

Witnessing an Arrest

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Main points on this page:

- Basic Info about witnessing an Arrest
 - 5 Key messages for an arrestee
 - A video on Witnessing an arrest
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When at a protest, there is no such thing as people who are 'non-arrestable'. This is because of the fact that anyone engaging in Non-Violent Direct Action or other forms of protest can be arrested. **It is all at the discretion of police officers.**

Witnessing an arrest is a skill not a role. A legal observer (LO) is more trained and experienced and has a precise role like a paramedic. Witnessing an arrest is like being trained in first aid, it is useful and could save someone's life, but no replacement for a paramedic.

If there are no LOs witnessing the arrest, then it is important for bystanders to step in to witness the arrest and make sure that the rights of the arrestee are being upheld.

In the situation of arrest, actively witnessing an arrest in the way described here may draw extra attention from the police. Please prioritise your own welfare.

- **If someone were to get arrested in front of / near you:**

Witnessing an arrest can be difficult and it is a different experience for everyone. Your wellbeing and safety is a priority!

Some tips:

- Don't panic. Here are some other steps. Chose the ones you will remember best. We have put in bold some points we think are worth remembering in particular.
- Ground yourself, note your tone of voice. If you are not feeling calm see if someone else can step into that space. Try to not view the Police as 'the enemy'. Conflict often makes these situations worse for the person being arrested. You are there for them . show empathy, be there for the arrestee.

Read through this informative list:

- If you are being threatened with arrest for Obstructing a Police Officer, then take a step back and say "I am taking a step back officer. I am just here to watch and make sure my friend is doing alright".
- **Try and find out what police station they are being taken to.** This is the most important piece of information you could get, as it will allow for Police Station Support to be organised and this will let us collect more information once they have been released. **If the police officers don't tell you where the arrestee is being taken, try and get the arrestee to ask the officers where they are being taken and then get them to tell you. This is because the police technically don't have to tell bystanders where an arrestee is being taken but they do have to tell the arrestee themselves.** In an ideal world, you will get the name of the police station, but in some cases the arresting officer may genuinely not know, or might just be being difficult. If you are unable to get a location, just tell the back office what you know and tell the arrestee to let the back office know with their custody call Point out to the arrestee that this is the phone number on their bustcard.
- If the Police officer doesn't know where they are going you can do two things: You can follow them to the van to see if they have more information about where the arrestee is being taken. Take a note of the Van's number. You can tell the Police you are doing this so that you can report back to Back Office.
- Hand them a '**bustcard**' or put one directly in their pocket (preferably a trouser pocket, if possible).
- Walk them through the **5 key messages**, [which can be found here](#), or you can look at the bottom of this page too. These are 5 key pieces of information, which guide the arrestee on what to do when at the police station.
- If possible, try and get them to whisper their name or alias to you. If they do not want to share this information with you for whatever reasons (such as a police officer listening in etc.), then do not force them into giving this information to you. Just move on! You could also try and get their name from some of their friends (if they are standing nearby) or people who the arrestee was talking to prior to their arrest
- If you know them or are connected to them somehow you can request that you take their telephone for safekeeping.
- Try and get a good mental image of what the person looks like, what they were wearing and height and other identifying factors. For example, the colour of people's shoes are sometimes a really unique colour (e.g orange shoes with a pink stripe) and pass all this information on to the Legal Back Office.
- Try and get some contact details (name, email address and phone number) for any other witnesses to the arrest and pass this information on to the Legal Back Office too. If (for whatever reason, such as a police office is listening in) another witness doesn't want to give you their details, then that is fine. Try and give them a bust card and get them to call the Legal Back Office, who will be able to explain why the information is asked for and how it gets stored etc.
- Call the Legal Back Office that has been set up for your action.
- Call the Green and Black Cross Protest Support Line on 07946 541511 (for actions, not XR related)

- **For XR actions, the Back Office number can be found on your 'bust card'. But, if for some reason this is an issue, call the central XR Back Office on 07749 335574.** Alternatively, you can report an arrest that you witnessed directly to the [Back Office using the form](#) if this is something you feel more comfortable doing.
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- Please also do share [this 15 minute video](#), which explains how to witness an arrest. **The password to the video is: ProsecutePolluters**
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