

YOUTH EMPOWERED ACTION (YEA) CAMP PRESENTS

**THE
BEGINNER'S
GUIDE TO
CHANGING
THE WORLD**

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The Beginner's Guide to Changing the World

Table of Contents

Introduction - Who We Are and How to Use This Guide	2
Intro to Activism	5
Obstacles to Getting Started	9
Taking the First Steps	10
Mini Activism Starter Guide	14
Heartbreak	16
Developing an Activist Mindset	17
Be on the Lookout to Make a Difference	18
The Big 8, Privilege, and Allyship	18
Interconnectedness of Issues	22
Look for the Low-Lying Fruit	23
5 Easy Forms of Activism You Can (Probably) Do Today	23
Getting Out of Your Comfort Zone	24
Make a Bigger Difference While Caring Less What People Think	26
Be Someone People Want to Be Like	27
Opportunity Cost	28
Balancing Urgency and Patience	29
Positive Mental Attitude	31
Activism 101 Video Presentation	34
10 Types of Activism to Choose From, From Simple To Complex	34
Choosing Your Own Activist Adventure	39
Self Assessment - What? Who? How? When? Why?	39
Effectiveness Analysis	42
IOI + MO + ORG = Your Activism Plan	48
Your IOI - Issue of Importance: What and Why?	50
Pillars of Support	51
Your ORG - organization(s) - Who?	57
Your MO - Modus Operandi - How?	57
Finding Your Activist Groove	57
Dealing With Difficult Emotions: How and Why Not To Be An Angry Activist	58
Communication Tips	64
Self Care, Community, and Keeping at It	72
YEA Camp Action Plan	74
Conclusion	75



The Beginner's Guide to Changing the World

Introduction - Who We Are and How to Use This Guide

Hello and thank you!

It says so much about you that you're reading this because it means that you care about our world and want to do something to make it better. And we need more people like YOU to do just that!

If you're looking around and see problems in the world that you want to do something about, you're already part way to becoming an activist.

In fact, according to our YEA Camp definition of activism, you're probably an activist already.

We'll get to that shortly.

It can be intimidating to get involved in a cause you believe in. There are so many ways to get involved, but that can also make it harder to decide what to do.

When we take a stand, we can be opening ourselves up to criticism, questions we may not know how to answer, or even failure if a project we work on doesn't succeed.

The causes we care about are too important to let those concerns stop us. We're going to figure this out together.

About this guide:

We've divided this guide up so you can completely skip parts, read it out of order, and focus on the topics that are most helpful for you. Come back to read other sections in the future if and when you feel they're relevant to you.

If you want to get the Cliff Notes of this guide for now, check out [this video](#) and our [mini Activism Starter Guide worksheet](#). You can choose an issue you want to focus on, find an organization to volunteer with (check out [our list of amazing featured organizations!](#)), and get started with whatever they ask you to do.



Zooming straight to the section called “Choosing Your Activist Adventure” is another way to go!

The rest of this guide will provide a much deeper level of training and support to help you become the most effective advocate you can be.

We are taking advantage of the e-book format by including lots of links if you read this online, while also including worksheets and space for you to answer questions if you print it out.

There's plenty that's not included in this guide, too, but we plan to keep adding to and updating it, so please send us any feedback you have [here](#). We're also starting a [Facebook book club group](#) if you want to chat with others about the book!

And if you want to take your activism to the next level, we hope you'll join us at a future session of YEA Camp! We have sessions for [teens](#) and [adults](#) -- and it's way more fun and inspirational than reading a guide!

To tell you a little more about ourselves so you know who we are....

Who We Are

[Youth Empowered Action \(YEA\) Camp](#) is a summer camp for social change. For almost 10 years now, we have been training teens from a dozen countries to make a bigger difference on a cause they care about -- all while having the time of their lives. [Our campers have gone on to do amazing things!](#)

And this year we are launching our first ever [YEA Camp for Adults!](#)



It's been hugely inspirational seeing the rise in political engagement and activism in recent years, though with all the problems in our world, we need all hands on deck, and we want to be as effective as possible.

At YEA Camp we feel that if you're old enough to recognize a problem, you're old enough to help bring about a solution. This guide is for people of any age.



YEA Camp has a positive and inclusive approach to activism. There are so many causes that need help. We are not focused on any particular issue, though we are what most people would consider progressive, which means we care about equality and human rights, protecting the environment and animals, supporting peace and non-violence, and wanting to move our world in a direction that is more equitable for those most in need.

To speak in the first person for a moment, hello! I'm Nora Kramer, YEA Camp's founder and director. I have been an activist on various social justice issues since the late 90s. I took an environmental science class that exposed me to a whole new world that I never knew about -- and that changed everything for me. I realized that there are all kinds of social problems that we mostly just go through life ignoring and on some level pretending are not a thing we should worry about, but I couldn't be OK with just going on as if I didn't know.



I grew up privileged enough not to notice a lot of problems. The more I started researching one issue, the more I saw how it was connected to another problem in our world. I had no background in activism or anyone in my life at the time to teach me. I just knew I wasn't OK with polluting our environment, with poverty, racism, sexism, cruelty to animals, or any type of violence or injustice in our society. The more I looked for problems, the more I found them and started studying them. I started stumbling along as an activist, doing as much of whatever I could think to do, though without a plan or a clear direction.

I did so many different types of activism, from working on political campaigns to handing out leaflets, making videos to writing letters, protesting to trying to change policies, training newer activists to making daily changes in my own life --like going vegan, rarely driving, and buying most things second-hand. I went to conferences, did internships, did every leadership and activism training I could find, met amazing activists around the country, and learned a ton along the way.

Long story short, here I am 20 years later, having created a summer camp for activists and trying to help more people make a difference through this guide and other resources.

Activism doesn't need to be complicated, but most things can be intimidating when just getting started, so we're here to help.

That is at the heart of what we do at YEA Camp itself.

Hopefully we will [see you at a future session!](#)

OK, now on to changing the world....

Intro to Activism

- What Is Activism?

Activism starts with identifying a problem that harms society and deciding to take action to do something about it, rather than accepting this status quo as just the way things are.

There is no shortage of problems in our world, and activism is key to addressing these issues and bringing about social change.

At the most basic level, we see activism as turning a complaint about a perceived problem in the world into an action towards a proposed solution.

When you think of activism, what do you think of? You may have a positive image and imagine heroes like Martin Luther King or Gandhi, or even modern-day celebrity activists like Angelina Jolie, Ellen DeGeneres, or Beyonce'.

However, some people have a negative depiction of activism. For several reasons, *activism* and *activists* have developed a negative connotation, and we want to debunk this bad rap right from the start.



Activism is often negatively depicted on the news as:

- Shocking - blocking traffic or showing graphic images
- Controversial - tactics used to generate attention
- Judgmental and proselytizing - telling someone what to do or trying to make them feel guilty
- Angry and screaming or fighting on social media
- Leading to arrest - an action that is almost guaranteed to get news coverage, which is a main reason activists do it.

Activism can include any of these things, but it is most certainly not any of these things.

The news can be a biased source of information about activism. It benefits from shocking stories. The news typically uses the classic “if it bleeds, it leads” approach to showing violence and other scary or headline-grabbing stories.

The news is ultimately a television show, and it needs ratings and advertisers.

Mainstream network news is funded by the commercials that advertise on it, and many of these companies -- think car and oil, fast food, pharmaceutical, and banking companies -- are often the target of activists' campaigns. It's no surprise that, out of self preservation, networks might choose to avoid highlighting stories that call into question the ethics of their advertisers.

Most activism doesn't make the news. It's not shocking or controversial, and it doesn't show up in history books, but activism is happening all around us every day, and it is mostly just people helping other people.

So, what is activism?

We at YEA Camp didn't think any of the dictionary definitions really did this term justice (no pun intended!), so we made up our own definition.

Activism (noun): Taking intentional action to help others, with an eye towards the big picture.

By this definition, we consider recycling a can activism if you do it to protect the environment (the big picture) -- though not if your motivation is to get the 5 cent deposit. (Although, think about the folks who have helped pass laws to ensure people can get 5 cents for each returned can, regardless of the motivation for recycling. They are absolutely activists!)

While, by definition, activism helps others, activism can also help you if you are being affected by the problem you are seeking to address -- but if it helps only you, and there's no bigger picture where others benefit as well, it's not considered activism according to our definition.

Other examples of things that fit our definition of activism:

- Speaking up when someone makes a prejudiced remark.
- Voting, or helping to get others to vote, when done not out of one's own self interest but what's best for society.



- Rescuing an animal in need of a home, as a recognition of the big picture that shelters are overpopulated.
- Reducing your ecological footprint, like by going vegetarian or vegan or eating less meat, driving less, and buying things second-hand. These choices can benefit you directly, too, but what makes it activism according to our definition is that it helps others.
- Raising or donating money for any not-for-profit cause, from finding a cure for a disease to helping a family in need. There's an eye for the big picture that these are not being sufficiently addressed or funded in our society, such as by us having adequate affordable health care or safety nets.

We could go on all day.

We bet you've done plenty of activism already.

So, are you an activist?

By our definition, we consider most people activists for something, even if they don't realize it or think of themselves that way.

We see activism as something people do with different levels of regularity, commitment, and effectiveness -- and if someone does it enough (whatever imaginary level this might be), they can be considered an activist.

We prefer the idea that all of us who care about something and want to make a difference are activists, and some of us just need some more direction and focus to follow through.

Of course, there can be activists for "good" and "bad" causes or even people doing things that are counterproductive for their goals, but the key is that someone feels they are doing something to help others. Whether they are actually doing that can of course be debated.

Ultimately, activism is about helping those without power who are experiencing something harmful that could be stopped by societal action. As activists, we need to figure out what those actions are, and how to make them happen.

In short, we think activists are heroes. They (we!) are devoting time, energy, or money, and making sacrifices for the greater good.

Thank you for being an activist!

- **Why is activism important?**

This seems like it might be self-explanatory, given the problems in our world, but we want to make a few key points.

On a daily basis, we take for granted the hard work of activists who have come before us.

- Enjoy your weekend? And the opportunity to spend your childhood getting an education instead of working in a factory? These advances are thanks to the



labor movement.

- Do you appreciate having a say in our democracy by being able to vote and not be discriminated against in your employment or housing? (Granted, there is more work to do here, as of course discrimination and disenfranchisement still exists.) Thank the tireless work of countless activists working for racial and gender equality, when not so long ago *this country had slaves and women were seen as irrational creatures who were not fit to vote.*
- Isn't it nicer to live in a world where there are environmental laws and protections against cruelty to animals? (Of course the existing laws are vastly inadequate, are being chipped away at, and often not enforced, and there is much work still to do, with so much money to be made from harming animals and the planet.) Environmental and animal advocates have achieved enormous advances from a time not so long ago when there were no laws protecting the planet or other species.

It is mind-boggling to think of all the ways we benefit from countless activists who have come before us, almost all of whom have names we will never know.

What did all these activists have in common?

Activism comes from a mindset that doesn't settle for the unacceptable. It comes from a recognition that there is something wrong, and a deeply held feeling that doing nothing would be intolerable.

Activists recognize that their actions are needed to address a serious problem. Of course, it's not always clear what to do to address that problem. In fact, sometimes we have no idea at all.

As a context, there are people actively working right now to make the world a worse place. Literally. [They are putting their own interests ahead of what is good for society.](#)

There are corporations who are paying thousands of employees very well to do something that is terrible for the environment. There are private for-profit prisons that are working very hard to make money off of locking up innocent people. Billions of dollars are being spent to advertise harmful products, to lobby Congress to ignore things that harm society, and to militarize and kill people all over the world. People profit greatly from harming other people, animals, and the environment, and many of those with privilege and power are doing everything they can to prevent others from attaining equality, opportunity, and justice.

Activism is an antidote to these profit- or ego-driven ventures that are doing so much harm.

Meanwhile, even the most conscious among us are all on some level doing harm to the planet and all life that depends on it every single day.

Did you throw something in the garbage today?



Did you flush the toilet?

Did you use a motor vehicle for transportation?

Did you buy something made in a factory?

These all cumulatively cause massive harm to other species and to our own. From affecting our climate to reducing access to natural resources that we all rely on to exploiting other people working in terrible conditions, we impact one another. No matter who we are and what we do, our presence does some amount of wear and tear to the planet.

This brings to mind a favorite YEA Camp quote:

“Activism is my rent for living on the planet.” -Alice Walker

By doing activism, we are compensating for the harm we cause, and hopefully we are more than offsetting this damage.

How are you paying your rent this month? What happens to our world if, using this metaphor, billions of us on this planet don't pay our rent?

- **Obstacles to Getting Started**

Let's think through a sample potential activism scenario.

To pick a very simple example, imagine that you are out on a lovely walk and you see a piece of litter on the ground. Surely, we all see this every single day. You identify this as a problem to whatever degree, and you decide you want to do something about it.

What do you do?

You could pick that piece of litter up, and then maybe pick the next piece up and the next piece as you walk down the street, making your way to the nearest trash can.

Does that address the problem? In the short term, yes, sort of, there is no litter on the ground where you are, but is this a long-term solution? Of course not.

From your point of view, though, honestly, do you actually even want to pick that litter up? You didn't put it there. It's not your fault. Why aren't there more trash cans on this block anyway? Isn't it against the law to litter?

If you decide you don't mind picking the litter up, how much are you going to pick up? How much time do you spend? Are you going to go around your entire neighborhood? Every single day? Of course not, so when and how often? Like, on what day or at what time of day are you going to do that and for how long? Are people watching you and already thinking you're weird?



Maybe you could get other people involved? Would anyone want to? How would you even do that? Would it be more effective to try to convince people not to litter in the first place? Yes, definitely, but how do you do that?

Oh, that's probably too complicated, and this is all so much more involved than just picking up that one piece of litter that you didn't even put there, plus you have so many other things to think about. Ahh, forget it!

Sometimes all of these possibilities can lead to us not doing anything at all, and that's what we are trying to help you move past.

We said above that we consider most people to be activists for something, but of course this is by degree. Most people do little things here and there, but let's face it. Most people are not actively seeking to make the world a better place, or devoting much effort to actively bringing about change.

We don't want to give the impression that activism is super hard, but for many people there can be a lot of barriers to entry for getting more involved in activism.

Many people get stuck on:

- Being busy.
- Not knowing what to say or do.
- Being afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing.
- Not wanting to put themselves out there, be judged, or stand out from others.
- Being overwhelmed by emotions associated with the problem or with the scope of the challenge.
- Worrying that they may put a lot of effort into something and have it not make a difference.
- Just needing to focus on their own wellbeing and that of their family to get by.

The task we have as activists can feel overwhelming in the face of personal obstacles and a recognition of the scope of the problem, but think about how the abolitionists must have felt in the times of slavery, or the way suffragettes and other early feminists felt in the years when they did not have basic autonomy or rights. Think they felt overwhelm? Did they let that stop them?

No one person can possibly do "enough" to bring about *all* the changes they want to see, but people's cumulative actions add up to big change.

Overwhelm is almost impossible to avoid when thinking about the scale of the world's problems, which makes it especially important to focus on what you *can* do, on being as effective and strategic as possible, and in taking care of yourself so you don't give up, which is the focus of the rest of this book. So, onward!

- Taking the First Steps

If you're ready to find out some key steps to get started and want to jump right in, and you didn't watch it earlier, [this video](#) breaks down being an activist into 5 simple steps.



[This video](#) is basically the Cliff's Notes of this entire guide.

To summarize:

1. **Choose an issue** you're passionate about changing. At YEA Camp, we call this your IOI, or Issue of Importance.
2. **Learn as much as you can** about your cause. Why is this happening and why doesn't everyone agree with you already? Learn answers to frequently asked questions people have.
3. **Find organizations** working on that cause. Check out [our list of favorites](#). Review their website, follow them on social media, or go to a meeting. These can be large organizations that are experts on your cause and that you can learn from, or a community group that you can join.
4. **Take the actions they recommend**, or that make sense to you. Whether it's ordering and passing out flyers, signing their petitions, making phone calls, boycotting a product, sharing a video, or another action they suggest, get involved and look to others who have been working on this issue for a while to find out what they think is needed. Consider your skill set and resources and the unique opportunities you may have to make a difference.
5. **Keep going!** Changing the world can take a while. You are awesome for caring so much!

But what if you don't have time?

We get it. So many of us are so busy with work, school, family, and other obligations, changing the world might not make it onto our to-do lists.

Of course there are bigger things you can do if you have more time, but there are so many things you can do that don't take much time and that you can fit into your everyday life.

- Are you a parent? See if you can spend quality family time volunteering, doing some community service or learning more about a cause. Maybe you can find a way to advocate for an important improvement at your kids' school next time you are there. Just spending time exposing your kids to an appreciation of nature or other cultures could replace something else you might do.



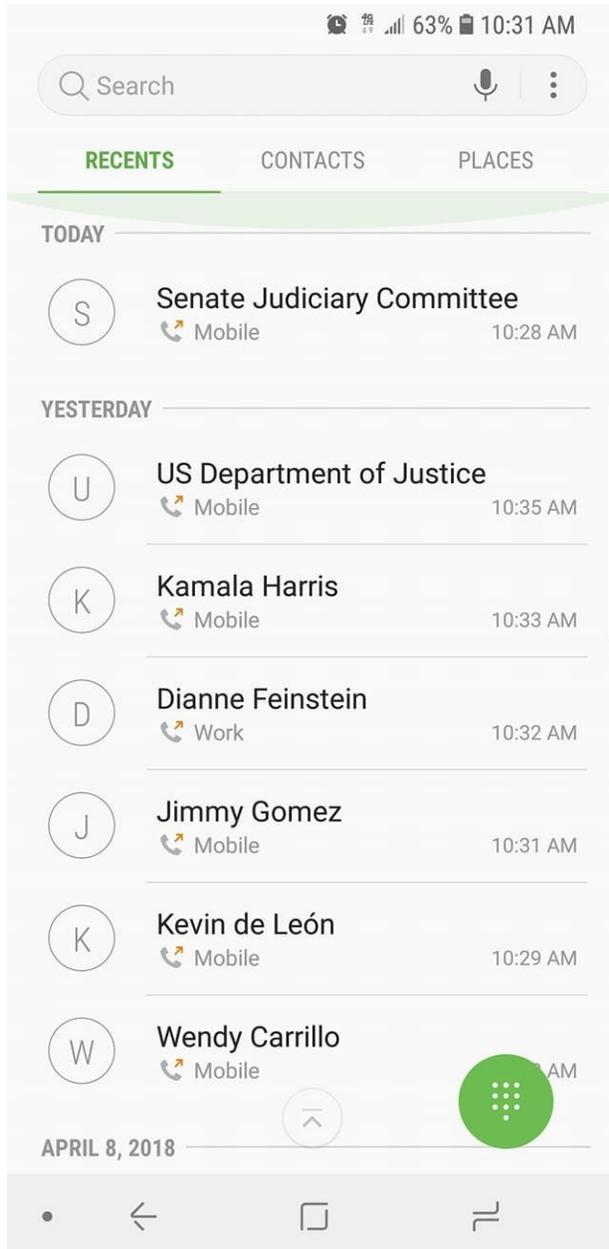
- Are you a student? Do your next presentation on a cause you care about! And know that community service and leadership activities you're involved in could do more for helping you get into a better school or get an internship or job you want than studying harder for your next test.
- Do you work all the time? Find creative ways to bring about good in your workplace, whether it's trying to improve the diversity at your company, improving office recycling, or organizing a simple fundraiser with your co-workers.

All of the above?! Even if you're super busy, you can still do things in your daily life that really don't take more time, like speak up when you know it's needed, donate even a small amount of money, make more eco-friendly choices, or just wear a shirt or post a bumper sticker that has a message that will make people think. There are so many things we can each do that don't take much or any time at all.

Technology also makes it easy for us to reach a lot of people with very minimal effort. Think about the power of sharing information online, whether it's a news story or video, or your own personal message. Speaking up and recording an injustice that you see and sharing it on social media can make a big difference too. Recent incidents of racism that were captured on a cell phone and then posted to social media and seen by thousands or even millions have led to significant institutional changes, like [workers being fired](#) for racist behavior and a multinational corporation [closing down for a day](#) to train its staff about implicit racial bias. For the [woman who recorded the now infamous Starbucks video](#), it wasn't about time but about seizing an opportunity to film something happening right in front of her.

Not to discount the fact that so many of us truly are very busy, many of us do tend to make time for things that we really consider important. If your close friend was in town visiting, you'd probably make time to see them. If someone you love were sick, you would figure out a way to help out.

Check out this phone log from a YEA Camp supporter and how short a time it takes to make calls to your representatives. She works full time but still manages to calls them all every day Monday-Friday. You could literally do it on your walk to lunch or a 10 minute break from work.



You can download the phone app [5 Calls](#) or [Daily Action](#) to get a daily text notification of what to say in these calls, and just follow the script!

Point is, there are so many possibilities that don't need to take a long time, and we hope this guide will help you along your path. Read it when you have — or make — time!

So let's get to it!

If you feel like you're ready to get started on an activism project now, check out this [Mini Activism Starter Guide](#) and then feel free to go off on your way changing the world! Check back with this guide in the future when you want more info, if you get stuck, or if you want more ideas or support.



Mini Activism Starter Guide

STEP 1: Choose your issue. If you had a magic wand and could solve 1 major problem in the world, what would it be? Be specific. This is what we call your IOI or Issue of Importance.

STEP 2: Understand your issue.

- Why is this problem happening? List all the reasons you can think of.

- What do people who disagree with you not know or understand about your issue? Who benefits from this problem continuing on as it is, and how?

- Why is this so important to you?

STEP 3: Get connected. Research organizations working on your IOI. Find at least 5. Then:

- Like or follow them on social media and join their email list.
- Look up what actions they want people to take.
- Put a star next to any org you really want to get involved with.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

STEP 4: Take action.

List 10 things you could do to make a difference for your IOI. Just brainstorm! They could be actions recommended by an organization or an idea that you have.

Think about things that would:

- address the root cause of the problem, or provide help to those in need
- apply things you're good at or like to do



- spread awareness and get others involved
- directly help an organization you support

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

- Put a star next to any that you actually want to do. When will you get started? Put a date next to any actions you want to take so you can start making it real.
- Think of all of the steps you will need to take in order to take that action? ex) If your action is to call your legislators, you may need to research their phone numbers. If your action is to pass out flyers, you will need to order the flyers.
- Put these actions into your calendar to schedule them and turn them from ideas into concrete actions you will be taking.

STEP 5: Keep going. Changing the world will take a while. As you move forward on your change-making path, write down the knowledge, skills, confidence, and community that you want to develop to set yourself up for success in your efforts.

CHANGEMAKER QUADRANT

Knowledge:	Skills:
Confidence:	Community:



Heartbreak

Sorry to be depressing here, but there is no activism without some type of heartbreak, and we may as well talk about it from the start.

Activism begins with the desire to address a problem that you care about, and activism is challenging or uncomfortable enough for most people that they really need to care a lot about something to do it.

If you didn't really care about the environment, would you really spend your time picking up trash, or donate to an eco-friendly candidate you believe in? You probably wouldn't bother. But the thought of our planet being unlivable for us or other species is sad enough that you want to do something about it.

If you didn't care about ending racism, would you really engage in uncomfortable conversations with people who are saying or doing racist things, or go to community hearings about a new prison being built or the latest innocent person to be killed by police? [Would you put up with rude, insensitive people while you're advocating for what you believe in?](#) No, you'd stay home and watch a movie or go do an infinite number of other more enjoyable things. A problem has to be bad enough for you to really care and do something about it.

Coping with the sadness, anger, fear, and even hopelessness in the face of such overwhelming problems can be a huge challenge for those of us who care. How to deal with these emotions is a topic big enough for its own book and more, but we do offer a lot of resources in this guide.

The enormity of the problems we are facing and the difficult emotions we feel about them may make it hard to think about mundane things, or even lead to feeling guilty for enjoying our lives.

How to handle this is really an existential question, like dealing with looming mortality or overcoming grief. Confronting these things may get easier over time as we come to accept the reality of what is, while also doing our best to shape what will be in the future.

The beauty of activism is that it shows that you care -- that you are willing to feel, to have empathy, and to go out of your way to make a difference for others. Think of the opposite: learning of something terrible in our society and just not caring or doing nothing at all -- or being so distracted by other things as to not even notice others' suffering.

Sadly, the problems in our society can feel overwhelming that many people have become resigned and comfortable accepting the unacceptable.

At YEA Camp, we look at activism as proof of your humanity. It is proof of your belief in yourself, others, and a better future.

Once you get going as an activist, we've got good news and bad news when it comes to this issue.



The bad news: There will be even more heartbreak. Social change can take a very long time, and the more you start paying attention and taking action, the more you will see how entrenched many of our problems are and how difficult they are to solve. Your heart will break over and over again, and you will have even more proof that you are human.

The good news: One of our favorite quotes: “Activism is the antidote to despair.” -Joan Baez. One of the best things we can do to cope with the sadness of the injustice in our world is to take action to do something about it. Doing something will make you feel better. Doing nothing will not.

Becoming an activist is like receiving a diagnosis of a serious disease, and going forth with the difficult experience of treating that disease, rather than going undiagnosed or hoping the disease magically goes away without the necessary treatment. There's very bad news, yes, but you are actually doing something about it. The alternative is unacceptable.

And as you move forward in your activism, you will see improvements and experience victories -- even if it is convincing one person to see things a different way, or learning that an organization you donated to has achieved something special. These accomplishments will help heal your heart, as it continues to break and heal and break again.

Social change happens gradually — and then suddenly. Our cumulative actions wake people up and lead to tipping points that bring about big change. But we need to prepare ourselves for this emotionally.

Doing activism gives life a deeper meaning, helps our lives serve a more significant purpose, and helps us feel fulfillment that the world is better off for us having been in it. It also brings about the change we wish to see in the world, so we've got to find ways to keep at it.

The rest of this guide offers a lot of tips and tools to address heartbreak you might feel, and you will have the rest of your life to practice them.

Developing an Activist Mindset

Before we delve deeper into actions you can take, we wanted to look first at your mindset, because every action you choose to take -- or not take -- and the way you approach it will be a product of your mindset.

Again, though, feel free to skip around and read this guide in the order that works best for you.

We are all born without knowing how to plan a fundraiser, what to say in a difficult situation, or how to launch a successful social media campaign. If we are willing to learn, we figure it out as we go, and we make mistakes along the way that we can improve on for the future. It is each of our jobs to figure out how we can become more effective at anything we do, from taking better care of our health to doing better in school or work, to succeeding in relationships, to changing the world.



Cultivating an activist mindset will not only help you make a bigger difference over the long term, it will empower you in other areas of your life.

Below are some key mindsets to start embracing.

- **Be on the Lookout to Make a Difference**

Start noticing problems. You might already do this, like, all the time, but often we want to ignore them, or we have just gotten numb or used to ignoring them.

Think about struggles you are experiencing and ask yourself if others are struggling with these issues too and why they are happening.

If you're privileged enough not to be directly struggling with social problems, like poor schools, over-policing, or lack of healthcare or affordable housing, consider the litter you see everyday, or homeless people in your community as visible symptoms of social problems. Notice flyers about issues happening in your town or the problems others are having.

Read the news, and there is no shortage of injustice and tragedy on a daily basis.

Now, the key here first is to pay attention and then start thinking about how you could do something about it, instead of just complain. It's actually pretty simple:

1. Notice problem
2. Consider solutions, and how you could be part of them. This could be addressing a root cause of the problem -- like figuring out how to get people to litter less (from enforcing fines to adding more bins to doing educational campaigns) or taking a direct action (like actually picking up a piece of litter or organizing a cleanup with others in your community). **See if you can brainstorm at least 5 possible ways to address any problem you identify.**
3. Do something, if you're moved to. Everything you do is something you can learn from. Afterwards, ask yourself if you feel the action you took was effective, if you are well suited to it, or if there's a more appropriate role for you to be in, and what you could do to make a bigger impact next time.

Realistically speaking, you can't do something about every problem you see (sadly, there are far too many), and we will talk more about this below, but for now just start noticing problems, consider how you could make a difference, and learn as you go.

- **The Big 8, Privilege, and Allyship**

Activism for social justice typically centers around issues of power. Who has it and how do they maintain it? Who suffers as a result? How can we help those with less power achieve the lives they want for themselves?

As we embark to address the problems in our world, we will likely notice or be affected more by some than others depending on our personal experience and our own level of power and privilege.



For instance, if you have experienced being targeted by police, or if your community has been affected by mass incarceration, the injustices of our criminal justice system are right there in your face. If you have the privilege of not fearing for your own safety when you see police, of not worrying about if police will harm your friends or family, then this issue might not be on your radar. It could be something you're just learning about and questioning from seeing stories online. If this issue seems irrelevant to you, maybe you've never even thought about it or don't see what the fuss is all about.

Our personal experience and privilege deeply affects how we see the world, the issues we are most concerned about, and what we can do about them.

We must recognize that if we are not directly affected by something, then we have certain privileges that others don't, and if so it's up to us to educate ourselves so we can challenge injustice so others do not need to experience racism, sexism, or other oppressive systems.

If you or people you care about are African American, gay, trans, Muslim, Mexican, an immigrant, or a member of another group that has been historically targeted and is especially at risk from the current administration, you may be very aware of the policies and challenges that harm these communities. If not, you may or may not know about -- or even believe -- the injustices these communities are facing. In that case, it is up to you to educate yourself and to learn about what others have been experiencing.

**“In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist.”
-Angela Davis**

If these issues do not affect you directly it is important to “check your privilege” to notice if you are speaking about something that you really can't know about, or challenging the experiences of people who have been victims of treatment that you don't have to worry about. If you find yourself criticizing people for making bad choices, consider that they might have been dealing with experiences you can't relate to and should therefore refrain from judging.

Listening to people with less privilege can help those with more privilege learn from their experience and try to help bring about change.

The term The Big 8 was coined to describe some key markers of people who have commonly faced discrimination. These are:

- Ethnicity
- Race/skin color
- Religion
- Sexual Orientation
- Gender
- Age
- Socioeconomic Status
- Disabilities or Appearance



If you fear or have experienced discrimination because of where you fall in any of these categories, this might be an area you are uniquely positioned to do something about, though of course you may want to focus on something else, which is fine too.

If you do not experience systemic prejudice as a result of one of these categories, that is a privilege. A massive privilege!

Privilege: a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group of people.

Just by virtue of your reading this and my writing this, we are clearly very privileged in some ways. For instance, to have the wealth and access to electricity and the Internet, to have gotten an education to be able to read and write, and to speak English — a language that enables economic opportunities around the world — are all privileges. By virtue of reading this, we each have the ability to see, or access to a program or person to read to us if we don't. These are all things we probably take for granted as we go through life. We may not recognize privileges we have, while it is much easier to notice privileges we don't have.

Ideally, everyone would have basic privileges like affordable health care, good schools, a safe neighborhood, a criminal justice system that values their life, good employment opportunities, access to healthy food and clean water, and more. But the reality is that many people don't.

If we are privileged not to have to worry about these things affecting us, we may not fully understand the experience of people who have been or are being discriminated against or suffering for these reasons.

That's why it's very important to consider one's own privilege and how it might create bias or impact your awareness of social issues. As social justice advocates, we want to make sure that we are not perpetuating, and in fact are challenging, unjust systems.

Given the racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, and other prejudice and oppression that many face, it is that much more important that we not just be *not racist* but *anti-racist* — that we are being proactive in addressing these problems versus passively not taking action in a world where there is such oppression.

Take a few minutes to consider where you fall in each of these categories. In which do you benefit from privilege, and in which do you not?

If you have no idea if you have ever been impacted by this classification, most likely you are privileged in that way, as those who have been victimized because of their ethnicity, skin color, or sexual orientation are likely very aware of it.

There is an intersectionality to these issues as well, where prejudice in one area is compounded by prejudice in another -- such as black women who may experience both racism and sexism.

This can be uncomfortable to think about but valuable to consider as we come to grips with our world and what we can do to help improve it.



We're just giving you a little bit of space here to reflect on these categories, but we invite you to reflect more on the role these aspects of identity affect you. You could literally write a book about it.

Big 8 categories	Advantages or disadvantages you've experienced as a result
Ethnicity + immigration status	
Race + skin color	
Religion	
Sexual Orientation	
Gender	
Age	
Socioeconomic Status/wealth	
Disabilities or Appearance	

Leverage your privilege

If you are privileged enough not to need to worry about being victimized by unjust systems that target people for these reasons, you are uniquely positioned to do something as an ally to help change these systems and the oppressive beliefs and actions that perpetuate them.

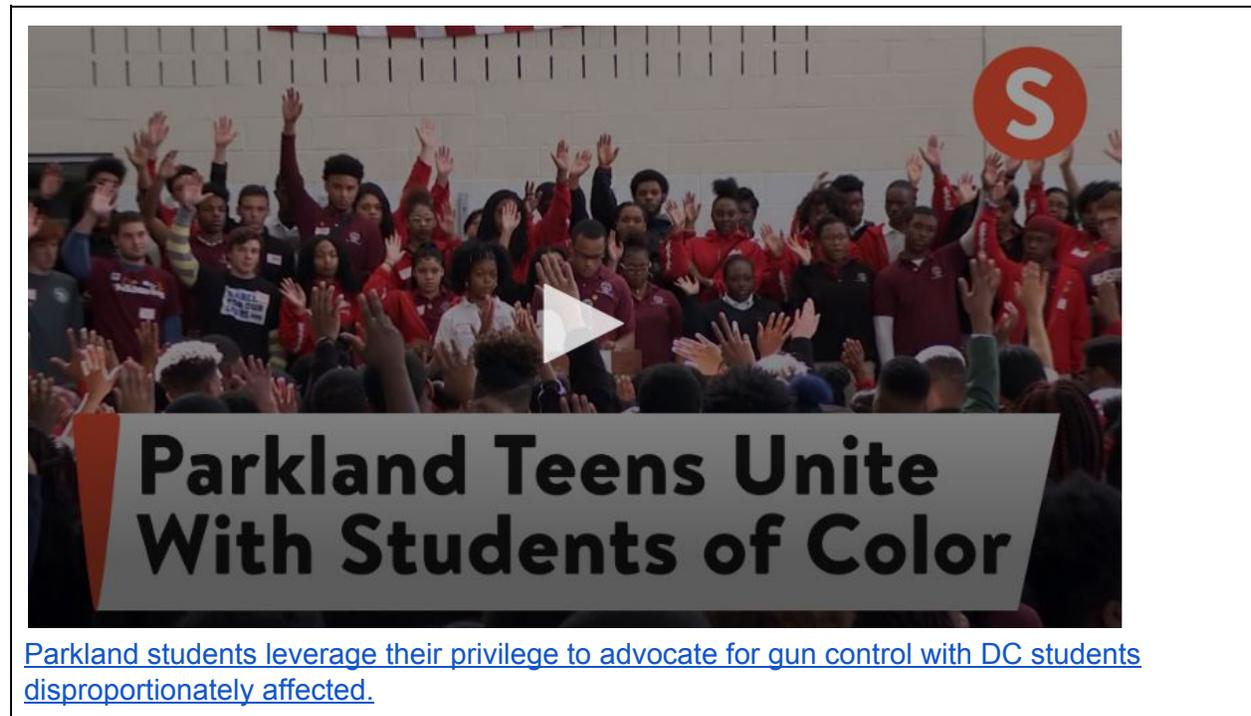
Sometimes people can feel guilty, and then defensive, if they do not experience prejudice for these things, but these problems are not helped by people feeling guilty. These are systemic issues that developed long before we were born, and they are not our fault -- but they are all of our responsibility to change.

The key is to leverage our privilege and to choose to take responsibility for trying to rectify injustices so that everyone can experience the same basic privileges.

If we have white privilege, we can leverage it by advocating for inclusive policies in our community or being the ones to engage with police at a march. If we have male privilege, we can leverage it by speaking up when men are making misogynistic comments. If we have wealth privilege, we can leverage it by providing needed funds to support causes we believe in. These actions — not guilt — will bring about the change and justice we wish to see.

Note that this does *not* mean taking the lead and being the person out in front of those with less privilege. It means supporting and uplifting those who are most affected, sometimes from behind the scenes.

Take a look at [this beautiful example](#) of students from Parkland, Florida, leveraging their privilege to elevate the voices of African American students in Chicago who have also been deeply affected by gun violence and who, despite garnering little media attention, were speaking out on this issue long before the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School that dominated headlines.



People of privilege also need to recognize the threats those without privilege might experience, and try to mitigate these threats as much as possible. Case in point: [white people calling the police on black people](#) who are minding their own business and doing nothing illegal. Most white people were raised to look to police for protection, but in a society with such implicit bias among police, a 911 call may put innocent black lives at risk.

- **Interconnectedness of Issues**

The more that we learn about social issues, even ones that seem unrelated, the more we see how interconnected they are. Start getting curious about the problems that you care about and how they are connected with other social ills.

For instance:

How is poverty connected to war? They might seem to be totally unrelated, but consider this:



→The government spends massive amounts of our tax dollars on war, yet legislators often claim there are no funds and therefore a need to cut services like health care, food stamps, shelters, and education that poor people rely on.

→Many veterans return home with serious physical or mental disabilities, unable to work, and are a large portion of the homeless population.

→By harming other countries through war, they experience poverty that is terrible for them and also has an impact on the global economy that eventually affects us.

These two issues of war and poverty are rarely discussed together, yet they are incredibly strongly linked. If your passion is working to alleviate poverty, you may decide you want to do this by advocating against war or increased military spending. Sometimes there are counterintuitive or indirect ways for us to pursue our goals.

These two issues are just one example, and we want you to think of a lot more.

Ask yourself or research how each of the issues below are related to one another, or to another cause you're passionate about, and consider how addressing one injustice might help the other.

- Racism
- Environmental destruction
- Homophobia
- Poverty
- Animal rights
- Sexism
- Health care
- Education
- Gun violence
- Mass incarceration and police brutality

How can these connections inform the actions you take on these issues? If you're not sure of how different issues connect, start researching and see if you can find something when you enter the two terms together into a search engine.

- Look for the Low-Lying Fruit

Start with the easy stuff first.

Are there simple changes you can make in your own life, at school, or at work that you know would make a difference?

Spend a day or two getting curious going through life, asking yourself, "What's something simple I could do to make the world better?"

You can get started through your daily choices:



5 Easy Forms of Activism You Can (Probably) Do Today

1. [Eat less meat](#). Even better, cut out animal products as much as you can. Raising animals for food is the biggest global cause of climate change and wastes massive environmental resources. Eating fewer (or no) animal products is also the best thing you can do for animals and withdraws support from an industry with terrible labor practices and that successfully lobbies against food safety and public health and in favor of enormous tax subsidies to prop up unhealthy products. It also [has significant health benefits](#). Check out these [great tips for going veg on a budget!](#)
2. Use and [buy less stuff](#). When you do need to buy something, look to buy it second-hand, consider the packaging, and the business you're supporting through your potential purchase. Do you really need a bag or a straw? When it's time, dispose of stuff as well as you can. Recycle what you can, compost if you can, reuse or donate what you can. And you know what else counts as less stuff that is maybe the most important thing to buy less of? Gasoline. Find ways to use less -- whether by driving a more fuel-efficient car, carpooling, walking, or taking public transit.
3. Donate to a cause you care about. Use some of the funds you saved above to give to a great cause. Even if you can only give \$5, this feels good and is an affirmation to you and the organization you've given to that you want to make a difference. Of course, if you can give more, challenge yourself to do so, knowing how good it will feel to make an impact on a cause you believe in. When you donate to a nonprofit, you're literally paying someone to help the world.
4. Sign petitions on [Change.org](#). Someone has done the work for you in identifying a problem and the decision-maker and action to resolve it. The more people who sign, the more likely the decision-maker will feel pressure to make the change. This is also a great way to learn more about problems in our world that you might not be as familiar with.
5. Have a say in politics. Call your legislators and tell their office what you care about. Identify your elected officials and their [contact info here](#). A phone call can literally take less than 1 minute. It doesn't need to be polished and perfect. You can just say, "Hi, I'm calling to ask that the legislator does more to" protect our environment, fund our schools, end mass incarceration, protect women's rights to birth control, or whatever is most important to you. That's it! They will likely ask your name and zip code, and you're done! If you know a particular bill to ask them to vote yes or no on, great! You can download the [5 Calls](#) or [Daily Action](#) apps to get daily notifications on topics to call on. And, of course, when it is time, vote, and get others to do the same. ([Register to vote here!](#))

Bonus: Is there something you could tweak at school or work that you need to do anyway, and that could incorporate some social benefit? If you're a student, maybe you could choose an issue you care about to focus on for your upcoming research paper or presentation, or that staff bonding activity you were already wanting to plan at work could be volunteering at a local organization or doing a fundraiser for a great cause?

These are some relatively easy things that are great ways to get started, and if they are all you do that's great and really adds up. Reading this guide will of course help you to take your activism even further.

- Getting Out of Your Comfort Zone

One thing that can intimidate people about becoming an activist is that it can be nerve-wracking to take a position and really put yourself out there on a cause you care about.

Well, we have good news and bad news.

The good news is that there is [this video!](#) And as you will see in it, **you don't need to be the one in front of the room at the center of attention to be an activist or a leader.** It can be just as important to be a "follower" of someone who is leading in a way that inspires you.



First Follower: Leadership Lessons from Dancing Guy - YouTube

YouTube · Derek Sivers

[Watch this.](#) It's just 3 minutes.

It doesn't make sense for us all to try to be the leader. We need people in different roles, and certain people will be better suited to be out in front.

So, look around. Is there someone in your community who's doing something worth following? Maybe supporting them could really help get the awesome thing they're doing off the ground! Or is there an organization already making a big difference that you want to join in on? Go for it! That's a lot easier, and you can probably be a lot more effective doing that instead of starting your own organization.



You don't need to be the "leader," and in fact you are taking leadership by making a strategic choice to support someone else who is better poised to make a difference in that role.

The bad news we mentioned is twofold.

First, depending on your goals, you might really need to step up and be willing to be a "lone nut" on an issue you care about, at least at first. If, for example, you're a student and you want to work on a cause that nobody else is working on there, you would need to be the one to get it off the ground and get other people to join you. That can be hard not just if we're not sure what to do (and, just saying, but most people are not sure what to do almost every moment of the day!), but also if we are scared to be the center of attention or to be the person upfront getting something started. More on that soon.

Second, even if you're not the "lone nut," being an activist does sometimes involve putting yourself out there in a way that exposes you to other people's judgments and opinions.

It's a lot easier to sit on the sidelines and judge other people than it is to actually get out there and do something yourself.

Part of developing an activist mindset is being willing to get out there knowing that some people might criticize you, make fun of you, ignore you, or otherwise have an opinion about you.

Which brings us to our next point.

- **Make a Bigger Difference While Caring Less What People Think**

Caring About the Right Things

To pick maybe the least controversial issue an activist can advocate for, say you decide to work on trying to register voters. When you're at a table at a festival or school asking people to register, some people might have an opinion about you being there. Actually, everyone will have an opinion on everything, but someone may have a negative opinion that they choose to share with you.

"That's stupid," "Get a life," "I'm not interested," "Sorry," or some other variation of "no" are responses most grassroots activists have heard many times. Of course, more controversial topics will probably result in even more negative responses, but your activism on that cause might be more needed and make a bigger difference.

Most people naturally want to be liked by everyone, but our goal as activists is to help our cause, even if that means not being liked by some people. In this case, our goal is to register a lot of voters.

If you spend an hour volunteering and you register 50 new voters while also having some people tell you what you're doing is stupid, would you consider it a success? From an activist standpoint, this is absolutely a success! The key is for you to not worry about the stupid things people said, which really won't matter if you helped 50 more people vote!



Years down the line, do you want to look back and remember that you did your best to help your cause, or do you want to feel regret or disappointment in yourself for giving up because of what some people might have said?

In life, we have to come to terms with the fact that we cannot please everyone. Someone will always have an opinion about anything we do. Trying to please everyone (which you can never do) means giving away your own power over your life, and of course people could judge you for that too.

Think of any successful celebrity. For every famous singer, there are people who criticize their music or talent. Every successful business will have people who criticize their products.

Activists are even more at risk for this because we are challenging the status quo, and people can react negatively to that.

While Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is seen as a hero today, while he was alive, he was hated, and most white people disagreed with him and the entire civil rights movement. Yet, he and countless other civil rights activists courageously kept going despite not just rude but hateful and violent comments and actions. They were clearly on the right side of history in shaping our world for the better.

Activists are ahead of their time and are literally trying to change the course of history. We need to accept that not everyone is going to agree with us.

The key is to act according to our own integrity -- to what we believe in, and leave other people to their opinion. We are doing this for what we care about -- not to win a popularity contest.

Be kind.

Even when people give you a hard time, try to find a way to be kind back.

This is not meant to tone-police or excuse any awful behavior, but as activists we are trying to hold people to a higher standard of behavior and in fact we are trying to get people to hold themselves to a higher standard of behavior. If in the past they were racist, sexist, or otherwise prejudiced, we want them to hold themselves to a higher standard. If they didn't care about the environment or animals, we want them to hold themselves to a higher standard.

If we don't exemplify this higher standard ourselves, we risk being seen as hypocrites or just not living in accordance with our own stated values of respect and compassion.

If this is hard for you, try to put yourself in this person's shoes or, if necessary, try to fake it. We will go into this a lot more throughout this guide, but we will likely be more effective if we are kind, and we will probably be happier people who have more longevity as activists if we take a respectful approach.

Think of Michelle Obama's classic recommendation, "When they go low, we go high." This approach maintains our integrity, appeals to neutral parties observing the interaction (even if it doesn't win over the person "going low"), and is a call to others to elevate their behavior as well.



- Be Someone People Want to Be Like

Think of the stereotype of an angry activist who yells at people to make them feel guilty to change their behavior. Does that inspire you to get out there and join their cause? For most people, probably not. Most people don't like feeling angry or disconnected from others.

Then think about Dr. Martin Luther King and his grounded, strategic, positive -- yet no less committed -- approach that brought people together and was aspirational in creating a better world. Wouldn't you rather join that cause?

While we can't just try to please everyone, we also must recognize our power to inspire others to adopt our way of thinking or to join our cause.

There are different ways to approach activism, as we'll talk more about below, but the more you can be someone that people admire and want to be like, the more you can inspire other people to follow your lead.

Basically, you're so awesome, we want to clone you! We want there to be more people like you. And how do we get more people like you? One way is for you to be someone that people want to be like.

Some qualities most of us admire and respect in other people:

- Confidence
- Courage
- Happiness
- Energy
- Focus
- Sense of humor
- Integrity and kindness
- Successful at what they do
- Happy with who they are

It's OK if you don't identify with any of these things. Ask yourself, what kind of person do I want to be? And then "fake it til you make it" by embodying that quality. Start taking actions consistent with that approach. Like, if you were someone who was courageous, what would you do?

Being kind and respectful to the people you interact with will typically lead to greater success. People are more open and less defensive to your message if you communicate it in a respectful way. The positive, non-violent approaches of Dr. King and Gandhi were respectful yet no less strong in their commitment as if they had been yelling.

Having said that, there are definitely times when this might be nearly impossible or when expressing your full emotions about a serious issue are called for. The more able you are to be in control of your emotions, though, the more you can express yourself strategically instead of impulsively.



If you struggle with controlling your emotions when interacting with people, read our section further along in the guide called “Dealing With Difficult Emotions -- How Not to Be an Angry Activist.”

- **Opportunity Cost**

The concept of opportunity cost means that any time you are doing one thing, you are therefore not doing something else. The same goes for money. If you just spent \$10 on this thing, then you don't have that \$10 to spend on that thing.

Opportunity cost is especially important for activists to think about because we all have a limited amount of time, money, and energy that we can devote to the causes we care about.

Later in this guide, we will ask you to assess how much time you realistically have for your activism. Whether you work full-time for a great cause or you only have a few minutes here and there to focus on your cause, your time is precious.

When we start thinking about spending our time as wisely as possible, it can really shift what we do. If you spend an hour arguing with someone on Facebook who will probably never come around to your point of view, is that really the best use of your time? Is there something else that you could have done in that hour to make a bigger difference?

How best to spend our time is an ongoing life question for all of us to consider, but as activists we urge you to always reflect on how to best devote your time, money, and energy to make a difference.

- **Balancing Urgency and Patience**

One of the most challenging things for activists to deal with emotionally is the urgent need for justice, with the recognition that significant systemic change often takes a very long time.

The Reality of Marketing a Message

Any person who works in marketing is familiar with the idea that it takes many exposures to a new product or service before a customer will buy it.

Rarely do we hear about a new movie and immediately run out to see it unless we are already very familiar with the actors or the story. Otherwise, one ad probably barely even registers in our consciousness. It might take several ads before we even think about or remember the movie's name, and even still we might need to have heard about it from a friend or seen a great review in order to go see it.

This is for something as simple as seeing a movie. Consider if we are asking someone to change the way they see the world, to change habitual behaviors, or to challenge strongly held views that they inherited from their friends, family or religion.

Consider [“The Lone Nut” video](#) we referenced earlier and how much harder it is for people to join in on something unfamiliar or uncomfortable for them until everyone around them does it,

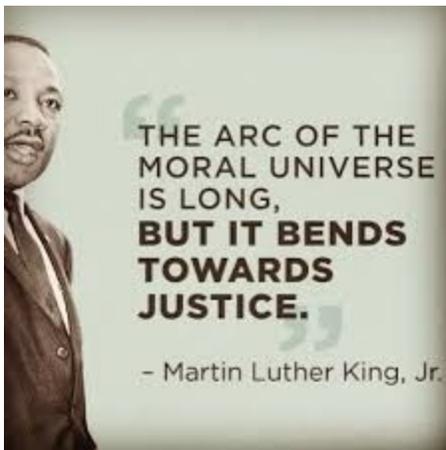
and how much easier it is then for some to come around. If the “shirtless dancing guy” was yelling at everybody because they didn’t get up and dance with him right away, probably nobody would have gotten up to dance with him at all. Eventually, people saw him essentially as a role model doing something fun and courageous, and eventually they came around.

We need to be prepared for it to take a while for people to come around, as well as to accept that some people never will.

Plenty of people have never seen the most popular movies of all time, but advertisers accept that. Likewise, we don't need to persuade the entire world to come around to our point of view — at least not yet.

Once there is a tipping point of a certain number of people who feel a certain way, we start to see significant change -- from gay marriage being legalized to sexual harassment not being tolerated to cultural habits like more people recycling or eating organic. These wins then snowball, leading to more acceptance of LGBT equality, changing behavior standards in the workplace, and recycling or more sustainable food choices being more normalized and accessible.

Advertisers focus on reaching their target audience and getting as many as customers as possible, and they know not everyone will buy right away. We need to do the same, which sometimes means being patient, Targeting those we feel will be most interested at first and accepting that not everyone will jump in right away, and then presenting a movement that others will want to join in the future when they are ready.



Progress Takes Time

As much as we need to bring about change on so many different issues, it can be helpful to keep in mind the context that the fight for social justice has come a long way.

So many of the problems that exist today are improvements from the past -- even if only in the sense that people are more aware of them, and we have technological advances that help educate people about them.

Dr. Martin Luther King famously said that “the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” This arc doesn’t just bend itself, though. It is through the efforts of countless individuals speaking out and advocating for what they believe in that we see advances in issues like racism, sexism, LGBTQ equality, and recognition of the need to protect the environment and animals.

It all adds up.

Consider for a moment how much activism has gone into any one social issue. Think about all of the people who participated in the Underground Railroad, every single person who attended the March on Washington, people who participated in sit-ins. Consider those who broke barriers set by racism, from the first African American students to attend integrated schools to Jackie

Robinson to the women whose stories were told in Hidden Figures (amazing film!) to the people whose names we will never know but who took literally countless courageous actions to challenge racism on every level. Consider all of the powerful conversations with racist family members or co-workers, the Freedom Riders, the voter drives, and on and on throughout the country's history.

Each time anyone participated in these actions, they did not see long-term systemic change.

They may have wondered if they made a difference at all.

However, the cumulative effect of all of these countless actions is what brings about systemic change. We must keep this in mind when we act for change -- that our actions are cumulative with others who are taking action as well, and it all adds up.

We must feel urgency to take action to bring about needed change. And yet we cannot give up when we do not see change happen as quickly as we want.



- Positive Mental Attitude

Maintaining a positive mental attitude is hard enough for the average person. Yet, activists face an added challenge of needing to put oneself out there as well as to find ways to stay positive in spite of knowing and caring so much about the problems of our world. And of course there are temptations to give up or feel demoralized when change doesn't come as soon as we want it.



There are many reasons to be cynical, but if you had no hope and didn't believe in your ability to make a difference, why would you take any action? You wouldn't. So you need to find ways to think positively -- and there is actually plenty of reason to feel hopeful. There are so many people doing amazing things everyday. Take a look at our [YEA Camp blog](#) if you need some examples and inspiration!

At any given moment, you can find reasons for optimism and pessimism. The key is where to put your focus.

This applies to the state of the world and activism, as well as to you, yourself. You will encounter all kinds of setbacks in life, and the bigger your goals, the more likely you are to stumble along the way.

Limiting beliefs and behaviors

Some of us may be starting off having inherited or accepted limiting beliefs about ourselves or having counterproductive habitual behaviors that we need to move past.

We are bombarded by so many negative messages in society — from capitalist-based messages in commercials that tell us we need to buy things or look a certain way to be accepted, to pressure to achieve levels of status or success in school or career, to facing challenges of stereotypes or prejudice based on what we look like or who we are, and more.

There may also be negative messaging we have internalized from family members or traumatic childhood experiences.

There are enough obstacles to making a difference without us creating more for ourselves.

So think about it for yourself:

Are there any limiting beliefs or behaviors you know you have?

You can identify a limiting belief by silently finishing the sentence "I can't really make a difference/accomplish my goals because..." This might be something related to being shy, busy, disorganized, or a procrastinator, or something deeper, like stupid or weird or a loser. Get quiet and listen to what you tell yourself, if anything. (If you can't finish that sentence because you insist that you can make a difference, then awesome! This might not be an issue for you. Be grateful!)

To get more specific, think of anything that you think might stop you in your activism. Ask yourself:

- Where did this belief or behavior come from?
- Is it true or actually based on facts about you, or is this just someone's opinion? If true, why do you think you are that way?
- If true, does this actually affect your activism? If not true, awesome and move on!
- If true, how can you overcome it?



As an example, maybe you think of yourself as shy, and that poses challenges for you. Why do you think you are that way? You probably did not come out of the womb shy! How can you get past this or overcome this challenge so that it doesn't hold you back?

Limiting beliefs often manifest into self-sabotaging or unhealthy actions. Sometimes we are more aware of these behaviors than we are of the thoughts that contribute to them. Consider:

- Do you spend your time in ways that you feel are good for you and others?
- Do you treat people the way you want to be treated, and do they treat you that way?
- Are there any behaviors you engage in that interfere with you achieving your goals? How does this behavior actually benefit you, and how can you get that same benefit while also pursuing your goals?

You must find ways to manage your mind and the ways negative thinking manifests in unhealthy behavior so that you keep going, stay positive, and face the challenges of life and activism.

Of course this is easier said than done, but there are endless resources you can seek out for help. Reading self help books, listening to podcasts, doing personal growth seminars, practicing meditation, journaling, or going to therapy can all be ways to address these deeper issues.

Prepare for failure and develop a growth mindset. If you know anything about baseball (or if you don't), the best hitters hit about .300. That means that out of every 1000 at-bats, they get 300 hits -- meaning they get out 700(!) times. That's because it's really hard to hit a baseball!

Literally, the best baseball players in history got out about 7 of every 10 times.

Imagine if someone expected to get a hit every time, or even half the time! If they couldn't accept that sometimes they won't get hits, and that is part of the game, they would give up fast! And imagine if they showed up to bat convinced that they were terrible because they had just gotten out the last few times in a row. Their chances of getting a hit the next time would probably go down.

As activists, we will be unsuccessful at times, or at least it might seem that way at the time. We need to mentally prepare for this and not let it affect us in how we approach what we are doing or whom we are speaking to.

Each time we experience some level of failure, we've got to think in a productive way that we can learn from, which might mean needing to put our emotions aside. If a campaign doesn't seem to be going well, what could you learn from that? Even a successful endeavor can always be improved upon, but sometimes we don't take the time to reflect on how.

We must work to think about ourselves in a positive light, to strive for success but accept and learn from failures as part of life, and to develop ourselves as we go forth to make a bigger difference as activists and to succeed in any area of life that is important to us.

Surrounding ourselves with positive people, practicing looking for the good in us and around us, reminding ourselves that change takes time, and developing ourselves in any way we want to improve will set the stage for success in anything we do.



Especially if this comes hard for you, check out our “Giving Yourself a Pep Talk” worksheet further along in this Guide.

Appreciate progress

Anyone who has worked on trying to pass laws is familiar with the compromising that often happens along the way. What might have been a great bill to begin with is just pretty good in the end. But if that great bill had no chance of passing, we have to appreciate the win of a hard-fought pretty good one. Of course it's not perfect, but achieving perfect laws or convincing people to change 100% of their views or behaviors is hard, and we must recognize that most change happens little by little. We can always strive to build on that accomplishment in the future, rather than achieving nothing and hoping for a bigger win someday,

There's a campaign that's called Meatless Mondays, which is trying to encourage people to try out eating vegetarian one day a week. Instead of focusing on the 6 days someone isn't participating, appreciating and encouraging someone for what they are doing is a way to not only stay positive and encouraging, it also makes the other person feel better on their path than if you were to berate them for not doing more. Then, maybe they discover a new meal or restaurant they love and decide to incorporate it into their diet other days of the week.

As changemakers, we often put our focus on so many problems in the world, but appreciating progress, even without perfection, helps us encourage ourselves and those all around us to keep achieving more small victories.

Activism 101 Video Presentation

[This half-hour video](#) is from an “Activism 101” presentation that can be helpful at this point. This was a presentation at the Sacramento VegFest so it is very targeted to activism on that issue, but the basic ideas can be applied to other causes.

[Watch this Activism 101 presentation here.](#)





10 Types of Activism to Choose From, From Simple To Complex

OK, getting down to action.

YEA Camp doesn't focus on any one particular social justice issue because they are all connected (as you looked at above), because we want each person to focus on what they're most passionate about, and because the basics of activism are similar across issues.

One guiding strategy throughout is one you might have heard of: **Think global. Act local.** With any large problem that you're concerned about, you need to find ways to act in your community or network.

Here are some key ways you can get involved as an activist regardless of the issue you're most passionate about.

If you try one and aren't feeling it -- either because you are dreading doing it or because you don't feel it's impactful, try something else! As you try out more things, you will probably figure out where you feel you are making the bigger difference and where you want to focus more of your activist time.

At YEA Camp we do skill-building training on many of these topics to learn a lot more, but most of these are things you just need to jump in and get started on. Your efforts can get a lot easier and more impactful with practice.

1. Daily actions

Start (or continue) shifting daily behavior where possible, including:

- Making eco-friendly choices, like driving less, eating less (or no) meat, buying less stuff. Even if the environment isn't your activist focus, literally all life relies on the sustainability of our planet, and those with the least privilege will be most affected, so all of us can seek to do more to reduce our environmental impact.
- Boycott companies or products that you know engage in unethical behavior.
- Go out of your way to be kind and to help others.
- Speak up against bigotry when you see the opportunity to do so. [Here's a great video to help.](#)
- Following organizations on social media and getting on their email lists, doing their recommended actions and sharing their campaigns.
- Get people in your community involved too! [Plogging, anyone?](#)
- Be yourself! If just who you are challenges the status quo, like if you are challenging traditional capitalist superficiality or conventional gender norms or stereotypes, you do you! By your very existence, you help create an environment where others feel free to be themselves too.

2. Using specialized skills or talents

Do you have any skills that you could apply to a cause you care about? Are you:

- A graphic or web designer, or techie
- An attorney (every org could use your guidance!)



- In a leadership role at a company, school, organization, or in the community
- An artist or influencer
- A doctor, nurse, therapist, bodyworker, or veterinarian
- A writer, journalist, or marketing professional
- A teacher ([check out Institute for Humane Education!](#))
- Able to apply some specialized knowledge, skill, experience, or talent
- Wealthy and in a position to donate

Whether you offer your services to a nonprofit you love or incorporate an activist mentality into your work, there have got to be ways to bring your own unique blend of experience to your activism, and for some of us applying our professional skills can be the most effective thing we can do. Check out [this inspiring one-minute video](#) of how this man uses his skill and passion for cutting hair to help people.

Later in this guide we will ask you to do a Self Assessment to consider what skills you might be able to contribute.

3. Raising awareness

Consider how you would most like to get the word out about what's important to you. This will depend on your own passions, skills, comfort level with technology, and opinions of what you think is the best use of your time for your cause. This could include:

- Writing, like for a school newspaper or blog. (Try to find a publication that will get your message out for you, versus just your own blog that you need to publicize.)
- [Passing out leaflets](#) or putting them in a cafe or store that has a space for flyers from the community. Most nonprofits will send you their leaflets for free.
- Making or just sharing YouTube videos. [The now infamous Starbucks video](#) that captured two African American men being arrested for no reason was taken by a woman at the coffee shop and has been seen millions of times, leading to the company training its staff in implicit bias to prevent future such incidents.
- Posting on social media. [Check out these tips](#) from a YEA Camp staff member!
- Making art, whether visual art, spoken word, or other creative ways you might have of expressing yourself
- Going to community or political hearings for you to share about a problem you see.
- Setting up an info table at a festival or school or community event.

4. Direct service

While some types of activism seek to address the root causes of any problem, which we absolutely need to do to bring about long-term change, there are also things we can do to help those in need now, like:

- Volunteering at a shelter or community organization, like a local [Food Not Bombs](#) chapter or soup kitchen, a local animal shelter, or through a mentorship opportunity like with a local Boys & Girls Club or other community center. Check out [VolunteerMatch](#) to get connected.
- Creating a food or clothing drive in your school or work
- Being a mentor or helping people directly.
- Organizing or participating in community cleanup.
- Other opportunities you see in your community to directly help those in need



5. Philanthropy

- If you're in a position to donate, every nonprofit or community group needs more resources to expand their efforts. Those with wealth are in a huge position to lift up those in need or to shift the balance of power.
- Create an online fundraiser for an organization you believe in. You can create your own page through a site like [Crowdrise](#), or some organizations will have their own platform for you to share directly
- Find creative ways to raise money for a cause you believe in. This could be a local event you do, from a garage sale to a dinner party, or by otherwise creating opportunities for people in your community to learn about and support the organization or cause of your choice.

6. Social entrepreneurship

Do you own a business that has a social mission? Or could you? Maybe you're in a leadership role in a company you could influence? See if you can get creative, [like this bar owner!](#)

- Are there ways you can donate a portion of your profits to a cause you care about?
- Could you add a social mission to your work, such as offering some products or services pro bono?
- Could you start or work in a business that does good for the world?
- If you are innovation-minded, could you [find a market solution to a social issue?](#)

7. Advocacy

Advocacy is awareness-raising taken up a notch and directed at a decision-maker. What problems do you see around you that certain people in power have the ability to address?

This could include politics but could also be campaigning for systemic change, policy or infrastructure. This could include:

- Signing online petitions
- Trying to implement a policy regarding your school or company's purchasing of certain products, commitment to diversity, handling of harassment claims, or other things they could implement to improve working conditions or social impact.
- Trying to shift funding to launch a new program or expand access, from getting more recycle bins or changing the food in your school cafeteria to hiring more guidance counselors or changing budgetary plans
- Setting up meetings with decision-makers to make your request

8. Empowering and connecting with others

This could be through:

- Bringing people together or caring for those in need in your community.
- Registering voters -- [share this link](#), grab a handful or voter reg forms at the post office for people in your life, or volunteer at events designed to register voters
- Organizing voter reg events, like setting up a table at a busy area or festival that will attract people whom you want to encourage to vote
- Starting or joining a school club, MeetUp, or [Indivisible chapter](#)
- Encouraging others to get involved in any activism you're doing or considering
- Connecting with other activists to support one another and form deeper relationships so you can help



9. Politics

Get started by:

- Learning [who your legislators are](#) and start contacting them and supporting or campaigning for those you believe in -- or against those you oppose. It is usually far easier to impact local politics than federal or statewide policy, and you might see results a lot sooner, so you don't need to just focus on the federal government. We don't endorse candidates, but find organizations that recommend and advocate for candidates who stand for your values. [Real Justice PAC](#) is trying to elect more progressive district attorneys in cities around the country or other organizations advocating locally. [League of Conservation Voters](#) endorses environmentally friendly candidates.
- Read our "[10 Ways Kids Too Young to Vote Can Get Involved in Politics](#)" blog post, which actually applies equally to adults too! Take it further with this [tutorial from Indivisible](#) and join an [Indivisible Group](#).
- Connect with [Swing Left](#), [Sister District](#), or [MoveOn](#).
- Sign up for [text alerts of daily actions](#) you can take.
- Follow [CTZNWell](#) for regular political updates and practices on sustainable activism.

10. Disruption and pressure

A fundamental principle of campaign planning is the escalation of tactics. This means that if you're trying to change a policy at your school, workplace, or town, your first step isn't to go on a hunger strike or launch a protest. It's to make a request of the right person. For all you know, they will say yes and implement your request right away, and you will be done! Then you can move on to your next world-changing mission.

If they say no, then you need to figure out how to convince them to change their mind. Some possible ways to do that:

- Solving the concern they had (like finding a cheaper way to do it)
- Going over their head to ask someone else who might be more likely to say yes
- Showing them that there is more benefit or support for this issue than they realized.
- Showing them that they could gain good publicity if they agree to your demands, or avoid bad publicity — which ideally wouldn't be their motivation, but realistically it might be.

You want to escalate with more and more pressure until they say yes.

You ideally want to have a positive, polite relationship with any decision-maker, even if they run a company or institution you entirely oppose, unless or until you are clear that they are actively blocking the change you are seeking, and that a collaborative relationship with them is just not possible if you want to proceed.

Disruption as a tactic is typically used as a last resort, as it will surely hurt your relationship with any decision-makers if you start protesting or publicly making them look bad, but sometimes there is no other way to move forward in our efforts for change.

In some cases, disruption can be the most effective approach in an urgent state of emergency for your cause or to draw massive attention and engagement to a timely injustice. Examples are the massive [protests at airports](#) across the US the day the travel ban was announced, national



[protests of Trump's presidency](#), and local protests in cities [time](#) after [time](#) after [time](#) after [time](#) when police kill unarmed African Americans and yet make no attempts to hold officers accountable or change their approach to policing. Clearly these issues are long past making a request or having a meeting with a decision-maker.

Some ways to participate in these types of actions are:

- Attend or plan a protest or walkout. Successful [walkouts by teachers](#) advocating for increased funding and students [protesting gun violence](#) came after years of advocacy that did not produce the results they were wanting.
- Gather with a group of people at a location that the decision-maker will notice and be bothered by, especially if it draws media attention, like their office building. Again, [these are acts of desperation when nothing else has worked](#).
- Organize or participate in a boycott of a certain service that this decision-maker will take notice of, or [urge companies to participate in a boycott](#)
- Draw attention to the decision-maker's failure to take action, like with attention-getting messages on social media or at an event they will be at

Choosing Your Own Activist Adventure

OK, you've got those 10 categories, and lots of actions you can take among them. Which do you choose?

If you know already, get to it! Don't let us stop you!

If you're not sure, or want some help thinking it through, we're going to break down how to use your time most wisely, and then help you brainstorm ways to get started

- Self Assessment - What? Who? How? When? Why?

As you think about how you will make a difference, it's helpful to first consider several key questions about yourself to figure out how you may be best positioned to have the most impact.

1. What issues are most important to you? Why do you care as much as you do about them? How might who you are, or your personal story, history, identity, or experience be relevant to what you care most about?

Of all the issues in the world, think about why the one(s) you are most passionate about certain problems and not others. Does this relate back to the Big 8 and your personal life experience or that of a friend or family member? Have you had a particular experience that you could share in a way that really informs and inspires people? Is there something about who you are that could uniquely position you to make a difference or makes your story different from others? Maybe your passion for this issue busts a stereotype, you have a different story of awakening, or you can speak from personally experiencing the injustice yourself? In the Communication Tips section below, we ask you to think about your personal story and invite you to develop your Personal Manifesto, if you want to take this further. See if you can share in a few sentences why this issue is so important, not just in general but to you personally.



2. Skills, Passions, and Strengths:

What do you love to do? What are you good at? Sometimes these are the same (lucky you!), sometimes not, but either way these are a great place to start when thinking about the type of activism you might want to do. [Check out this one-minute video for some inspiration](#) and see if it sparks any ideas.

This could mean applying something you already do for your job (or a high-level hobby) like if you're an attorney, photographer, graphic or web designer, journalist, or PR person, and want to devote time and services for a cause you care about. ([Let us know](#) if so!)

Or it could mean doing something more creative, like making art that draws attention to a cause, or using your great communication skills to give presentations, make youtube videos, or to be a spokesperson for an issue.

Choose 5 things you are good at or love to do. Can you think of any way to apply these for a good cause?

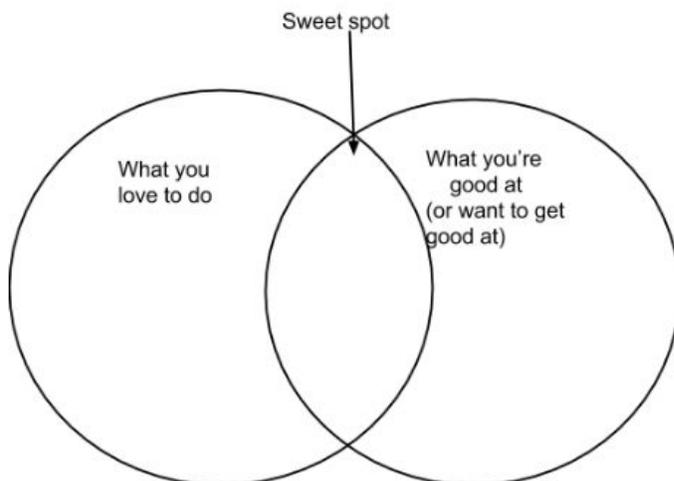
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Choose 5 adjectives to describe your personal strengths. Can you think of anything you could do for your issue that best suits these strengths?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

If you're a more visual person, you can try writing some of these out and seeing if it sparks any creative ideas.

How can you apply these for your cause?





3. Influence and Resources:

Who do you know that has some influence or power? Maybe you do? Leveraging these resources could become the focus of your activism. These could include:

- Wealth
- Social media followers
- Name recognition
- Decision-making power at an organization, school, or government
- Contacts who have any of these

How can you (or how can you influence someone you know to) apply these for a good cause?

4. Time: How much time do you realistically have to devote to activism?

Spend a few minutes thinking about your schedule and looking at your calendar if you have one. (Highly recommended!) Think about how many hours a day you are already committed to doing something else, whether it's work, school, transportation, family time, sleep, or other obligations.

Where in your schedule could you make some time for an important project? Even if it's just 1 or a few hours a week, when would that be? What would that mean you would have to do less of than you're currently doing -- maybe watching movies or scrolling on social media?

List here times in your schedule where you could work on a project, and how many hours a week or month that would be. Start brainstorming actions you could take and when.

Note that if you really don't have any time in your schedule, there are still plenty of things you can do in your daily life or at school or work. Take a look back, early in this guide, at our examples of what to do if you have very little time or the "10 Types of Activism" to choose from list, and you will find some!

5. Taking Stock and Developing Yourself



YEA Camp's entire curriculum is based on developing knowledge, skills, confidence, and community. We look at these critical 4 things as our Changemaker Quadrant to assess where we are starting from and how we want to grow. In the following chart:

- **Write and underline any knowledge, skills, confidence, and community that you already have that could help you at all in your change-making.** Even if you're not sure if it's relevant, write it down to spark ideas. Taking stock of these, how can you apply these for a cause you care about?
- **Write (but don't underline) any knowledge, skills, confidence, and community that you want to develop to help you in your activism.** For example, maybe in Community, you don't know any organizations working on your issue, or in Confidence, you are shy in certain situations when you want to speak up. Be as specific as possible. This will become your to-do list!

CHANGEMAKER QUADRANT

Knowledge:	Skills:
Confidence:	Community:

Does assessing the knowledge, skills, confidence, and community that you already have help spark any ideas? You can come back to add to this chart when you think of things you want to develop in yourself, or to underline when you learn more things, meet new people, and develop your confidence!



- **Effectiveness Analysis**

As activists (and as humans) we are limited in the time, money, and energy that we can devote to anything. We mentioned this earlier when we looked at the issue of opportunity cost.

There is no shortage of difference that we can make in the world, so we want to figure out how we can be as effective as possible.

No matter what cause you care about, this is the most important thing we can do as activists: be effective at making a difference -- in, to paraphrase Gandhi, bringing about the change we wish to see in the world. This seems simple and obvious, but if we look around at others and, let's be honest, in some cases start evaluating our own actions, it isn't always.

At YEA Camp we teach something called an **Effectiveness Analysis**. It is a simple chart to plot how impactful you think something is against how difficult it is to achieve.

Typically the things that are easiest don't make as big of a difference, say recycling a can. It's very easy, and while it does make a difference, in the scheme of things it's very small. It's not persuading anyone else or leveraging any change for the future. It doesn't address any root causes to reduce this problem in the future. But these items do make a difference, and they're so easy, so we should definitely do them.

Then there are some things that might be really hard and yet, realistically, make a very small difference. Think: convincing your homophobic uncle to support gay marriage. You might spend many hours trying to persuade him, possibly causing family problems along the way, when ultimately does it really matter if he supports gay marriage? This is a settled issue now that the Supreme Court has ruled on it, and your uncle has no real say on this. If you convinced him, what difference would it actually make? What if you used that time in other ways? And if it doesn't take up time because you were at dinner with your uncle already, consider that it takes up energy, which is something we also have a finite amount of as activists. Maybe we shouldn't even bother with our uncle.

Of course that doesn't mean not to try to educate people or challenge oppressive ideas, or that people never change. Just be strategic in considering if something is a good use of time, weighing how much time, money, or energy it will take against how much of an impact it will have to help your cause.

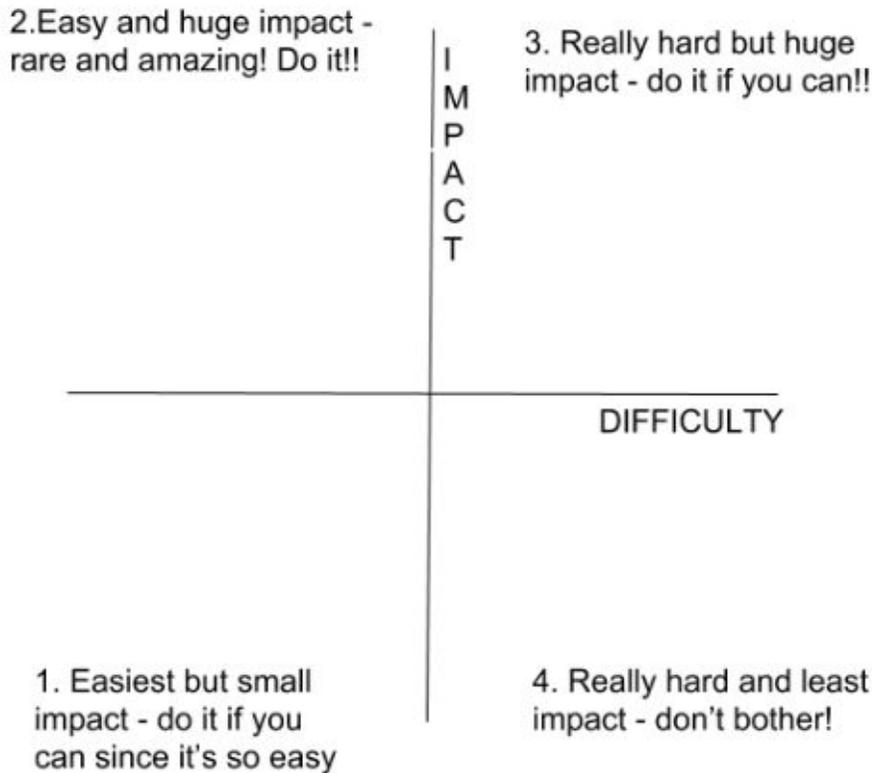
But what if your uncle happened to be the principal of a school or on the City Council or an influencer in some way? Can you see how a conversation to influence him on some issue that he has a say over now takes on a completely different level of impact? It could be a really quick and easy conversation that makes a huge difference!

Check out the 4 quadrants of our Effectiveness Analysis chart to think of this more visually.

It's important to mention that sometimes we don't actually know how easy or hard something will be or how big of an impact it will have, but it's worth thinking about and making an educated guess before investing much of our time.



EFFECTIVENESS ANALYSIS



To give some examples to show what we mean:

Quadrant 1: These are likely the most common things we do in our daily life. Recycling a can is super easy but doesn't have a huge impact, though these small acts add up and they are easy enough, so do them as often as you can.

Quadrant 2: These are rare but huge opportunities we need to capitalize on! Often these opportunities come from taking advantage of unique skills or relationships or resources we have. If you're already someone with a large social media following, say, it's super easy for you to post a message about a cause you care about, and that can influence tons of people, whereas if you don't have a social media following, you can still do that, but that would be more of a quadrant 1 activity that won't bring about as big of an impact. Make sense? Other quadrant 2 activities could also include using your role as, or your relationship with, a lawmaker or government official, a leader of a company or nonprofit, school principal or other administrator, celebrity, etc.

Quadrant 3: These items are like passing a law, launching a campaign, or electing someone to office -- really hard work but if it's an effective law, policy, or lawmaker, it can make a huge difference and be worth all of that work and money to make it happen. Whoever is spearheading



this will want to think very carefully before committing to a huge endeavor to decide if they really think there is a good enough chance of being successful (or achieving some of the other goals along the way even if you don't achieve the complete success). Without enough resources, maybe it's not worth the effort to attempt this huge project, and the focus should be on something else more achievable.

Quadrant 4: Ideally, we would spend virtually no time on items in this quadrant. A classic one here is arguing for a long time with somebody who has such strong and entrenched views in opposition to yours and who is clearly not open-minded to what you have to say. This person is also not an influencer, decision maker, or person of power -- they're just one of 7 billion people on the planet. Not worth your time and energy when you can do something else that will have a bigger impact, even speaking to someone else who would be more open-minded.

Make sense?

Start brainstorming how you might apply this to your Issue of Importance, or IOI -- which you will be choosing shortly! -- or even recognize opportunities in the all-important quadrants 1 and 2 that might not directly relate to your IOI but that are still easy for you to accomplish. Learning about our "3 Layers of Changemaking" framework below will make it even clearer to think about pathways to social change that could include actions in these important categories.

To start applying this further, we want to introduce our **3 Layers of Changemaking**.

Inner circle - individual actions you can take to make a difference.

Middle circle - community actions you can initiate or participate in, essentially to get other people to take the same individual actions you are.

Outer circle - institutional change to stem the problem, expand infrastructure, or mandate action that addresses the root cause.





The Multiplier Effect

We usually need to start with our own individual actions, and then we want to stretch ourselves to the next circle to expand our impact. If you can get even one person to do the activism you are already doing -- whether it is voting for a certain candidate, boycotting a certain product, writing a letter, attending an event, making a donation eating a vegan meal, or whatever it is, you are cloning yourself! You are literally doubling your impact. And if you persuade a third person, you are now tripling your impact! And on and on!

Once you know what individuals can do to make a difference on your cause, you can probably come up with ideas to get even more people to do it too. Then think about how institutions can make changes too. These could be in the form of rules, laws, policies, infrastructure changes, or funding.

For example:

Issue Of Importance - climate change:

Individual actions: eat less meat, drive less, buy second-hand when possible, write or call legislators, donate

You could capture as many of these individual actions on social media as possible to inspire others in your network to take the same actions.

Community actions (getting others to do what you're doing): pass out leaflets or share videos online about your cause, invite others to carpool with you, do a clothing swap or Really, Really Free Market (like we have at YEA Camp!), invite friends over to write or call your legislators together, organize a fundraiser for others to contribute to

With enough community support, or support from the right decision-makers, institutional action becomes achievable.

Institutional actions: (bringing about systemic change) - passing laws or electing candidates who support addressing your cause, improving infrastructure like getting (more) recycling or compost bins in your school or town, budgeting taxpayer funds to benefit society

Sometimes we can bring about institutional change in ways that are low-lying fruit.

One of our former campers, Maria, prepared at camp to launch a campaign to get rid of dissection at her school. Right after camp, before the school year started, she researched alternatives to dissection, prepared to talk to fellow students and get petitions signed, and prepped an email to her future science teacher.

It turned out that when her teacher read the email, including information about the money the school would save and the trend toward increased test scores when students use computer models instead of actually dissecting animals, she was persuaded right away and agreed to eliminate dissection. Because she happened to be the department head, she was able to make the switch for the whole school!



This was just a matter of some research and a well-written email that our camper sent! That is the power of institutional change. Of course it was good that Maria didn't dissect (individual action) and it would be great for her to convince other students not to dissect also (community action), but the most impactful was to implement this institutional change. And think how much easier that approach was in this case than having to convince every single person at her school (ever!) to not dissect! Of course, if the teacher had said no, that might have been Maria's strategy. You need to adjust your approach as you go.

Brainstorm as many actions as you can think of in each category for an issue you care about.

Issue of Importance:

Individual actions you or others could take on that issue. This can be your purchasing choices, donations, voting or calls to legislators, or another action you can take on your own.

Actions you can take to influence your community to take these actions too. Think of ways to educate or inspire more people to take those same actions.

Institutional actions that could be implemented to further this cause. These might be attainable in the short term -- like electing a certain candidate, improving infrastructure (like getting more recycle bins), or implementing a certain policy:

Who could you reach out to to collaborate with, to learn from, or to help or get help from?

That brings us to our next topic.

IOI + MO + ORG = Your Activism Plan



Yes! It is time to get to it and make some choices.

We suggest you think of your activism by selecting three things that you want to focus on to start:



Your Issue of Importance (IOI) -- the cause that you want to focus primarily on

Your Modus Operandi (MO) -- the types of actions you want to take. This could be anything from fundraising to political campaigning to awareness-raising, or using some skill or resource you already have

Your Organization (Org) -- a group or club you're connected to, either collaborating with locally or that you get resources and information from online. This could be a large national group whose email list you're on or that you follow on social media, and whom you look to to determine what actions to take.

You can choose many issues to work on over the course of your life, many approaches you will take, and many organizations you will work with, so these are not permanent decisions.

Yet, while we already looked at how every social justice issue is connected, it's a big enough job to make changes on any one issue, let alone to address every problem under the sun.

- **So, is there one issue you want to start focusing your attention on?** Even just for now? That's you IOI.

Thinking back on your Effectiveness Analysis and Self Assessment can actually be a great help to think about if you are uniquely positioned to make a difference on any one certain issue.

If you know that, you can look for an organization that works on that issue.

- **Is there an approach that you think makes the most sense for you or you want to get started on? That's your MO.**

If you know that, you can look for an organization working specifically in that way, like through politics or direct service volunteering or advocacy.

- **Is there an organization you know about that you want to get involved with or are already connected to?**

If you know that, you can plug right in to whatever actions they are asking people to take.

If you don't know any organizations working on your issue, check out [our list of amazing featured organizations](#) working on many different issues.

Your IOI	Your MO	Your Org



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We will help you think through each of these more below.

- Your IOI - Issue of Importance: What and Why?

There are so many problems in the world, and while we looked at how they are interconnected, we think it helps to primarily focus on one, especially when just starting out. It's hard enough to bring about change on one major issue, let alone trying to fix everything wrong with the world.

But keep in mind two things:

1. You can change your mind anytime as you want to switch your focus to another issue. Our passions and our awareness change in life, and the cause that you are most committed to right now might become less important to you as you learn about other issues, or as progress is made on that cause.

We had a camper several years ago arrived at camp with a focus on gay marriage. He identified as gay, and he wanted to be able to have this right when he got older. Not only is that issue no longer relevant because of the huge Supreme Court victory making it the law of the land (woohoo!), but as he learned more about environmental problems, he decided that he actually felt it was more important for him to focus on environmental advocacy. "What difference will it make if I can get married when I'm older if we don't even have clean air to breathe or clean water to drink?"

We would never push someone towards one cause or another, as it's hard enough to make a difference and stay focused on the issue that you are most passionate about, but we love when people learn about new issues and decide that they feel truly called to work on them. So choose something for now.

2. You can be focused primarily on one issue and still take action for other causes that you care about. If that camper did decide to stay focused on gay rights issues, he still could have made eco-friendly choices in his life, put a sticker on his notebook next to his equality sticker, and join the March for Science to advocate for action on climate change.

There may be certain opportunities or times when it makes sense to focus on a cause of local or national interest. At the time of this writing, gun control has become a huge national issue, with students leading the way in advocating for reforms.

One of those lead students to earn international attention, Emma Gonzalez, is actually the president of her school's Gay Straight Alliance. But given the tragedy that she experienced and



the opportunity that she sees to make a difference on that cause, she is devoting her focus to that issue.

In time, maybe she will go back to focusing on LGBT issues or some other cause, or maybe she can find ways to keep advocating for gay rights while her main area of focus is on gun control.

So, having said all that, what issue do you want to focus on for now?

Educate Yourself

Once you choose an issue, we have a couple of approaches to help you become better informed.

- **Pillars of Support**

Many people feel hesitant to get more involved in a cause because they think they don't know enough about it and might make a mistake.

Typically, the opposite is true: the mistake is feeling you don't know enough to get involved.

You do not need to know absolutely everything about your cause to make a difference. You know enough to care and even be thinking about doing something about this issue, and that is good enough to get started. You will learn as you go, and it's fine to admit that you don't have all the answers.

Having said that, as you're thinking more about your issue, considering what is called the "pillars of support" that keep that problem in place will help you develop a more sophisticated understanding of the issue, as well as to find entry points where you might put your focus on chipping away at that pillar.

The pillars of support are the institutions, beliefs, funding, laws, habits, beneficiaries, and practices that need to be chipped away at to address a social injustice.

Thinking these through is similar to looking at the root causes of a problem to work to eliminate it entirely, versus just treating the symptoms.

Think of this kind of like a game of reverse Jenga. Know the game Jenga, where the object is to pull a block out of the tower of wooden blocks without knocking over the whole thing? As an activist, we want to reflect on the pillars of support (the blocks that make up the tower) and think about what block can we strategically choose to pull out – or push as hard as we can, with as many people and resources as we can – that will help topple as much of the tower as possible?

Maybe there's one strategic thing that will do that will bring a huge amount of bad publicity to this issue, or a creative way we can raise a bunch of money for our efforts to fight it? How about working to elect officials who will pass or enforce laws that address this problem, or infrastructure or funding improvements we can advocate for to address the issue?



There are 3 steps here:

1. Choose a problem you want to solve and reflect on all aspects of it. Consider all of the challenges that need to be addressed to resolve this problem completely.
2. Identify the pillars of support that prop up this problem and make it so bad. Remember pillars are institutions, beliefs, funding, laws, habits, beneficiaries, and practices that perpetuate the status quo of this problem.
3. Choose one pillar at a time and consider ways to address that pillar. What misinformation is out there? Who benefits from or enforces this problem? How is this issue making people money? What actions, if people knew about them, could people take to help?

EXAMPLE 1: Consider the issue of police brutality and the pillars of support that maintain it.

What are the institutions or structures that maintain the status quo of this problem?

Some ideas are:

- Racism
- Lack of police training on implicit bias
- Lack of accountability for police for various reasons: district attorney not prosecuting, jurors giving police the benefit of the doubt, laws and policies that give police the benefit of the doubt
- Private prisons and mass incarceration that lead to over-policing
- The war on drugs and more over-policing
- Media messaging that is fear-based and discriminatory
- Proliferation of guns: would police be so quick to shoot innocent people, and so afraid for their own lives, if far fewer civilians had guns?
- Politicians who want to appear “tough on crime”
- Voter disenfranchisement

You could choose to work on any of the above issues (or others not listed) in order to help chip away at the overall problem.

A great way to decide what actions to take is:

- **Choose the pillar of support you want to chip away at.** You could use different strategies here. You could choose a pillar because you think it's the most powerful and critical to be addressed, or because it's the most vulnerable and able to be influenced, or because it relates to something you know you are in a position to affect.
- **Figure out what actions you can take to chip away at it.** You might need to do some research on this, and you also might be able to use skills or resources that you have to choose the approach that makes most sense to you. If you have a particular action you want to take because of your personal skill set or experience, you could do this step first.

Some pillars will be easier to figure out how to dismantle than others. Once you choose a pillar, brainstorm actions you (or someone) could take to chip away at it.



Using the pillars above, if you wanted to focus on voter disenfranchisement, you could do things like:

- volunteer to register voters
- donate money to an organization working to register voters
- volunteer or donate to an organization working to oppose voter ID laws, restore voting rights to those who have been disenfranchised, expand early voting, etc.
- volunteer or donate to a legislator or candidate who wants to make it easier for people to vote
- Contact law-makers who make decisions that affect people's ability to vote, and ask them to take a certain action you know would help
- Do canvassing and get out the vote (GOTV) volunteering or work to encourage more people to get to the polls.
- Publicize the importance of these issues and opportunities any way you can
- Find different ways to get other people to do all of these things too

If there's a pillar that for whatever reason you really don't know how to address or seems way to big for you to see a way to impact, don't give up! Focus on a different pillar.

Start taking actions that make sense, and assess whether you think they are effective and whether you want to continue doing them or want to try out something else. As you keep doing this, you will start to find your niche and get clear on what you want to focus your activism on.

EXAMPLE 2: Consider the issue of factory farming and the pillars of support that maintain it.

- Lack of information about the problem
- Habitual eating patterns
- Convenience and cost of industrialized food
- Lobbying and tax subsidies that make these products even cheaper
- Some people aren't familiar with other meal options
- Myths and stereotypes about getting enough of certain nutrients or eating a certain way
- Basic supply and demand for meat and animal products
- Lack of laws protecting animals, the environment, health, and workers
- Billions of dollars spent to advertise these products
- Food deserts that make it difficult to find healthy and sustainable options.

Remember the 2-step approach of choosing the pillar and how to address it. You can choose these in either order, as long as the action addresses a pillar of support.

If you have a particular skill, resource, or interest that positions you to address a particular pillar, go for it!

For instance, if you're a great vegan chef, you can use your cooking to address the pillars of people being unfamiliar with other meal options and helping them get out of their habitual eating patterns. If you are a nutritionist, you can use that skill to advise people to eat healthier. If you're an attorney, work with an organization focused on animal issues to address the pillar of lack of laws. Or if your school or workplace doesn't have any veg or healthy options, advocate for them to address the pillar of making more sustainable alternatives more conveniently available.



If you don't have any particular skill or passion related to the issue, and nothing immediately jumps out at you as a way to get involved, find out what organizations working on your cause want people to do, and do that.

Whatever issue you pick, you can choose to focus on addressing any of the pillars of support that you feel are weak, relevant to you, or make the most sense strategically.

Make a list of the pillars of support for your IOI. Brainstorm ideas you have to address these.

Your Issue of Importance (IOI):

Pillar of support	Possible way to chip away at it

Most organizations will choose 1 or 2 pillars to focus on chipping away at.

When you research organizations working on your issue, ask yourself what pillars of support each organization is strategically choosing to chip away at. Why do you think they are choosing that strategy, and do you agree that it is a wise approach? If not, maybe there's another organization chipping away at a pillar of support you want to address.

Keep in mind that you do not need to be an expert on this, and that it's totally fine for you to just volunteer with a local organization and just plug in wherever it makes sense to do so. The more you learn and analyze your IOI, though, the more you will be able to make strategic, thoughtful choices about how to use your time most effectively. That will likely inspire you to do more, and enable you to be more effective inspiring others to get involved too.

Let's get even deeper into thinking about your issue of importance so you can get more ideas for how to strategically approach this issue and feel more confident in conversations about this problem that means so much to you.



THINKING AND TALKING ABOUT YOUR ISSUE OF IMPORTANCE

1. What is one issue in the world that you would really like to see improved? (Even if you care about lots of things, choose one for now.) That is your issue of importance (IOI)! Be as specific as you can — so instead of, say, human rights, you could pick poverty, and within poverty you could pick something more specific like health care or job training for low-income people.

2. What are the 3 most important reasons someone should care about this issue?

-
-
-

3. Who makes decisions that affect your IOI? You might need to research this.

- a) everybody
- b) one particular person or group of people – like the president, Congress, your school principal, a store owner, the CEO of a company. WHO?
- c) other:

If a random person agreed with you about your IOI, what actions would you want them to take? If powerful people agreed with you, what actions would you want them to take?

Consider lesser actions that might be compromises to get someone to move in your direction.

4. Why are people not already doing what you want them to? Below are some common ones. See if you can understand their point of view, and explain it below.

- a) they don't have the information you do
- b) they disagree with the information you have
- c) their values are different – they have the information but aren't persuaded by it
- d) they don't think it's important, or they don't believe there's a problem with the way things are
- e) they agree that this is a problem but don't want to change their behavior. If so, why?
- f) they benefit in some way from the situation being the way it is (for example, they make money this way or enjoy taking certain actions you disagree with)
- g) something else – what?

Explain using your own words below.



5. What are frequently asked questions (FAQs) about this issue? What specific beliefs, opinions, doubts, misconceptions, or concerns might someone have that would keep them from taking the actions you want? Answer for different decision-makers who impact your issue. (Your school principal might have different thoughts about your campaign than your classmates.)
What's your response to these?

6. What are some factors that could motivate them to take action on your issue even if they don't totally agree with you or even care about it?

(For example, someone who doesn't care about animals, the environment, or even their own health might be motivated to eat less meat if they want to lose weight. Someone who cares about reducing taxes and government spending might oppose building a new prison or funding another war.)

7. What are some ways you could communicate this request most effectively? Think about appealing to what is important to them.

8. Who agrees with you? These can be nonprofit organizations, a local politician, school groups, teachers, friends, family members. Check out our [list of featured organizations!](#)

9. What materials or info do you know of that might persuade them - websites, videos, or brochures? If you don't know, make a note to yourself to research this.

10. What help do you need? What more do you need to learn? How do you need to develop yourself to be the best advocate you can be for your issue? Add this to your Changemaker Quadrant above.



- Your ORG - organization(s) - Who?

Find organizations that are working on your cause. Ideally you can find a national group leading a large-scale effort, as well as a local group that is working on a cause you want to get involved in. Follow these organizations on the social media platforms you use, sign up for their email lists, learn what they do, and look at how they want people to be involved.

To get connected locally, if you're interested in a political approach, we recommend you find a chapter of [Indivisible](#) and elect progressive leaders; or you might want to look on MeetUp.com or go on Facebook to search for local groups working on something you're passionate about.

[Check out our list](#) of organizations we admire.

- Your MO - Modus Operandi - How?

Building more on the idea of how to chip away at the pillars of support, there are several ways to begin to make a difference.

This is such a big topic, but some ways to decide what to do:

- Do the things organizations you support are asking people to do
- Do what you determined you are positioned to do from your self assessment -- tapping into your skills, knowledge, talent, resources, network, finances, etc.
- Join something you're inspired others are doing.
- Do the low-lying fruit, the easy stuff you can see to do.

Finding Your Activist Groove

One of the best ways to find your niche and to get clear on how you want to focus your efforts is to try lots of different things and to really reflect as you go: Did this actually make a difference? Was this a good use of my time? How could I have an even bigger impact? Do I want to do this again?

Not every form of activism will be a great fit for you, so if you have a bad experience, try some other form of activism, and keep trying new things until you find your path.

One of our campers got home from camp inspired to make a difference, and she reached out to an organization she loves to ask how she could get involved. They were looking for people to pass out flyers in busy areas asking people to boycott a certain company.

This was a teen who is naturally shy and reserved until she gets to know you, so she was nervous, but she bravely set out to do it.

While she did reach some people, and surely did a great job especially for her first time (plus, we actually do a whole training about grassroots activism like this), she hated it. The rejection was hard for her, she felt alone doing it out there by herself because she didn't know anyone else locally who was passionate about her cause, and she didn't want to do it again.



Now, that would actually be a success story — if she decided “OK, that’s not my MO, I’m going to try something else.”

Remember, there are many ways to chip away at these pillars of support.

Instead, she felt bad about herself, felt like she was disappointing the organization for not going back, and decided that she wasn’t cut out to be an activist. Thankfully we got back in touch with her to help her move forward, but we don’t want this to happen to you.

The one thing NOT to do is give up.

A lot of activism, like life, is trial and error. It’s not sustainable to continually do some form of activism that you really hate, but there are so many other things that you could do! You just need to find those things that you either enjoy (if possible, though obviously some things we will likely never enjoy) or don’t mind and can keep doing, or are willing to do when needed just because it is needed.

Dealing With Difficult Emotions: How and Why Not To Be An Angry Activist

There is a stereotype of activists as angry, and while it is not necessarily true, it makes a lot of sense. There are so many reasons for compassionate people to be angry about the state of the world. We *should* be angry about injustices like racism, patriarchy, homophobia, poverty, war, cruelty to animals, the environmental destruction of the planet, and more. As the saying goes, if you’re not outraged, you’re not paying attention.

In a sense, it’s really important that we be angry, sad, or fed up. If we weren’t upset by these things, it would mean we were desensitized or apathetic or giving up caring about injustices we see, which is absolutely not what we want. These emotions are not inherently bad or good, and they can be huge catalysts for our taking action. However, while we have every reason to feel angry about the state of the world, if we don’t have an empowered way of relating to our emotions, this anger can really hold us back.

This is not intended to [tone-police](#), to criticize how someone expresses themselves, or to tell anyone not to feel angry. Again, our anger at injustice is justified. However, when we are overcome by our anger, we run the risk of:

- Saying things we don’t mean, or not communicating as effectively
- Making impulsive decisions or not thinking strategically
- Projecting our anger on to people around us who may not be at fault or respond well to our anger
- Communicating in a way that drives up other people’s defenses or that other people aren’t open to listening to
- Turning off other potential activists who do not want to be driven by anger
- Being unhappy, depressed, lonely, or hopeless
- Burning ourselves out as activists or even harming our wellbeing



When we find ways to handle this anger and get in control of our feelings, we can consciously choose to behave and communicate as effectively as possible in any situation, rather than being at the effect of our own emotions.

Think Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was angry and upset and frustrated about racism? Of course he was. But he communicated with eloquence and thoughtfulness, not by yelling and screaming, and that enabled a lot more people to be inspired by his message. To be most effective, we may need to find ways to process and transform these difficult emotions.

The more well-resourced you are from confronting your anger in a healthy way and engaging in sustaining and nurturing behaviors, the more in control of and at peace you will be with your emotions, which can increase your effectiveness as an activist as well as your wellbeing as a person. Different things work for different people. You might find that integrating just one of the suggestions below is all you need to really shift your emotions, or if you are really struggling with this, you might want to try all of these and more.

Here are 20 ways you can deal with these emotions:

1. **Reach out for help.** We can't do life alone, yet with social media and other societal factors, more and more of us are living more solitary existences. Find ways to connect more deeply with the people you interact with in your daily life, and reinvest in relationships with the most treasured people in your life. Find people who can relate to your feelings, or at least will listen with an open mind and heart. Support other activists so that they will feel empowered too. You can vent together, do activism together, help one another during hard times, or go do something totally fun and not activist-related. If needed, speak to a therapist or join or start a support group. It is up to us to develop the support system we need.
2. **Self-care.** We have a whole section on this below, but start looking at yourself as your own best friend or little brother or sister who could use some help, and that it is your job to look after them. This starts with positive self-talk and appreciating yourself just for being you, regardless of any perceived faults or failures you have. Our first and top priority in life must be to take care of ourselves, which makes it possible for us to take care of others. As your own best advocate, that may mean forcing yourself to go to the doctor, to take a walk, to stop drinking, or to leave a bad relationship. As the foundations of your emotional and physical stability are strengthened, you will be able to turn your attention to upping your activist game. You must take care of the basics of your own wellbeing so you can make a difference for others.
3. **Have fun!** It can feel impossible to enjoy life in the face of so much suffering, but we have to find ways to do it anyway. This helps us recuperate from the difficult emotions we feel. It also helps us think more creatively and be more well-rounded, happy people that others will want to emulate as activists. Spend time with friends who make you laugh, make time for a hobby you love, or watch a silly movie. When you get down, you need to find ways to pull yourself up
4. **Release your emotions in a healthy way.** Many longtime activists have cried and cried and cried about the injustices of the world. This allows us to, on the one hand, come to



an acceptance about the way the world is, and, on the other hand, feel more in charge of our emotions so that we can go do something about it. Writing in a journal can be one of the best ways to get your emotions out. You can also try talking with a close friend or family member, yelling at your TV, punching a pillow, or whatever you need to get these feelings out so you aren't carrying such a heavy load.

5. **Laugh instead of cry.** We talked about sometimes needing to cry, but sometimes it helps to laugh at the absurdity of it all. Furious about politics and the corruption of our government? Watching late-night satire news shows that do hard-hitting political comedy (and [may even be a better way of covering the news](#)) can be a way to feel better about things that, if presented in more serious formats, would just leave you angry and depressed.
6. **Practice gratitude and remind yourself of positive things.** There are so many beautiful things in life that those of us trying to improve the world sometimes take for granted. Think about the incredible number of people who are working on making the world a better place, and all of the courageous people who have come before us. There has been huge progress on so many social issues, and we're part of that legacy. Personally, focus on things to be grateful for, like your home, health, friends, education and access to information, and other things we may take for granted but that other people may not have. You might write these in a daily gratitude list or journal or just think them to yourself while you're brushing your teeth when you wake up and before bed. At YEA Camp, before each meal, someone shares something with the group that they are grateful for. Training our brains to look for positive things can help us be happier and more optimistic.
7. **Keep an activism journal.** We already recommended journaling, so this can be incorporated into that, or it can stand alone. So many of the things we do to help others don't show up as a victory in the newspaper. Of course we're not doing any of this for credit or accolades, but we might minimize our perception of the actions we have taken if others don't take notice or we don't see immediate results. What if each day you spent a few minutes writing down the things you did that day to help make the world a better place? Or even good things that happened in the world or in your life? This temporary shift in focus from the many problems in the world to solutions you're helping to bring about can help us stay positive and keep going. Reflecting on our actions in this way can give us the opportunity to consider how effective something we did actually was, if we want to do it again, and if there's anything we learned or could do better. Celebrating even small accomplishments also gives us a chance to feel fulfillment from our actions, and it's amazing to look back on all of these actions over time. This can also be a way to hold ourselves accountable to take action each day, even if it is something small.
8. **Try to find the good even in bad people or situations.** Black and white thinking, like "This person is horrible" or "I hate people," might be hyperbole but some activists think or say things like this. Think of someone you know who did or does something you disagree with. Maybe they hold racist or homophobic views, don't care about the environment, displayed sexist behavior, or voted differently from you. Can you find something good about that person? Maybe they are a great parent, they volunteer for a good cause, or have otherwise done good in their life? Recognizing that doesn't absolve



someone of bad behavior, but it softens our anger towards them and the world, and humanizes them when we may be tempted to see them as a lost cause. Try out some of the communication tips later on in the guide to see if these help. (Of course, some people are truly part of the opposition that we need to ignore or defeat through our ideas, creativity, organizing, votes, boycotts, and donations.)

- 9. Limit news and social media.** As activists, we need to follow what is going on to some extent, of course, but there is a limit where we will see diminishing returns. Read just enough about the problems in the world to be informed, and so you can move forward with activism you may want to do, but you don't need to know absolutely every detail about every issue in the news. This can become a waste of time, and if it leaves us demoralized and miserable, instead of ready to take action, it is counterproductive. You also don't need to watch every new video that comes out that depicts something heartbreaking that you are already familiar with if it. You don't "owe it to" the victims or the issue to watch the video — you owe it to them and yourself to be effective — so think about whether watching it will inspire you to take productive action or demoralize you to want to give up. Use your social media time consciously instead of spending hours scrolling or falling into a social media vortex. Give yourself a certain amount of time and purpose for that time, and then move on to do other things that will be a better use of that time.
- 10. Hang out with animals and kids.** Kids and animals have their own innocent agenda and live totally separately from the larger political world. Spend some time coloring, watching cartoons, going for a walk or playing fetch and notice how much better you feel. Volunteering at an after-school program or an animal shelter might help you just as much as it helps them.
- 11. Travel.** This doesn't need to be expensive or far away. It could even be getting on a bus and going to a neighborhood in your city that you haven't spent time exploring, or it could mean getting on a plane and adventuring to a different country or culture. This time away from our regular habits and responsibilities can give us totally new perspectives and ideas, and provide a reboot when we are in a rut.
- 12. Read a book you can't put down.** Pick up a novel from an author you know you love, or go to the library and start reading a recommended book until you get bored -- at which point find another one and repeat! When you find one you can't put down, take it out and keep reading! Traveling to another world through a book can give us a break from the concerns of our own life. You might also try reading autobiographies of people you admire, or reading books about other cultures or topics you're unfamiliar with to expand your perspective.
- 13. Learn something new.** The human brain is pretty smart, but if it is sufficiently challenged by something that takes its full attention, like learning a new language or instrument, that it can't also be worrying about what happened in the news at the same time. We need to turn our attention to other things.
- 14. Exercise.** So much research shows that exercise not only leads to better long-term physical health but also emotional wellbeing. Find ways of getting exercise that you



enjoy, or at least don't hate, and actually want to do. Maybe you love to swim and can go to a pool at your local community center, you can dance in your house to your favorite music, or you can go for long walks in your town just listening to music.

- 15. Breathe and sleep.** When all else fails, breathe and sleep. Deep breaths will have us feel more grounded and able to connect our mind with our body. When you've had enough of a day, allow yourself to take a nap or go to bed. If you have problems sleeping, seek out ways to resolve this because insufficient sleep affects everything else. There are lots of resources out there, and just keep trying different things until you find something that works for you.
- 16. Take time to just let your mind rest.** This could be through meditation or going for a walk without looking at your phone. It could be doing yoga, doodling, cooking, or simple chores around the house. Find something that works for you. If you can, get a massage or close your eyes in a bubble bath. Give yourself some time to rest when you need to -- ideally for at least a few minutes each day.
- 17. Put yourself in someone else's shoes.** Think of someone you disagree with about something important -- or even someone you hate or that is triggering your anger. Imagine how they came to be who they are. How they were brought up? Imagine their friends, family, schooling, and community. Can you see how they may have come to develop the views they have today? See if you can imagine this person as a child before their personality and political opinions were formed. Can you think of what may have happened that hardened their heart or led them to believe or behave a certain way? Try a role play where you take on their perspective to see if you can find a way to empathize with or understand them. This is not meant to excuse or justify anyone's behavior, but when we can start to think of a bully as a suffering little kid who was probably bullied himself, our anger can soften.
- 18. Take a break from activism.** If you feel you might be burning out, or if you are angry or depressed all the time and feel you aren't being effective, take some time away. Imagine trying to run a marathon if you're already exhausted and cramping up at mile 2. If you feel guilty taking time away, recognize that this short-term breather to reinvigorate yourself will lead to more of a long-term impact. Focus on doing some of the items above, and read our section on Avoiding Burnout in the Self Care section below.
- 19. Re-evaluate and change things up as needed.** So much of our lives can become routine, but if you are really struggling, take the time to consider what changes you can make to improve your life and wellbeing. Are the people in your life positive and uplifting, or do they bring you down? Make new friends, and choose more wisely who you spend your time with, if that would help. Do you hate your job? Start exploring other career paths. Have an unhappy living situation? It's time to move. Sometimes just changing up our conversations, like "can we not talk about politics today? I need a break!" can really help. We need to take an active role in evaluating our own lives to make the most of our one precious life and to preserve our bandwidth to be activists for helping others as well.
- 20. Give yourself a YEA Camp-style pep talk.** At YEA Camp, one of our favorite activities is making a list of absolutely everything that you can think of that you like about yourself,



that others like about you, that you have accomplished, that you have overcome, that you are good at, or that otherwise is a reason for you to be proud of yourself. It could include that you care about making the world a better place and every bit of activism you've ever done. It should include that your dog loves you or that you are a good friend. Keep coming back to this list. Keep adding to it, reading it, and remembering it when you get down.

Do this now:

YOUR PEP TALK TO YOURSELF

On a piece of paper or document you can refer back to easily, list as many things as you can think of that:

- You like about yourself
- Others like about you
- You have accomplished
- You have overcome
- You are good at
- You are proud of yourself for
- You have done to help others
- You are (or you know you should feel) grateful for

List at least 20 and keep coming back to it. If you get stuck, ask people who care about you, think about successes you've had at school or work, or things you have done for others.



Communication Tips

This is such a massive topic, but we will share a few tips here that we think are key.

- **Understand cognitive dissonance.**

Have you noticed that sometimes people insist on positions that don't even make sense, or that they disregard logic that contradicts their world view?

The concept of cognitive dissonance is key to understanding why people sometimes take massively hypocritical positions and are often unmoved by facts or reason.

Cognitive dissonance is an idea in psychology that says that people feel better when their actions align with their values.

Everyone wants to feel like a good person, and our view of ourselves in that positive light is challenged when we think of ourselves as taking actions that go against our values. It feels better to make illogical excuses than to admit we did something we ourselves deep down believe is wrong.

Because people tend to want to avoid change, it can make them feel better to “shoot the messenger” or to discredit the information that threatens their own world view or positive sense of self. As irrational as it is, people do it everyday in order to justify continuing to engage in behavior that goes against their values.

For example, if somebody learns about the causes of climate change, or about the cruelty or injustice in the production of their favorite food or piece of clothing, they are faced with two main choices:

- a) stop doing something that they like doing because of the harm that it causes, or
- b) keep doing what they like doing in spite of the harm that it causes.

If they choose b) and keep doing the same things that hurt the environment, they now have to figure out what to do with the discomfort and guilt from knowing they are doing something that goes against their values.

By discrediting the information or the significance of the action, even just denying their own power by throwing up their hands and rhetorically asking “what difference do I make anyway, I'm just one person?” or “maybe climate change is a hoax?,” they can unconsciously clear their conscience without having to change their behavior.

Our efforts to avoid feeling guilty while also avoiding changing our behavior are pretty extravagant.

The Just World hypothesis is a related concept in psychology where people unconsciously choose to believe that the world is fair in spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.



It makes people feel more ease to think that if an unarmed man was shot by police, that he must have done something bad to deserve it — because if he didn't deserve it then that means that something is very wrong in the world, and they should be worried and do something about it.

Unfortunately, people often prefer to stay in their comfort zone than “rock the boat” if they don't feel the issue pertains to them directly.

If somebody's entire family or church voted a certain way or has always believed a certain thing, it may challenge their whole world view to consider that they have all been wrong. It's easier to call something “fake news” than to actually seriously consider this type of information.

How do you respond when you recognize that somebody is doing this?

This is sort of the \$1 million question without an exact proven answer, but you can start by trying to understand what they are unconsciously avoiding confronting — what behavior they don't want to change or what they don't want to believe — and why this is actually so deeply important to them.

One approach can be helping them be less afraid or intimidated by the implications of this new information.

For example, if you make it seem like it's totally understandable that they would have their concerns because you (or someone else you know) used to feel that way too before uncovering this new information, that can have them feel less of a need to protect their ego from having to admit that it has been wrong.

If you can show that the perspective or behavior change that the person would need to make is actually not such a big deal, that can lower their psychological defenses to engaging with this new information or world view.

This is not a simple or formulaic approach, obviously — if it was we could easily convince people who cling to irrational losing arguments.

However, the more you take a combative position to someone struggling with cognitive dissonance, the less likely they probably are to be persuaded, as they may feel the need to double down on their strongly held position.

Some of the other techniques below can help too.

- **Tell and own your story**

Ultimately, we each have our personal reasons for why we feel so passionately about something.

It's very powerful when we can have the self-awareness to understand how we came to feel the way we do, and the confidence to be able to share it.

It's much harder to argue with someone who is using “I statements” and sharing about their own lives than if they are stating facts that could be disputed.



That's why research shows that stories tend to be more powerful than statistics in convincing people to take action or change their views. This is great news if you've ever stressed about not remembering some certain statistic to share with someone.

Take the time to consider:

- Why do you feel the way you do?
- What personal experiences have impacted your views?
- What might someone else not know about what you have witnessed or experienced that might influence their thinking?

At YEA Camp, we have everyone develop what we call a Personal Manifesto. Here are the three parts that you can develop at home:

1. Personal story - Why or how you came to care about this issue (a few sentences, or this could become something longer)
2. Values - What you believe and why (2-3 sentences, or longer, depending on the format)
3. Conclusion - "And that's why I..." (1-2 sentences, or longer, depending)

- **Put yourself in the other person's shoes.**

We referenced this earlier but this is critical in all communication about challenging subjects.

Appeal to their interests

We often assume that everyone has the same values as we do, but clearly they don't. If you are trying to persuade someone, considering what is important to them will help you know how to guide your conversation.

What are the pillars of support that are holding up their views or behavior? (Remember this idea of "pillars of support" earlier? What ideas or information are holding up their position?)

What is important to them? How do they make their decisions?

An amazing tool for your activist toolbox is the Socratic Method, or asking questions. The key is not to antagonize, which would likely make someone defensive, but to ask someone to explain their opinion that you know has not been well thought out or that has holes they can reveal to themselves through reflecting on your questions. This viral video [shows a perfect example](#) of this non-antagonistic inquiry that is still clearly coming from having a clear activist purpose for asking.

Practice your "Thinking and Talking About Your Issue" and learning answers to frequently asked questions will be a huge help to prepare ahead of time.

In some cases, a person will not want to honestly admit what their true interest is in a particular issue. For example, a politician would not want to admit that he is taking a particular position because of who has given money to his campaign, or that all he cares about is getting



re-elected. A company engaging in poor labor practices would not want to admit that they don't really care that much about their workers and that their priority is making more money for their shareholders and executives.

To figure out how to approach someone most effectively, we have to put ourselves in their positions to try to figure out what is important to them. Of course we want them to come around to our way of thinking for the right reasons, but all hope isn't lost if they truly have no conscience or just don't care about your issue.

What if you can figure out a way it will actually benefit them to support your cause? It is very powerful when we can figure out how to align our goals with their goals.

- What if you could show a politician that he would be more likely to get elected if he took your position?
- What if a company could see that developing better labor or environmental policies could be good for their business long-term?
- What if your school principal or mayor who otherwise doesn't care about the environment could see that it would save the city or district money to be more energy-efficient?

Sometimes it just isn't possible, but when you can frame your issue in a way that is a win-win by appealing to what is most important to a decision-maker, convincing them becomes much easier.

Connecting with someone even though you disagree

Consider that if you had had the same upbringing and experience, you might have the same views and take the same actions as someone with whom you totally disagree.

Empathizing with someone who has views you strongly oppose can be really challenging, of course, but this approach is a way to establish a base of connection and respect, which sets the foundation for an actual inquiry and exchange of ideas. It creates a possibility for the person to consider what you are saying versus just feeling attacked and judged, and then trying to defend themselves and their position.

See if you can "love the sinner, hate the sin," meaning to be able to find some good in a person even though they have done or continue to do or believe something you find very bad. This is not an endorsement or acceptance of their behavior but a way to practice living by the value of "being the change we wish to see in the world." It also is often much more effective.

The alternative, some version of considering them evil, stupid, or hopeless to change (would you be open to someone speaking to you in that way?!), is unlikely to lead to any change on their part. Check out [this incredible example](#) from a woman who left the hateful Westboro Baptist Church to see if it helps you.

Of course this may not apply in all cases, and is easier said than done, but we have many tools in this guide that can help.



- **Find common ground**

When you disagree with someone, it can feel like you see the world in totally different ways, and that can make it very hard for someone to come around to your point of view. If you can find something you both agree with, then it creates a sense of trust in shared values and makes the other person more likely to be open to other things you say.

The campaign to end mass incarceration is of course a human rights issue, but in recent years some activists have started to focus on the enormous amount of money it costs to keep nonviolent offenders in jail, and that it actually costs less to educate youth than to incarcerate them.

From a progressive standpoint, that may not be the primary reason to oppose mass incarceration, but if that persuades Republicans more concerned about cutting taxes, then this is a winning approach!

If you are pro-choice and are disagreeing with someone about abortion rights, you might want to agree that abortion is a last resort that ideally would never happen, and then point to the approach to expanding access to birth control, which leads to reduced rates of abortion. Maybe they could agree on that. Or maybe not. Some people have their minds as made up as we do, in the other direction. At some point, if you can't find any common ground, politely move along and find a better use of your time.

- **Pick your battles -- and try to have them not feel like battles.**

Should you be engaging with this person?

Consider the concept of a Spectrum of Agreement.

Everyone agrees with your opinion on something to some degree, measured in a percentage, anywhere from 0% to 100%.

A lot of times, especially on social media, many of us focus our energy on arguing with people who agree with us close to 0% or people who almost totally agree with us but disagree in a small way, maybe they agree about 98%.

Is this really the best use of our time? If you are in complete disagreement with someone are they likely to convince *you* of something? Probably not.

On the other hand, if you are arguing with someone on social media, you are more likely to convince the people reading the comments who might not have their mind made up yet than that person, so maybe it is a good use of time after all. You get to choose.

Meanwhile, if you agree almost completely with someone, should you really spend your time arguing with them? Can you just agree to disagree so you can focus your energy where it might do more good?

Thinking about how an argument will affect you: How do you enjoy arguments? Do they leave you feeling energized, inspired, and happy about life? Probably not.



If not, is that how you want to spend much of your time as an activist? And how effective do you think that that actually is for the person you're arguing with?

What if you could make just as big or a bigger difference without an argument?

As a mini case study, a major shift that we have seen in strategy in recent years has been with the animal rights and vegan/vegetarian movements.

When the movement was just getting started in the 80s and 90s, a large focus was on shocking images to generate awareness. This was an issue that was very new to most people. These shocking images served an important role of educating the general public, but for many people that wasn't translating to changing their behavior.

If you look at the approach today of large organizations focusing on this issue, it's very different.

If you follow large groups like Mercy For Animals or The Humane League on social media, their pages will take a much more positive approach, even though they are just as concerned about the same upsetting issue. These days, you will still see some occasional graphic pictures or video, but you are even more likely to see how-to videos about making delicious vegan meals, infographics about protein sources, stories of celebrities who are going vegan, amazing new vegan restaurants opening up, and cute pictures or videos of a pig with a puppy, trying to compare the two.

These approaches are not trying to argue with you. They're providing information and inspiration that can influence viewers' thinking or behavior, and that they may want to share with others.

They are also chipping away at many different pillars of support that keep people from changing their diet -- concerns about where and what to eat, nutrition questions, wanting to feel part of the mainstream, etc.

They are also normalizing a diet and lifestyle that has been seen as fringe. They are making it cool, where in the past it might have seemed weird.

As an individual activist, if you were working on that issue, you might be more successful by having friends over for a delicious vegan meal than by arguing with them about how much water goes into the making of a burger.

- **Generous listening**

When we think about communication, we usually think about speaking, but sometimes it is even more powerful to listen in a certain way. If you think about it, at any time, you have a choice of listening to someone in very different ways.

You could listen to someone in a cynical, judgmental, or even hopeless way, like "This person doesn't get it, and they never will." You might even be right about that. Maybe they never will. But thinking in that way can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you really think there is no way



to change their view, you won't speak to them in a way that has the power to do that. They will probably also be able to tell you are judging or dismissing them, and they won't respond as well.

When we approach a conversation with the thinking that this person *may* come around *someday*, that they just haven't learned what they need to know *yet*, or they just haven't put aside their past misconceptions or judgments *yet*, we will likely have a much more productive and positive conversation. We also need to accept that most people don't change their strongly held views and habitual behaviors overnight. We need to put aside our anger and judgments so we can approach someone from a more open place.

If, for example, a company or decision-maker says that they care about the environment but they are not taking action consistent with that, try kindly but directly reminding them of how important they say the environment is. Try holding them to the values they claim to have.

The Michelle Obama recommendation is relevant again: "If they go low, we go high." Try being a role model who elevates the behavior of those around you, rather than sinking to their level.

If someone takes some action in the direction you want them to go, be encouraging and appreciative that they have taken that action even though they haven't taken the full action you want. Most people will take baby steps in the direction we want them to go. We need to be patient enough that they will continue to take these steps.

Of course, not everyone will come around to our way of thinking or take the action we want them to, but if we listen to them as if they may step up and do the right thing, they are more likely to do so.

- **Focus your activism beyond your friends and family.**

We may be uniquely positioned to educate our family members when they make problematic statements about racism or sexism, or when they simply don't have access to important information or news sources. Educating them kindly or intervening when they have said or done something problematic can be a huge contribution you can make. We encourage you to practice the tips above and to find creative ways to influence those around you.

In some cases, it might be wise to exercise caution with coming on too strong with family members who don't agree with you if it is likely to result in an argument where they feel triggered to defend their position, rather than actually consider some new information that might influence them. Sometimes it's even harder to change the views of family members, so maybe your influence will help them be more open to someone else saying the exact same thing, or saying it in a different way.

Not only does nagging or judging family members tend to be an ineffective approach, it can actually be a harmful strategy for new activists for 2 serious reasons.

First, it can damage relationships that we rely on for our own sense of security, community, and love, which can affect our long-term well-being. Can you accept this person as they currently



are and hope that with time they may come around? Of course, if this person holds reprehensible views or is toxic for you to be around, you might choose to sever the relationship -- that's something else entirely -- but if you want to maintain this person in your life, it might be best to not bring it up with them if you have already done so before and you don't see a new pathway to get them to change their view or behavior.

Second, people often think that if they can't convince the people closest to them then they won't be able to convince other people, and then they can't be an activist, so they should just give up.

This is of course the last thing we want and is also unfounded.

Plenty of amazing activists have not persuaded their conservative friends and family to get involved in their cause or see things differently, but they are effective because they focus their energy on where they can make the biggest difference.

Unless they agree with us about the issue right away, people closest to us are often the hardest people to convince.

In addition, these people often come around quicker if they can see you as a role model, as a person living a happy life of integrity and purpose, and if they learn the information on their own (or from reading a leaflet you accidentally leave on the kitchen table), rather than by you nagging them about it, particularly if they have gotten the information before and aren't already persuaded

Also, relationships with family and friends are precious for most people's emotional well-being, and threatening these relationships may not be worth it.

That's not to say that we shouldn't try to educate our families, but sometimes less is more and we just need to be patient.

Meanwhile, there are 7 billion other people on the planet, a lot of whom will be much easier to persuade.

- **Try to find humor and lead with positivity and love.**

When we were talking about very serious issues that we have very strong feelings about, I can scare people away. Finding creative ways to use humor, or to laugh off a snide remark, is one of the best approaches to diffuse a tense interaction.

[Ellen DeGeneres is a master at this.](#)

If we can present ourselves as kind, positive people who lead with love, people will simply enjoy interacting with us more. They will want to hear what we have to say or come back to us with questions when they have thought more about what we said last time. We know it usually takes a number of exposures to an idea before it sinks in or leads to behavior change, so let's be someone someone will want to come back and talk with again in the future.



We will also have interactions that leave us feeling lighter versus depleted. Smiling makes us happy whether we feel that way it or not.

Self Care, Community, and Keeping at It

To state the obvious at this point, totally changing the world will take a while. Think of all of the activists who came before us who never saw the world they were working towards in their lifetime. We need to find ways to keep going, deal with the heartbreak of caring so much, and enjoy our lives while not giving up. Plus, life is hard enough even if our only focus is on taking care of ourselves and those we care about. Above we listed 20 ways to deal with anger and other difficult emotions, and these can be critical for self care.

Here are some key points that we think are important to avoid burnout and set ourselves up to be in this for the long haul and to enjoy our lives while we are making as big of a difference as we can:

1. **Do more of what you love to do.** Make time to travel, draw, swim, bike, or play the guitar -- whatever things bring you joy that you might not make time for in a busy schedule. It is not selfish to enjoy your life. It's necessary for keeping yourself going without giving up. It lets you replenish your energy and see things from fresh perspectives, and it also makes you a more well-rounded person that people can relate to and want to emulate.
2. **Take actions to be healthy.** Try taking stock and doing a "state of the union" for yourself to get honest with yourself about where you need to look out for your wellbeing. There are fundamental things we all know we need to do to be healthy. Start with the basics of eating well, getting enough rest, and exercise. These are great long-term but also boost our mood and energy. Stop doing things that are making you unhealthy, like drinking too much, smoking, eating lots of junk, or any unhealthy behaviors that deep down you know you need to stop. Go to the doctor or dentist as needed. Do what you know you need to do. Pay your bills and take care of the things you need to for your life to function so that you can focus more on helping others. Of course these are all easier said than done, but we have a world to change here and we need you to be able to make the biggest impact you can.
3. **Feel your emotions.** Caring about this world can be hard, and we often stuff our emotions down so that we can get through the day. But sometimes we need to get these out, and we need to find healthy ways to do so -- otherwise we can end up taking our anger or sadness out onto other people or losing our focus. This is obviously a huge topic, but you can start by trying journaling, meditation, talking with a like-minded friend, or maybe speak with a therapist. Again, not to be the bearer of bad news, but taking time to cry can be really helpful for a lot of activists to release the sadness, anger, and frustration at the injustice of the world. Once we let those tears out, we can be more freed up to make change.
4. **Connect with others who care.** We need people in our lives who support us and agree about the importance of the causes we care about. Experiment with engaging in deeper



relationships and elevating the standards of behavior of everyone around you. Say hello to your neighbor, help someone in need, leave things better than you found them. Join a group, reach out to new or old friends, or even if it's just online, connect with others who care and have been through similar experiences and want you to succeed. It is up to you to be proactive in making sure you get the support you need.

5. **Come to grips with the concept of “enough.”** Another piece of bad news: you can never do enough, and neither can any of us. There's always more to do. That can be heartbreaking to come to terms with, but it can also free you up to accept that you can't do activism 24 hours a day. Do the best you can. This is a marathon -- not a sprint. If that means you have to take some time off, do it. You will probably make an even bigger difference when you do.

Don't Let Yourself Get Stuck

There are so many things you can do to make a difference, and sometimes that can be overwhelming -- but we need to use that to our advantage and not let that stop us.

If you go to a supermarket to buy cereal and see 100 different brands, you might feel a tiny bit of stress at making such a simple act so complicated. Imagine if you were so overwhelmed by this experience that you just decided not to get any cereal at all? And then at breakfast time the next morning you just ate nothing? This is what it's like when you don't do anything because you're not sure what to do.

The reality is that there are an infinite number of ways that you can make a difference in the world, and you've got to choose one at a time. We've provided you with so many ways to determine what makes sense for you. It all depends on the issue you care most about, your unique skills and interests, the resources you have, how much time you can spend, and your own imagination!

If you still feel stuck, keep it simple for now. Look back at the “5 Easy Forms of Activism You Can (Probably) Do Today” at the beginning of this guide and get started on those. Or [go back to the basics of this video](#) and choose an Issue of Importance, [connect with an organization](#) working on that issue, and do the actions that they recommend.

The more activism you try out, the more you will figure out what really seems to be making the biggest difference or what we excel at. Sometimes it takes time for us to assess where we can best contribute. You might also discover that there are forms of activism you really enjoy. Try to focus on those versus doing things you really aren't well suited for, which you might dread and not do for long. You get it.



YEA Camp Action Plan

WHAT: YOUR IOI

What issue(s) will you primarily be focusing on this year?

WHO: YOUR ORG(s)

What organization(s) will you be supporting or looking to for resources and information about how to get involved? Follow them all on social media and sign up for their email lists. Who do you know in your school, workplace, or community that might want to join you in your efforts?

HOW: YOUR MO

What methods will you use to make a difference on your cause?

If you're not sure, consider:

- a) What do the organizations you're going to work with asking people to do?
- b) What skills do you have and how can you use these for your cause?
- c) What opportunities do you see in your community, workplace, or school to make a difference?

SET YOUR GOALS: WHAT BY WHEN?

What would you like to accomplish in the next month? 6 months? Year? 10 years? Lifetime? Start setting goals and brainstorming the actions you will need to accomplish them. Brainstorm here and then start scheduling actions in your calendar or planner to help make them real.

DAILY ACTIONS: What actions will you strive to take in your daily life? These could include boycotting companies or products; changing the way you shop, eat, or travel; etc.



Conclusion

Being an activist might be the most fulfilling thing we can do in our lives. What could be more meaningful than taking action to help others and to bring about a better world?

Yes, there are challenges -- what to say or do in this or that situation, finding time in your schedule, and dealing with setbacks -- but so many changemakers who have come before us have done so much to make our world a better place for us, and now it's our turn to shape the future we want to leave behind.

At YEA Camp we are constantly inspired to see so many examples of people -- including kids just starting middle school -- who are passionate about a cause get active to do great things.

Twelve-year-old Megan started a club that has raised thousands of dollars to help homeless people in Boston. Sixteen-year-old Tehya and her environmental club persuaded their school cafeteria to stop using styrofoam trays at lunch. Sixteen-year-old Jake did an internship for the Congressional candidate in his city. Seventeen-year-old Leah helped get her entire school district to implement Meatless Mondays. Fourteen-year-old Ananya lobbies her legislators to take action on climate change. Sixteen-year-old Noor has been making popular and inspiring youtube videos about her challenges with eating disorders. Fifteen-year-old Josh is on the Board of a nonprofit and led a fundraising training to help them raise more money. Seventeen-year-old Hani organized and spoke at the March for Our Lives walkout at her school.

This is a drop in the bucket of the activism these young people have been doing. And you can do it too!

There's one final critical thing you must know. You are awesome! The fact that you read this far means that you care so much about making a difference, you are a person of integrity, and the planet is better off because of you being on it.

Changing the world on the massive scale we want is really hard, but changing it in small ways is a lot easier -- and lots of us changing the world in all of these small ways adds up to big change.

So get to it. Pay your rent for living on this planet. And [let us know](#) how it goes.

And if you'd like way more hands-on training and support than anyone could possibly provide in a guide, plus so much more fun and inspiration, we hope you'll come to YEA Camp! We have [sessions for teens](#) and [for adults](#), and we are always [hiring](#) people who are changing the world.