COMMON SENSE

COMMON SENSE IS THE SET OF UNDERSTANDINGS WE ALL USE TO MAKE IT THROUGH THE DAY. Our common sense may not always be exactly the same or in line with the politics we wish we had, but it controls our feelings of what makes sense. An important part of building abolitionist politics is showing how in some ways, in some places, abolition is already common sense. One of the major challenges in talking about abolition is that it doesn't make sense that we could have a society without punishment or one where we didn't need to forcefully remove people, even when they hurt others. However, there are parts of common sense that reject punishment and isolation as strategies for dealing with problems, and it is helpful to work with people on those levels. These contradictions mean that even a person with conservative politics is probably going to have some taken-for-granted beliefs that are actually radical.

|TALKING TO PEOPLE WHERE THEY'RE AT|

A CENTRAL PART OF HELPING PEOPLE SEE ABOLITION AS APPEALING is making it seem possible. That means showing how in our own daily lives we work from particular beliefs that punishment is harmful, or that the police shouldn't be trusted, or that what politicians say is good for public safety/economic development should be taken cautiously. This section provides two examples of working with people "where they're at" through appealing to and expanding ideas that are already common sense. There are also exercises below to help you practice.

EXAMPLE 1

One of us was recently talking with a friend who works as an aide at a nursery school who is not an abolitionist and supports the use of prisons and police. They talked about how she deals with so many children at once and whether she used "time-outs" in her classroom. She said that she never does, because it doesn't help the kids figure out what they are feeling, or how they can behave differently; nor does it get the kids to respect her more or help her figure out what "really happened" between them. So instead she uses a mix of strategies—normally involving a lot of questions and talking—and believes it works out much better.

In this case, even though this person believes in prisons and punishment and police for some, based on experiences from work she also has as part of her common sense a belief that is in line with abolition: that punishment and isolation don't work, but dialogue, attention, and flexibility do. Her experience as a teacher provided an opening in what she already believed to start a conversation that was critical of punishment.

EXAMPLE 2

Many people have direct experience where the government or a government agent like a police officer has done the opposite of what they claim to do (provide justice and safety or opportunity and fairness). Maybe they've been harassed or abused by the cops, or maybe they send their kids to a public school that's falling apart, or maybe they've had nowhere to turn when they needed work or job training or help dealing with an abusive partner or dangerous situation or emotional pain. These experiences may be openings to a discussion that is critical of the PIC. But lots of people also believe that the system mostly works, that it just needs to be fine-tuned, or that we have to be patient. People most affected by the PIC are often the same people calling for more policing, or other common sense paths to safety. On the one hand, common sense points out the violence of the system, while, on the other hand, still believes in its basic justice. In conversations about neglect and harm by the systems that are supposed to help, we can shift our basic perceptions—our common sense—about what these systems really do. This is a first step not only for building a movement against things like police and prisons, but for other things as well—like public schools that nurture and educate students in healthy ways.

Now try to figure out steps to challenge these activites, either as a role play or in conversation.

- What is the common sense about safety this group uses? How is it related to their position in the area—are they old-time residents, or recent gentrifiers? Do they seem to represent the feelings of most people in your neighborhood, or only a small but vocal minority?

BEWARE OF SIMPLE COMPARISONS!

Connecting with people's common sense could also produce upsetting results: to suggest that a prisoner is like a child at nursery school (as in Example 1) can do more harm than good in terms of how prisoners are perceived and how outside activists understand our relationships to prisoners. These are points of entry into conversations with people, not ready-made techniques to instantly produce a full-blown abolitionist.

Some common sense connections are even more dangerous. Many people, for example, think locking up animals in zoos is a terrible thing. Even if this is on the surface an example of common sense that rejects cages, connecting prisoners to "wild animals" only reinforces white supremacist ideas of who is sub-human and savage.

- How can you start from a desire to be safe from crime to start a conversation about alternative practices, or about the dangers of the program they're proposing?
- Where and how could you do this effectively? Would it help to talk to people one-on-one? Could you start a different neighborhood group that proposed a different model of safety?

EXECISES/BRAINSTORMS

1. LET'S START TALKING

Imagine that people in your neighborhood are starting a "Neighborhood Crime Watch" or "Civilian Corps." Maybe they're putting up signs telling people to look out for strangers, and suspicious activities. Or maybe they're trying to organize more community-based policing.

2. WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL SAFE?

(This might be a good exercise to ask people to begin before a roundtable or teach-in)

This is a brainstorm exercise. Make a list of anything that makes you feel safe. Then make a list of anything that you feel compromises your safety.

Play around with ordering the lists.

•How can you group them?

•What are the conflicts within the lists?

•Are there things that make some people feel safe that others feel keep them from being safe?

•If similar things pop up on both lists (from different people or even the same person), why do you think that is?

3. ALTERNATIVES TO PUNISHMENT: ROLE PLAY

Come up with a situation where harm has happened in your community. For this role play you need a person to play the harmer, one to play the person being harmed, and others to play friends and family for both people. Remember that friends and family can be connected to both people—especially if the harm in question is in the setting of a family or neighborhood.

For the exercise, you as a group have to figure out:

A) How you're going to meet. Who will facilitate, especially when emotions are high? How will decisions be made?
B) What is the harm that happened, and how is it still felt?
C) How can you resolve the issue without prisons or policing?

If you can come up with a situation that is specific to the group you're working with, great. You could also look to the alternatives to punishment section of this kit, which has a similar exercise about circles.

Of course, if people aren't comfortable doing a role play, you can still set up the situation and have a conversation about it.

|So What?|

The point of challenging our individual and collective common senses isn't to point out whose ideas and instincts are wrong or need to be corrected and changed. They are meant to help us see not just what we think about safety, but how many things we think about safety. This again makes the point that abolition is about building a world that is safe in multiple and lasting ways. Spending time working through what we think and how we came to think those ways about safety is an important step in that work.

> As somebody that was in prison, my—and this is probably because I'm a radical—my immediate response is to prison is that they shouldn't exist. And so it was a very gut-level kind of visceral response to being in prison.
>
> LINDA EVANS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

These are some of the questions we hear most often from people who are trying to learn more about abolition, and also from people who need some talking into the idea. These answers are not what we believe everyone should say in every situation. They are meant to give you tools and ideas to think about how you might answer these kinds of questions from the people around you.

IMPORTANT: DON'T BE SHY ABOUT ADMITTING YOU DON'T HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS.

||| DOES BEING AN ABOLITIONIST MEAN YOU JUST WANT TO LET EVERYONE OUT OF PRISON?

At its core, abolition isn't only about throwing all the prison doors open wide. It is also about creating new models for living. Imagining a future based on abolition means totally shifting how we think about living with each other. We must create stable communities for people to come home to even as we work to shut down all the prisons.

As a set of political beliefs, PIC abolition is based in a feeling of what is possible. So, instead of thinking about what we want to destroy it may be more helpful to think about what we must build to abolish the PIC. Our vision needs to include everyone affected by the PIC, not only the first time drug offender or the wrongly convicted, but everyone. We need to be able to create environments for ourselves that provide the basic necessities we need to live such as safe and steady housing; sufficient food; access to medical care; access to information and tools with which to process that information; resources to participate in an economy; a way to express opinions, interests or concerns; freedom from physical and psychological harm (both from individuals and the state). We need to start building those kinds of environments for ourselves as we work to abolish anything. We need healthy environments that don't depend on punishment and harm to protect the interests of the state and the rich or powerful.

We also can't just get rid of prisons without making dramatic changes in the systems that lead people to prison. We need to think about what kinds of things we could put in place to support people for whom even the best social setting may not work out. Creating more fair and lasting living environments is at the heart of our work. If creating a better environment still can't keep some people from hurting others (in all the ways that hurt happens), we do need to have something in place that would help everyone involved in the incident patch up their differences. But our current systems of policing, surveillance, courts, detention, family services, probation, and parole do not get the job done. Restorative justice practices that do not depend on our current policing and court systems may be one way of settling harms between people.

Abolition means creating long-term alternatives to the ways that we earn our livings, live together, and resolve conflicts (see sections on alternatives in this kit for examples). Working for a future based on abolition means building something real today that can be the foundation

for how we want to live. It means making practical plans for taking small steps that move us toward our dreams. It means figuring out ways for all of us to believe that things really could be different and that each of us can include this vision in our day-to-day lives.

It also means, of course, throwing all the prison doors open, tearing down the prison walls and the station houses and the detention centers and the punishing mental "health" hospitals.

WHAT ABOUT THE RAPISTS, CHILD MOLESTERS, AND MURDERERS? AREN'T THERE SOME PEOPLE WHO REALLY NEED TO BE LOCKED UP?

Rape, the sexual abuse of children, and murder are very serious and upsetting problems for everyone concerned about the wellbeing of loved ones, children, and members of our communities. Acts of great harm can understandably bring up great anger and fear. This anger can turn into a desire to punish, while fear can turn into a desire to try removing those responsible from society.

But the "need" to lock people up is a false need. No one needs to be locked up. If we take time to think through what makes an appropriate response to harm, we come to a different conclusion about what needs to be done. If we want our society to be healthy, safe, just, and fair, then alternatives to punishment and imprisonment must be put into place.

Let's consider a couple of matters in depth.

1) Punishment and Imprisonment are not Appropriate Responses to Harm

To understand why punishment and imprisonment are not appropriate responses to harm, it helps to walk through the common sense steps that lead us to developing a good response. If we walk through these steps, we come to a very different solution than punishment and imprisonment.

Awareness is one of the first steps. We need to be aware of the conditions and experiences of the person who was harmed, the person who committed the act of harm, the surrounding community, and the whole society. For our discussion here, what matters is first trying to understand those who commit acts of harm as well as the situations in which the harm happened.

When we begin to become more aware, a picture of what happened becomes clear. In learning why the act of harm happened, we usually find that more than one person needs to be held accountable. Even the worst kinds of harm do not happen without a reason. Usually there are a number of people and systems that should be held accountable. People who commit acts of harm often have been harmed themselves in the past. As result, they also need appropriate care and concern.

In the end, trying to develop higher levels of awareness gives us a broad view that makes an act of harm seem less like an isolated event. When we see harm as an event that is interconnected with the rest of the world, channeling anger only toward a particular individual doesn't make sense. Our anger is better directed elsewhere.

Abolition is about having a vision that seeks to change the social and economic conditions that lead to violence. Right now, punishment is a part of these conditions. Instead of discouraging harm, punishment makes future harm more likely because punishment encourages people to lash out. If someone committed harm because they had been harmed earlier in life, harming them even more with punishment really doesn't make sense.

Instead of punishment, people who have seriously harmed other people should have appropriate forms of support ranging from supervision to social and economic resources. Furthermore, in place of punishment we also need humane forms of accountability. Accountability means holding people to their commitments to others. Because punishment creates a feeling of social isolation instead of responsibility to other people, we need an alternative.

What a different response should look like is difficult to say, because the dominance of prisons as a response has kept us from developing alternatives. A few things, however, might be said. Immediately following an incident of serious harm, there is an especially urgent need for living spaces that ensure safety and wellbeing in a number of ways. First, these spaces should make sure that the person or people who committed the act can't harm anyone else. Second, they should make sure that people who want revenge couldn't hurt the person (or people) who committed the harm. Third, the spaces should make sure that the person who committed the harm would not harm him or herself. Because these spaces seek safety and wellbeing, they should be nothing like prisons. In fact, they should be the exact opposite since prisons are fundamentally dehumanizing and violent environments.

2) Locking People Away is a Violent Abuse of Power

Locking anyone away is wrong because it, without doubt, involves using violent and abusive power. We see this most clearly in terms of policies and practices.

First, policies and practices should never be dictated by force or fear. They should be based on concern for collective wellbeing. Because we live in a society where the media takes advantage of our fears and angers, we are constantly being hit with news about acts of violence that are coded in racist, classist, and homophobic ways. For example, connecting violence and "crime" with Black people is so deep-rooted and commonplace that Black people as a whole are criminalized. In this case, when fear is allowed to control policies and practices, Black people get targeted.

Second, the policies and practices of any institution, group, or society shouldn't be based on individual cases. Even though only a small percentage of people are imprisoned for really horrible acts, these acts are allowed to have a very uneven effect on how policy is created. Instead of basing policy on individual cases, policy should be made with the collective good in mind.

To be appropriate, responses to harm should be tailor-made in order. However, we should follow general guidelines for all responses to harm in order to guarantee fairness, equality, and humane treatment. Far from meeting these standards, the PIC goes against them as a matter of course. In the past and present, the PIC has been a central force of white supremacy and class domination. It has forced many people of color and poor whites to the lower rungs of society. Likewise, it has done this with constant violence.

Third, policies and practices should not create institutions that are anti-democratic or authoritarian. Prisons are fundamentally anti-democratic and authoritarian. Because prisons cannot operate without prison labor and general submission, prisoners are kept from organizing and having any real self-rule. As a way of excusing their position of power, the people running these institutions easily become won over by beliefs that make prisoners seem less than human. To treat someone brutally becomes possible when they are either no longer seen as human, especially in terms of race. When someone is no longer regarded as human, almost any act of violence or abuse becomes possible.

||| How will we stay safe without prisons or police?

One way to answer this question is to understand all the ways you are already safe. While the media and politicians focus on "crime" as a major problem in the US, the fact is, crime rates have dropped or stayed the same since before the prison boom. Also, "tough on crime" law making and enforcement has not had a big impact on "public safety." These media and political campaigns feed the panic about urban crime in particular. For example, most physical injury happens between people who know each other. Random violence is not as common as it's made out to be. Economic crime, like theft, is often linked to a downturn in the economy or drug addiction. People in need are more likely to turn to more desperate measures when jobs and assistance (like drug treatment or harm-reduction resources) aren't available, often because of state policies.

The government creates other crimes to increase the police's ability to control people. Along these lines, loitering, panhandling, public camping, and other so-called quality of life crimes, become excuses for police to hassle homeless people, queer people, young people and others who spend time living or socializing on the street.

So while there is real harm that happens everyday, the fear for our public safety is based less on real harm than on hype that blows the threat of that harm way out of proportion. Of course, harm does happen, and any movement for PIC abolition has to create ways to prevent harm more effectively and address everyone involved when harm happens. Before we think about how to reach this important goal, it's also helpful to make a new framework for what we mean when we talk about staying safe.

While police and prisons may make some people feel safer, they are not actually making us safer, especially in the long run. Rather, police, prisons, and the wider effect of the prison industrial complex create major barriers to other kinds of safety we need to live. With most financial resources going into policing and controlling people (especially people of color, poor people, immigrants, and others), there is less of an opportunity for people most affected by crime and poverty to get resources to deal with those concerns where they live. Police target specific neighborhoods and specific people for surveillance and control. As a result, people of color, poor people, queer people, and others are often made unsafe by the intrusions of police - whether they suffer physical abuse, constant harassment, or removal from their communities.

The impact of imprisonment is also serious. Many people of color and poor people have really suffered because people from their families and neighborhoods are being removed. Not only has building up police and prison failed to change official crime rates, the focus on crime fighting as

the only way to create safety limits what we think of as keeping us safe. Basic needs, like housing, food, access to mental and physical health care, and knowing that those things are not constantly at risk, are also essential for people's safety.

Working to end the prison industrial complex means trying to create all these kinds of safety, including day-to-day stability, self-determination, and a way to deal with interpersonal harm. PIC abolition is one way of creating safety. Abolitionist organizing projects focus on tearing down the system by seeing it as unnecessary. These projects also create safety by coming up with better ways of dealing with harm that involve regular people (not just the police, courts, and prisons) and that meet the needs of anyone affected by an act of harm.

Taking care of everyone's needs is crucial to help keep harm from happening again. Our current system does not focus on this and does not do this. Since many harms happen between people who know each other, well-developed ways for creating accountability without punishment could keep families and other communities together while reducing the harm within them. Abolitionist strategies are also focused on dealing with the societal inequalities that harm people. Hopefully, these strategies can lead to stability and self-determination that will help keep harm from happening in the first place.

Of course, when people are in immediate danger - whether that's physical violence by a partner or the threat of violence on the street - we need to know there is some possible way of getting safe immediately. So far, abolitionists have not created practical ways of providing that alternative to the police. This has to be one of our projects, along with others aimed at creating better ways of doing what we're told the PIC does for us. Creating those working alternatives is a part of the abolitionist vision for creating real safety.

WHAT CAN I DO INSTEAD OF CALLING THE COPS?

One of the biggest problems we face trying to build a world that doesn't rely on policing and punishment is that when people need an outside person to get involved in a situation, the police are often the only option. In so many different situations when people are in direct physical danger, or when someone hears a strange noise or a fight down the street, even when someone needs directions, the police get called. Our dependence on the police in all these situations just strengthens the PIC.

As abolitionists we don't believe that we can just say "never call the police" and people will be safer. But we do need to think about what happens when the police get called, why they get called, and how we can set up our own plans to replace the police. It makes sense that people call the police because they want support or need to change a situation. But when you call the cops, you mostly get only bad options.

Calling the police is a catch-all solution for what are normally specific problems with specific roots. The cops are a catch-all with only one real option: they can use or threaten to use force. Cops have the legal and physical power to direct the situation, so they end up controlling all the options. This usually means doing nothing, or taking one person (or more) away. Typically these are not effective strategies for handling an immediate conflict and preventing others.

Calling the police doesn't guarantee that a situation will get better. Everybody loses control when the police come. Not only does a person being violent or threatening violence run out of options, but so does the person who called the cops and everyone else around. Even people in the neighborhood who don't have a connection to the situation lose control. This happens because more cops in the area means more surveillance, which means more people getting taken away. This loss of control over the situation is especially true in communities of color that already suffer under intense police repression and surveillance.

A better option might be calling someone else—a neighbor, family member, or friend. Call someone who can get to where you are quickly, help tone things down, and help come up with a comfortable ending. That ending might be staying until everybody cools off, or checking out that strange noise with you, or providing a place for someone to stay for a while, or helping someone to leave.

A problem is that we don't usually set up these situations ahead of time, so people call the cops (even if they don't really want to) because there isn't another plan. It might help here to remember that we don't call the cops naturally. We are always being told to call them. We hear this from teachers in elementary school, from movies, news, and other media, from seeing other people do it, and, not least, from cops themselves.

So it makes sense that we should do a little planning ourselves to set up an alternative. It doesn't have to be complicated, or involve a million back up plans, or involve a complex commitment.
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 we know that calling the police doesn't.

||| What makes an abolitionist approach to the PIC different from reformist ones?

Abolitionists are often described as inflexible. There are many ways to come at abolishing the PIC, and no one path to a world without prisons and policing. There are actions that make sense up front, like opposing changes to visiting regulations for family members or for attorneys and their support staff. These actions help make sure that people who are locked up are treated as human beings.

However, there are also reforms that in the end make the long-term goal of getting rid of the PIC impossible. For example, in response to the terrible conditions that most prisoners across the country live in, abolitionists might focus on strategies that first look at how we can let people out of those cages instead of ones that just build better cages. Building new cells and prisons helps to extend the life of the PIC as a system. This goes directly against a long-term abolitionist goal of eliminating the system. It also just gives us one more prison to close down in the end.

The differences between these approaches are more than just being inclusive or exclusive. They are about strategy and long-term vision. They depend on what you want the end result of your work to be. The history of reform has brought us such things as prisons themselves (in the form of penitentiaries) and the expansion of prison systems when new prisons are built to "replace" overcrowded or crumbling old ones. Folsom prison in California was built to replace San Quentin prison to deal with overcrowding and poor conditions—both prisons still exist nearly 125 years later.

Mandatory minimums, determinant sentencing, and the juvenile justice system, are all reforms that have strengthened the PIC instead of tearing it down, or even shrinking it. At the core, the difference between the two positions is the difference between trying to make the PIC better and trying to tear the PIC down.

For these reasons, sometimes organizers who identify themselves as abolitionist support groups that use strategies that might be called reformist rather than abolitionist (like providing better health care and education to prisoners, making parole and probation accessible to more prisoners, supporting prisoner work stoppages and strikes—all things that don't necessarily abolish the system itself). There are certain strategies however, (like the trade off between "violent" and "non-violent" prisoners or constructing new jails and prisons to create better conditions) that undercut the work that abolitionists do and create the distinction between abolition and reform.

How can we talk about abolition without saying the "a" word? Is it important to use the word even though it's scary?

How and when to talk about abolition depends very much on the situation and our goals. In some cases we need to say the word abolition loud and often. We need to find ways to get the idea mixed into everyday discussions and debates. We need to say it often enough and in enough situations that it becomes one of the words that we use to talk about the full range of strategies for dealing with the PIC.

Many people are really scared about bad people running through the streets killing people without prisons and police to keep the bad people in check. In talking to them it may be best to talk about abolition as if it's common sense, but without using the word. Even though it is important to talk mostly about alternatives in either case, discussing alternatives is really important in this case. People need to see that we're not trying to put anyone in danger with this vision, but are trying to imagine what might actually make people safe.

When we talk about abolition without actually saying the word, we need to focus on actual steps and a clear vision of where we hope those things will lead us. Hopefully in talking about abolition without using the word we can create a common sense among people that eventually will lead them to be able to use the "a" word confidently and without any doubts.

Tools for Framing Abolitionist Arguments in Terms of What We Want

Often the ideas we use to argue for an end to prisons, police take-over, surveillance, social control, and other parts of the prison industrial complex are based in why we're against those systems, how they hurt our communities, and why they do not work. Understanding these systems and institutions, and having the tools to make arguments against them is one important part of being able to build the movement to end them. We need to be able to talk about what we want, what else we can envision, why we believe something else can work and how we imagine building communities where we can determine how to create and maintain safety.

WE ALL WANT THE SAME THING: SAFE COMMUNITIES.

THE ISSUE IS HOW WE GET THERE.

DOES THE CURRENT SYSTEM WORK TO KEEP ALL OF US SAFE?

Trying to tell people we meet that we're working toward not having prisons, not having police, and not relying on punishment is hard. Telling people this is hard because they think we're crazy, or don't care about safety, or that we've never been harmed or had anyone close to us hurt. All of this makes talking about abolition tough. Framing our arguments in ways that show what's wrong with system, what we do want, and ideas for getting there (no matter how small) sometimes makes it easier to be heard. It can also make it easier to talk to people who don't buy it right off.

Below are some ideas for framing arguments about abolition in ways that either don't refer to abolition outright and/or talk about the movement to end the PIC in positive ways.

|Talk about building safe communities|

One part of abolition is the vision. We are working to build communities that are safe and secure for everyone WITHOUT taking people away from their homes, families, and friends. To do this, we need to build accountability. While we know this takes time and work, there are examples of communities throughout the world (and in the US) that are good models (see the *What Is Abolition* pamphlet and *Alternative Practices* for some). Those of us who want to live this vision can start by finding ways in our own day-to-day lives to create accountability that isn't based in punishment. Than can be with our kids, our friends, or strangers.

Ask the people you're talking with to consider one way they can change their community to create safety without involving the police or prisons:

- Can they organize people to help keep the area cleaned up?
- Can they get a community center up and running for the people in the neighborhood?
- Can they provide resources and referrals for people coming home from prisons, or people at risk of getting caught up by the police?
- Often, when someone harms another person, they are told they need to be accountable to the state and/or the person they harmed. What if the community in which that person lives or harmed someone was also held accountable to help address what happened? Can the people you're talking to organize community meetings to address problems in ways that hold people accountable to their communities and have the groups held accountable to the people in them?

Keep in mind that a community can be as small or as big as what works for its members (see the *Keyword "Community"*). Since these kinds of tools work best when people share the same goals, suggest that they try it out with people they are already accountable to in some way. Remind people you talk to that part of building a movement for abolition is pushing us to imagine what else is possible and what would work better, then creating realistic, do-able projects that reflect those visions.

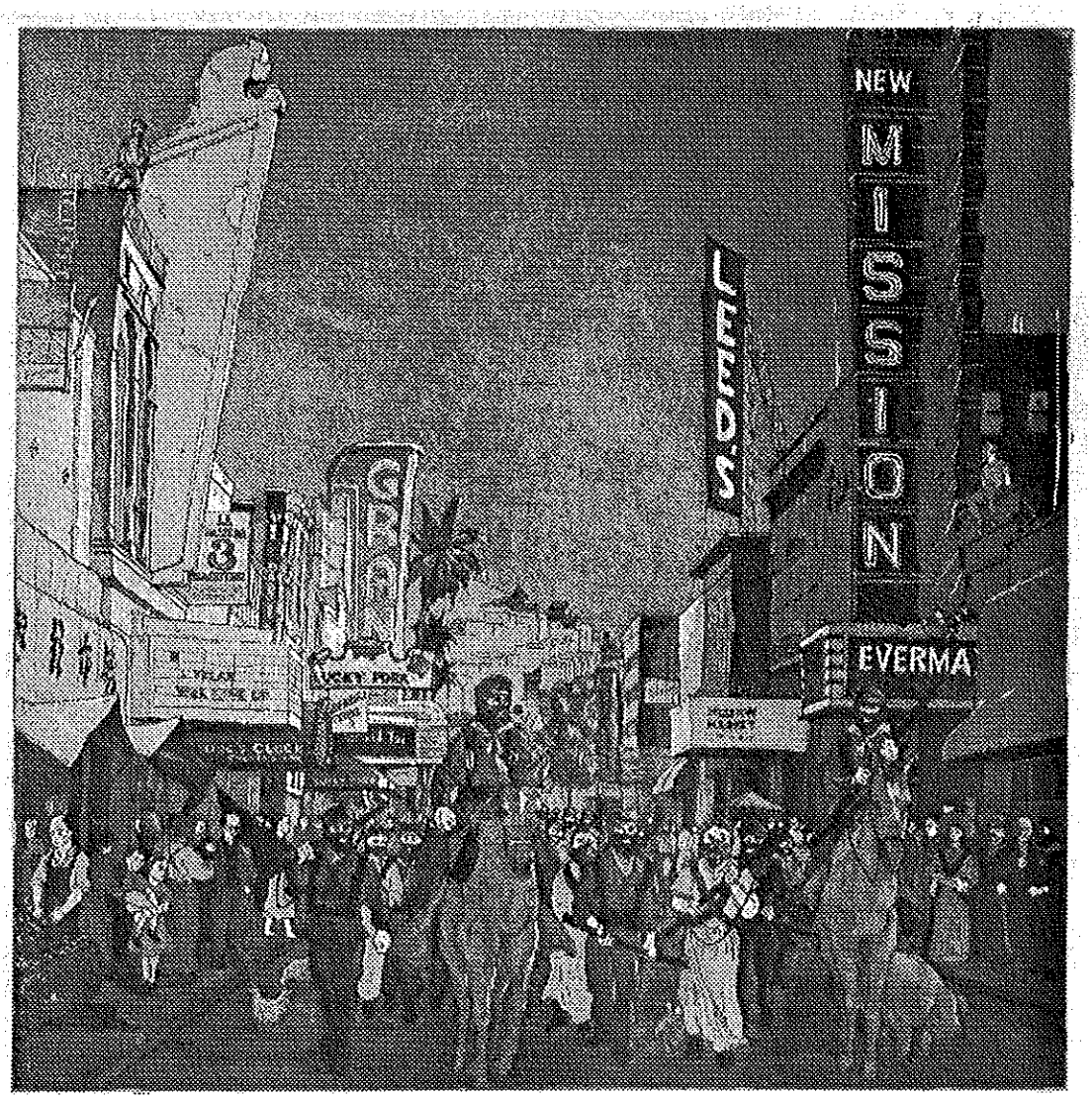
|Redefine safety|

Policing and prisons are held up as the only solution, the only ways to control problems and create safety. One positive way to talk about what we do is to challenge that idea by talking to people about what really makes our communities safe. What else makes safety?

Talk to people about:

- housing
- meaningful jobs
- self-determination (see *Keywords*)
- a clean environment
- being able to resist police control
- anything that makes people feel safer or that they imagine might make people in their communities feel safer.

Even in communities that are most affected by the PIC, people often still support policing and imprisonment and feel safer because of them. This shouldn't limit talking about OTHER THINGS that create safety, and moving the conversation to talk about positive things that can create increased safety and that may be longer lasting over time.



Sometimes it helps to talk about the limits people face coming home from prison and to show the consequences of people not having access to resources. Do former prisoners have access to safety when they come home? It can be really helpful to get people to talk about what makes them feel safest - and where you (the facilitator) can see patterns that speak to things other than police and prisons, create a discussion about how to create more of that kind of safety in a community or home. It is important to help people realize the most immediate things they can do:

- find out who in the neighborhood can provide jobs to people
- find out where resources are for former prisoners or other people who need resources to survive and circulate the information
- have neighborhood activities (block parties, cookouts) that can get people together and give people a space to talk over concerns

These can help it seem more do-able, since the idea of creating better jobs, housing, education, resources can be too much to take in all at once.

EXERCISE

Ask people to imagine what makes them feel safe and build a project or vision based on finding ways to create that safety. Help the group brainstorm one idea they can put into action.

|GIVE EXAMPLES OF ABOLITIONIST PROJECTS THAT ARE CONCRETE AND IMMEDIATE, THAT CAN BE REPLICATED IN PEOPLE'S COMMUNITIES|

LOOK IN THIS HANDBOOK, AND KEEP YOUR EYES AND EARS OPEN for all kinds of projects that are short-term abolitionist projects. Often, they may not be identified as abolitionist by the people doing them or may not immediately seem to be abolitionist. Despite that, a lot of projects that are intended to address people's need for housing, food, and jobs, have the potential effect of shrinking the prison population or limiting police control. A lot of organizations that work around homeless rights, poor people's rights, queer rights, labor, etc.... are working for self-determination and against some of the same power relationships that keep the PIC so strong.

So, an abolitionist project could be:

- building resources with people coming out of jails and prisons that will help keep people out of prisons and be successful on the outside
- fighting police control of homeless people and working to address their needs
- fighting a prison being sited in your community
- creating an education project, newsletter, or radio show to talk about the PIC and abolition and give people links to local resources,
- working with a harm-reduction or needle exchange group to get resources to drug-users (who often end up in the system), etc...

IMPORTANT: an abolitionist project shouldn't wind up in any increase in the size, scope, or power of the PIC. As organizers, people should be clear about their goals and about the possible consequences of the work they're doing.

|FEEL FREE TO ADMIT YOU DON'T KNOW THE ANSWERS TO ALL THE HARD QUESTIONS - THAT'S PART OF THE WORK WE'RE DOING|

IT SOUNDS MUCH BETTER AND IT'S MUCH MORE REAL TO ADMIT that abolition is a big goal. And while we are strongly committed to it, we know that we don't have the perfect way to make it work now. What we do have are examples of alternatives to how we're living, and a basic understanding that the PIC isn't designed to make people safer. It does not do that well, either. We can build something better for ourselves.

It helps to recognize that people do hurt each other and take things from each other. We can also say that as abolitionists we want to find good ways to build accountability that meet the needs of all people involved in an incident and the needs of the community in which something happens.

You can also point out that most crime that law enforcement says it addresses can be more or less directly linked to the conditions created by the state as a result of oppression of poor people and people of color, the political and social repression of poor people, people of color, queers, and other groups. The PIC, which is a system for removing people from targeted communities - again poor communities and communities of color - has the effect of knocking those communities off balance and making it even easier to target them.

You can always call on people's common sense ideas (see *Common Sense*). Sometimes people's common sense ideas about how they've been targeted by racist police or an oppressive economic system and job market will be a way in to talking about undoing the PIC altogether. These ideas can link you back to re-imagining safety and to specific goals groups of people can create for themselves to build the safety they seek.

You have to get past what "everybody knows."

And a lot of that really involves, strangely enough, listening to people, as well as –In other words, it's not just a question of what we've done all these years is gone out and given a lot of speeches to persuade people that we're right and they're wrong. A lot of it is walking up to people and saying "You know, the situation really sucks in this neighborhood, there's all this crime, everyone's afraid to walk around the street—what do you think we should do about this? I mean do you feel safer know that there's all these cops, is that really solving the problem?" And just talk to people and sit back and listen...

...I've had instances where people have come up to me and say, "I heard about this case on the news the other day, and the first thing I thought of was all this mess you've been telling me all this years, and you know, I think you're right." You have to patient enough to realize that there is a dialogue going on...that people who wrestle with ideas, who are wrestling with them because of very real challenges they're confronting, like fear of crime, like initially having no idea of what might be done other than locking everyone in the damn country up...when they finally do turn around...those end up being your strongest allies—people who really are going to kick ass and do a lot of hard work, and they end up being the people also that can teach you a lot.

LINDA THURSTON