form of collective security that benefits everyone and helps create the world we're working toward. Not everyone will have immediate neighbors who are open to this kind of relationship, and that's completely normal. Focus on what's possible in your specific situation, even if it's just one connection or takes time to develop.

HOW TO BUILD SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEIGHBORS

1. **Make a list** of neighbors you could build positive relationships with
2. **Introduce yourself** to immediate neighbors if you haven't already
3. **Exchange contact information** with trusted neighbors (sample text message below)
4. **Schedule time** to have a meal or drinks together and discuss mutual support during emergencies, travel, or security concerns
5. Consider joining neighborhood groups or community meetings
6. Consider starting a **neighborhood Signal/WhatsApp group** so it’s easy for everyone to share resources and invitations. (WhatsApp is less private than Signal but is more likely to be familiar to more folks).

> ***Sample text message:*** *"Hi y'all, I've been thinking about how we might be able to support each other better as neighbors. Would you all be interested in getting together for coffee/dinner sometime in the coming weeks to talk about how we might look out for each other? I'm thinking about things like emergency contact sharing, package pickup, and just being more connected as neighbors. Would [day/time] work for you?"*

Section 4: Evacuation Planning

This section helps you prepare for situations where you might need to quickly leave your home due to threats from people who are not connected to law enforcement or the government. This could include threats from hostile community members, extremist groups targeting our movements, or other safety concerns that make staying in your residence dangerous. Evacuation planning is different from planning for a “police at the door” scenario because you're choosing to proactively leave rather than being forced to leave by authorities.

The goal is to have clear plans for both **short-term situations** (staying away for one night while things cool down) and **longer-term situations** (needing to stay elsewhere for days or weeks). Having these plans ready means you can act quickly and safely rather than making panicked decisions when you're scared. Remember, evacuation doesn't always mean the threat is at your front door — sometimes leaving preemptively when you sense danger escalating is the safest choice.

Plan for emergency transportation and lodging (short- and long-term)

HOW TO PLAN EMERGENCY TRANSPORTATION AND LODGING

1. **Transportation:** Identify how you will get to your safe location, including backup transportation options and the safest route to take.
2. **Short-term safe housing:** Confirm a specific place where you can stay safely for one night if you need to leave your residence quickly due to threats from non-state actors.
3. **Long-term safe housing:** Identify a place where you and any household members can stay safely for 1-2 weeks if you cannot return home for an extended period.

Consider what you'd do for a fast evacuation

If a threatening person shows up at your house with no notice, it is good to have considered how you would exit. Some questions you can ask yourself:

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A FAST EVACUATION

1. Where are the **exits** to my home?
2. Is there a way for me and my housemates to **get off my property easily and get to safety** if someone threatening is at my front door?
3. Are there ways to safety that work for my **abilities** and that of all my housemates? Do we need to make different plans for people with different abilities or access needs?
4. If I don't have an accessible way to exit quickly, are there **trusted neighbors** I could call to support us in feeling safe or de-escalating the situation, so we can avoid calling the police? (Make sure to have a conversation with them in advance about what you might need from them in this role).

(If needed) Arrange care support for dependents during evacuation

If you would not be able to bring dependents with you, or if your assessment is that it would be safer to separate from them in the case of an evacuation:

If you need to evacuate your residence, plan who will help care for:

- Children
- Elderly family members
- Pets
- Other dependents

Prepare "go bag" for an overnight stay away from home

Pack and maintain a "**go bag**" with essential items for an overnight stay away from home.

There's a lot that goes into creating a go-bag and refreshing its contents, but we encourage you to take a small first step and build from there.

HOW TO CREATE A BASIC GO-BAG

Basics to include:

1. Essential toiletries
2. Medications
3. Phone charger
4. Copies of important documents
5. A change of clothes
6. Emergency cash
7. Snacks / energy bar

Learn more about go-bags:

- Go-bag article[14] from Margaret Killjoy
- Go-bag podcast[15] from adrienne maree brown
- Politics of a go-bag[16] from adrienne maree brown

☐ Plan communication schedule and methods during evacuation

Setting expectations about where you'll communicate and how often you'll communicate can help everyone in your emergency contact network feel reassured amidst the stress of a crisis. It can also help them know when to be concerned if they haven't heard from you for a certain period of time.

HOW TO ESTABLISH COMMUNICATION AGREEMENT

1. Decide how often you'll check in with your support network
2. Decide which platforms you'll use (Signal[7], etc)
3. Decide what information you'll share about your location and situation
4. If it's helpful, let people know what they should do if they don't hear from you after a specified length of time. What should they do to get you further support?

You might want to add this information to your Safety Planning Worksheet document.

☐ Identify people for specific roles during the evacuation period

HOW TO ASSIGN ROLES

Know exactly who to contact for different types of help during evacuation.

1. Identify person for emotional support
2. Identify person for logistics help
3. Identify person for decision-making support
4. Identify person who can access your residence if needed

You might want to add this information to your Safety Planning Worksheet document.

Section 5: Personal Crisis Assessment

Consider what helps you think clearly, what basic needs you might forget, and what kind of support you need for decision-making during high-stress moments. You might find it helpful to set a timer and free-write for 5-8 minutes on each question below, or simply jot down a few bullet points for each one. The goal is honest self-reflection, not perfect answers.

☐ Identify what helps you think clearly during stress

The Purpose: During a crisis, people often experience cognitive changes - your brain might go into fight/flight mode, you might feel overwhelmed, or have trouble making decisions. By knowing ahead of time what helps **you** specifically think more clearly under pressure, you can build those supports into your crisis plan.

What This Looks Like in Practice: People have very different responses to stress and different things that help them function better. For example:

Some people think more clearly when they:

- Take a few deep breaths or do a quick breathing exercise
- Write things down or make lists to organize their thoughts
- Talk through the situation out loud with someone they trust
- Have a quiet moment alone to process before taking action
- Do a quick physical movement (walk around the block, stretch)
- Remind themselves of a specific phrase or mantra that grounds them

Some people need:

- Someone else to help them break down big problems into smaller steps
- To avoid making major decisions when they're in peak stress
- A trusted person to double-check their thinking
- Extra time to process information before responding
- Background music or silence

HOW TO ASSESS WHAT YOU NEED DURING STRESS

Think about past stressful situations - maybe a medical emergency, job crisis, family problem, or even something like being pulled over by police. What helped you in those moments? What made things worse?

☐ Identify basic needs you tend to forget during crisis (eating, medications, sleep, etc.)

Common things people forget during stress:

1. Eating
2. Drinking water
3. Taking medications
4. Sleeping
5. Showering/basic hygiene

6. Checking blood sugar, taking rescue inhalers, etc.

Example: "I know that when I'm really stressed, I forget to eat and then get shaky and can't think straight. So I'm going to ask my safe person to remind me to eat something every few hours if we're dealing with a crisis, and I'll keep protein bars in my go-bag."

HOW TO ASSESS WHAT NEEDS YOU MIGHT FORGET

Think about past stressful periods - maybe when you were sick, dealing with a family crisis, work deadlines, relationship problems, or financial stress. What basic needs did you neglect? What did friends or family have to remind you to do?

☐ Determine what decision-making support you need during emergencies

During emergencies, you might need to make important decisions quickly - like whether to evacuate, who to call, how to respond to authorities, or where to go for safety. But stress can impair judgment, make you second-guess yourself, or cause you to freeze up. Knowing what kind of decision-making support helps you can be planned for ahead of time.

Different Decision-Making Styles Under Stress + Matching Requests:

- **Impulsive reactors**: Make quick decisions they later regret and need someone to slow them down

  > "I tend to panic and want to run immediately - I need someone to help me slow down and think through if that's actually the safest choice"

- **Catastrophizers**: Assume the worst-case scenario and need help seeing other possibilities

  > "I need someone to help me think through whether this threat is serious enough to leave my house"

- **People-pleasers**: Make decisions based on what others want rather than their safety

  > "I need someone to remind me that I don't have to be polite to law enforcement if they're at my door"

- **Overthinkers and/or Freezers**: Get stuck by too many options and need help narrowing choices and/or can't make any decisions and need gentle guidance through each step

  > "I get overwhelmed by choices - I need someone to give me 2-3 clear options instead of endless possibilities"

HOW TO ASSESS WHAT YOU NEED FOR DECISION-MAKING SUPPORT

Think about past stressful decisions - medical emergencies, job crises, relationship problems, financial issues. How did you handle decision-making? Did you freeze up? Make impulsive choices? Overthink everything? What kind of support helped, or what do you wish you had?

Pod Mapping: Building your support network

Pod mapping[17] is a powerful tool for crisis planning that goes beyond having just one safe person. It involves creating an intentional network of 3-5+ people who each bring different skills and resources to support you during emergencies. This approach requires more planning, energy, and coordination than the single primary safe person model, but it can provide more

comprehensive and resilient support.

Pod mapping complements your primary safe person - think of your safe person as your immediate lifeline, while your pod is your broader support ecosystem. This section is optional because it requires significant relationship-building and ongoing communication, but it can be incredibly valuable for people who want a more robust support network and have the capacity to organize it.

☐ Read about pod mapping and community accountability

Learn about pod mapping - a framework for building intentional support networks created by disability justice organizer Mia Mingus. This approach helps you think strategically about the people in your life and how they can support you during crisis situations. Understanding these concepts will help you build a stronger, more intentional support network beyond just one safe person.

→ Read an in-depth introduction to pods[17] (from SOIL)

→ Download the original pod mapping worksheet[18] (Mia Mingus)

☐ Create and organize your support pod

Identify 3-5 people who can provide different types of support during a crisis. These don't need to be your closest friends, but should be people you trust who have agreed to help.

You could print the pod mapping worksheet[18] and fill it in, if that's helpful for you.

☐ Meet with the pod or have individual conversations

Meet with your support pod members to discuss roles, expectations, and how you'll communicate during a crisis. Ensure everyone understands and consents to their role.

Keep learning with these related guides

Doxxing defense
Protect yourself from doxxing and online harassment.

Spyware protection
Protect yourself from spyware and surveillance software.

Lockdown Mode trade-offs 2 min read [19] "Police at the door" poster [2]

Links

1. indefenseofmovements.substack.com/p/criminalizing-dissent-in-the-wake
2. activistchecklist.org/police/
3. docs.google.com/document/d/176Yds1p63Q3iaKilw0luChMzlJhODdiPvF2I4g9eIXo/edit?usp=sharing
4. collectiveliberation.org/a-trouble-makers-guide/
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6. activistchecklist.org/proton/
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19. activistchecklist.org/lockdown/