



Safe Activism Summary

Reducing the risk and cost of
detention

Spring 2024



What Is Safe Activism?

The experience of activists and political prisoners shows that not being familiar with the principles of safe activism and not observing security tips can cause serious risks for activity, many of which can be easily prevented. Many of these security tips reduce the risk of arrest and damage to group activities and other activists, and many others reduce the psychological damage and legal costs of an activist being imprisoned. Also, after the release, the activists face many problems and these hints can reduce their intensity.

This booklet was prepared with the help and cooperation of about two hundred Iranian activists and political prisoners, taking into account the fundamental differences in the type of experience of different people.

The Safe Activism project has tried to propose various solutions in this regard. On the one hand, Iranian activists from different backgrounds face various conditions and possibilities, and on the other hand, at the individual level, the weaknesses and strengths of people are different. Also, different situations and events are unique in many cases. Therefore, it is obvious that solutions that work for a person or people in one case may not work for another person or people in another situation.

This text will introduce you to a summary of the Safe Activism booklet. Our strong advice to all activists is to read the original booklet carefully. Even though much of what you read in this booklet may seem obvious, we recommend that you read those sections with patience. This booklet has several chapters, each of which explains one aspect of safe practice. In addition to the main manual, we have developed other manuals that detail various aspects of safe practice.

By reading this summary, you will get to understand the Safe Activism booklet. By reading the booklet, you will learn the essentials of Safe Activism and recognize the recommendations that specifically apply to you and your activity. Based on this, you can go to the specialized books that are useful for you.

In this summary, the recommendations are divided into three general sections:

- 1- Things you must know before arrest.
- 2- Things that help you in interrogation and arrest.
- 3- Follow the things that are suggested after you are released from detention.

1. Before Arrest

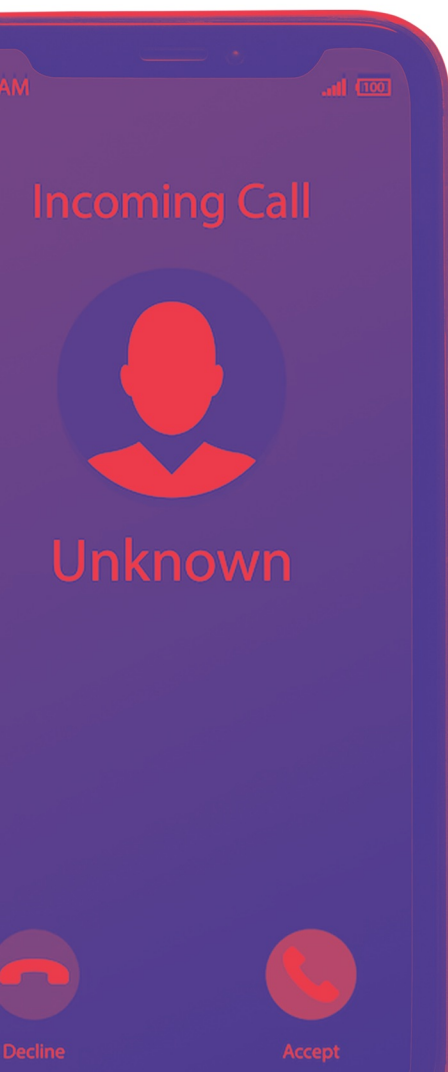
A photograph of a person in a crowd, wearing a red mask and raising their right hand. The background shows other people and a sign with Persian text. The image has a red and blue color overlay.

The most effective way to cope is prevention. In many cases, a person's type of activity greatly increases the probability of being arrested. But trying to prevent it is the first step to protecting yourself from the various harms that repression apparatuses inflict on activists.

If you think the probability of your arrest is high: Be sure to purge your house. Talk to your family or at least one trusted family member so that they are somewhat prepared after the arrest. Call some of your friends and ask them to spread the news of your arrest in the media. For more information on the importance of publicizing the arrest, see the "Role of the Media" section. Travel without attracting attention if you can. If possible, try to have a friend with you so that if you are arrested, your friends and family will know. Try to leave simple codes with your family before the arrest so that you can inform them about your situation without the interrogator finding out during the visit or phone call.

Emergency Preparedness Guide

If you are wanted by the security forces and there is a possibility that you will be arrested, it may be necessary to stay away from home for a short time until the coast is clear. It is better to have a backpack ready for such situations. It is better to have a backpack containing a series of essential items for at least one month



Digital Security

One of the most important aspects of Safe Activism is digital security. Smartphones have become an integral part of our lives, but in many cases, the lack of security of smartphones has become a problem for activists. For most of us, a mobile phone is a personal device in which we store many documents; Evidence that can be about our relationships with others or the places we have gone, or reveal our beliefs and opinions, or the things we have done. Therefore, taking a phone that stores all your sensitive information with you to gatherings where there is a high probability of arrest creates additional risks for you.

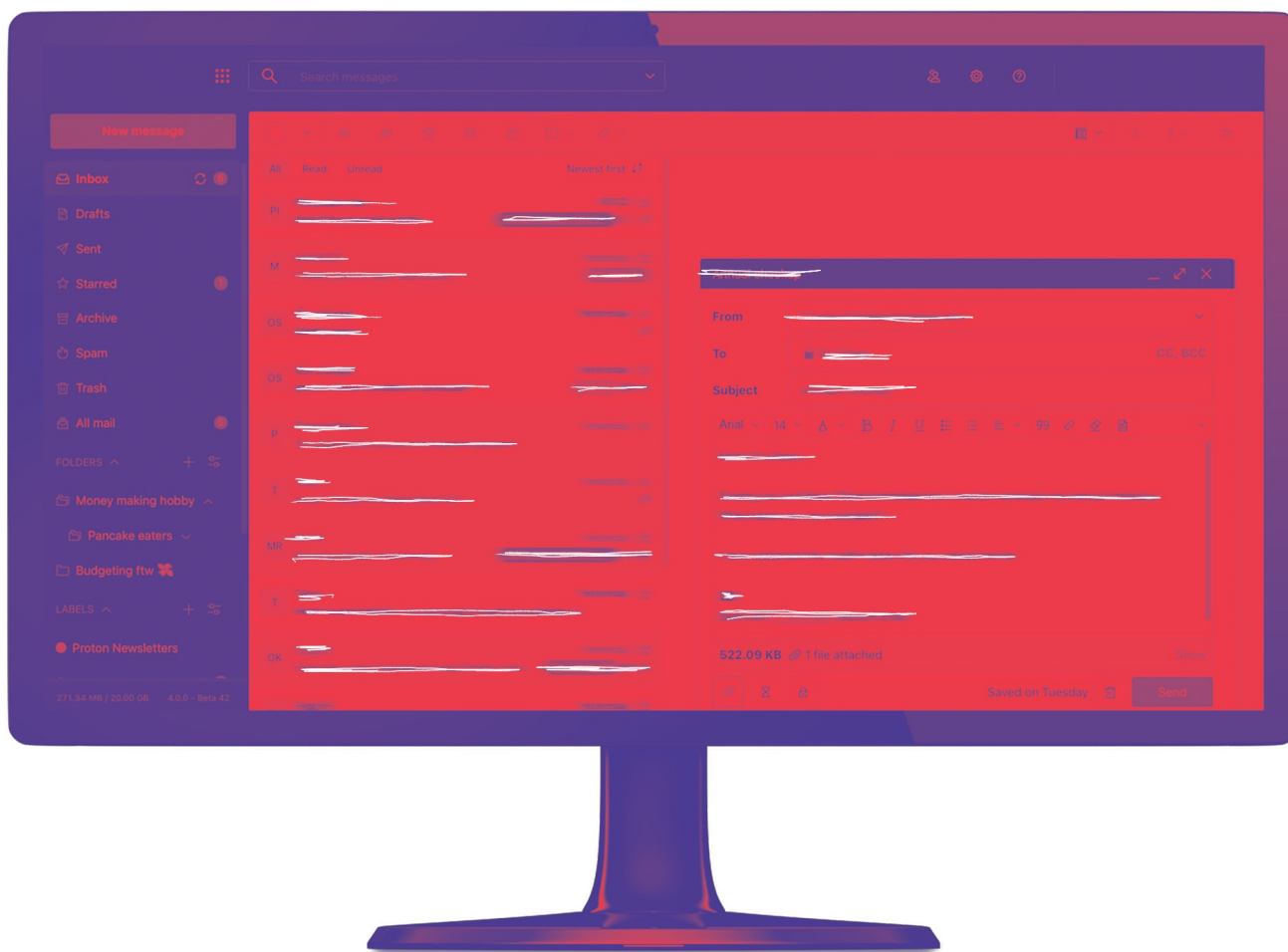
Never store your email and social media login information on your phone, especially if there is a serious possibility of arrest.

No one can tell you with certainty what level of information security you need: should you use relatively complex encryption methods or are more common methods sufficient for you? Are there risks involved? Is the cell phone worth the benefits for you or not?

Since you know better than anyone about the level of sensitivity and risk of the activities you do, it is better to find answers to these questions after reading different sources. But even if you don't feel that your activities cause a big risk, as a citizen living under the rule of a repressive government, your information is at risk both from the government and from people with bad intentions. Many people do not take digital security seriously until they suffer serious harm from it and consider hacking and sensitive information falling into the wrong hands to be other people's problems. Political and social activists should take this issue much more seriously because if their information is misused, it not only puts themselves at risk but other people's safety as well. A method that is considered safe today may be considered completely unsafe tomorrow. Therefore, if you are involved in a sensitive activity, it is necessary to read the currently available pamphlets and check new and related sources regularly to raise your level of awareness about digital security and also learn about the latest digital developments.

Deleting Messages Periodically or Automatically

We are living in an era where the use of messenger software has become more widespread and these messengers play an important role in our lives. For example, you can use messengers such as WhatsApp, Telegram, or Signal to send your friend just a voice message or a free text message instead of talking on the phone for a long time. They have made our lives easier but not necessarily safer.



Most messengers store an archive of your voice, video, and photo messages and the text of your messages.

If you are arrested, it can be used against you and your friends in the interrogation and the court. So if there is a possibility that you will be arrested, it is better to think about periodically erasing the photos, videos, and messages saved in the messenger software as soon as possible.

Our strong advice to all activists is to read the digital security section of the booklet carefully and take its security recommendations seriously.

2. Arrest and Detention Center



Being aware of what is likely to happen when you are arrested will reduce your panic and allow you to react more carefully. Security forces usually enter or attack your home or workplace to arrest you. But there is a possibility that you will be arrested on the street. While in some cases the behavior of the officers is respectful, many times they try to make the process of pressure for confession easier by creating an atmosphere of terror from the moment of arrest. Except for verbal insults and physical violence, they probably blindfold you and put you in a car without telling you where the destination is. In some cases, they ask you to bend your head towards the floor of the car so that you don't see where you are going.

If you think you will be arrested, try not to be alone in public as much as possible, so that if someone is arrested, others can inform your family or friends. Try to be with those who are not likely to be arrested, such as family members or non-activist friends and acquaintances. The presence of others also reduces the possible violence of the officers at the moment of arrest.

If you think you will be arrested, arrange with one of your friends to call you at least once a day. In this case, if he does not receive an answer from you for 2 consecutive days, he will be informed of your arrest. Note that security devices can easily detect your location by tracking your cell phone. Therefore, pay special attention to this point when you are likely to be arrested. For more information, please refer to the section on Safe Use of the Internet and Electronic Devices.

Activists who have been arrested before mostly believe that you should ask to see the arrest warrant (AKA interrogation order). Although it may not have an effect, if you see the arrest warrant, you will find out its issuing authority. The authority for issuing the arrest warrant is usually mentioned in the arrest warrant. In this way, your family will know which court and branch they should visit in order to pursue your case.

In many cases, it is helpful to remain calm during an arrest, especially if the officers have come to arrest you with a warrant. If the situation becomes tense, try to control the prevailing atmosphere to some extent with your behavior, sometimes with silence, sometimes with jokes, and sometimes with reminding them of your rights. Avoid struggling and resisting, which may lead to more misbehavior or violence from the officers. Because most of the time the person who arrests you does not know much about your case and it will be useless to argue with them. If you have sensitive documents at the time of your arrest, try to destroy them or keep them away from you so that they are not attributed to you.

After being transferred to the detention center, you will go through the usual procedures for admission to the detention center. After taking a photo and recording your profile, you will often (in most security detention centers) hand over your personal clothes and receive a prison uniform. Then you receive the personal items needed in the cell (toiletries, blankets, etc.).

Also, you go to the hospital after being arrested. Sometimes the process of arrest in big and small cities has slight differences and some of those who are arrested in small cities do not experience this stage. But if you go to the hospital, you must inform the health officials about all the medical problems or medicines you are taking.



Charges and arrest order

In order to explain the accusation, the judicial authority will come to the prison, or they will take you to the court and inform you of the charges against you. Sometimes, the charges are filed a few days later, even a few weeks later, and in some cases, a few months later. In this case, be aware that your detention and interrogation without charge is illegal. Usually, at the stage of indictment, the arrest warrant of the accused is also issued. The detention order is usually one month, but sometimes it can be two months. If the interrogations and filing procedures continue, every month the interrogator must request that the detention order be extended and this request must be approved by the interrogator. It is recommended that you appeal the detention order every time.

Interrogation

Getting familiar with the interrogation process, preparing to endure this period, and optimally dealing with the interrogators' pressures are the most important issues during detention. Interrogation and confession are of special importance in Iran's judicial system. In most cases of activists, there is no evidence other than the words of the accused or the confessions of other persons. For this reason, the defendant's behavior and ultimately resistance during interrogation is a crucial issue. Resisting an interrogation is usually difficult, but it is ultimately to your advantage as it reduces the likelihood of conviction and punishment. This suggestion doesn't mean you should remain silent or confront the interrogator, but it means not to give up and not to lose your spirit. Although many activists are somewhat familiar with possible methods of interrogation before arrest. But because the interrogation conditions depend on many factors, it is difficult to predict the interrogator's behavior.

Interrogation is a mental game, the main purpose of which is to get information. To achieve this goal, interrogators usually use the trial and error method. They change their tactics at different stages to find the best way to get information from the prisoner.

Some common interrogation tricks are: Revealing part of the information, the good interrogator-bad interrogator game, and lying. During the interrogation (usually the first session) the interrogator will reveal some of the documents that have been collected about you so that you will think that they have information about all your activities and resistance will be futile. In the Good Interrogator-Bad Interrogator method, one interrogator pressures you and harasses you, and the other interrogator comforts you and pretends to be concerned about your interests and situation. Using a Good interrogator-Bad interrogator method is a very effective way to get information from a prisoner because following the pressures of prison and interrogation, the accused needs kindness and support more than ever, and a good interrogator's demeanor can be very deceptive. Lying is another method that is very common. Most of the interrogators' words are lies. They often mix their false statements with the truth to increase the effect of their psychological game. For example, they may show you a fake newspaper about the critical situation outside the prison.

How to deal with interrogation

Perhaps the most important thing to remember when being interrogated is that interrogation is a mental game and a show designed to get information that is ultimately detrimental to you and your activities. Therefore, it is recommended to get to know this game as much as you can to avoid serious damage.

The first thing you should know about this game is that it is uneven. It is clear that the interrogators have more interrogation experience than you and are trained for this task. This issue, as well as the abilities and authority that the interrogator has because of the position he is in, puts the interrogator in a position of power, and the prisoner is usually in a vulnerable position. But this lack of equal power does not mean that the prisoner cannot have the upper hand in critical situations; The prisoner can usually have partial control over the interrogation process. But this work must be done with great precision and sensitivity. Like everyone else, the interrogator wants to feel smart and that he is doing his job well, which is to extract information. For this reason, one of the most effective tactics used by activists during interrogation is a game in which not only the interrogator is not humiliated, but his sense of superiority is enhanced.

Never trust the interrogator's words. Always assume that whatever the interrogator says is a lie unless proven otherwise. Skepticism towards the interrogator is important because in the long process of interrogation and taking into account that the prisoner is in solitary confinement, a kind of natural trust is created between the interrogator and the prisoner, which is very dangerous. Try to hide your weaknesses. During your detention and interrogation, the more sensitive you are to any pressure factor, the more the interrogator will use that factor; Because he realizes that it is an effective way to get information from you. So revealing your weaknesses can put you under a lot of pressure. The most effective method adopted by activists in this field is the "virtual trench" strategy. They have tried their best not to reveal their real weaknesses or tried to downplay them if the interrogator touches them. Moreover, some activists have pretended to be sensitive to issues that are actually their strengths. One of the most important points that should be considered in all stages of interrogation is: To create a balance between resistance and the resulting dissatisfaction of the interrogators, with the amount of pretend non-resistance and providing insignificant information.

This work is actually optimizing the amount of information given with resistance in such a way that the least consequences affect the person and his relatives.

If you have to lie, don't worry about being exposed. Interrogators usually try to make you feel that it will cost you if they expose your lies. This is one of the common lies of interrogators. You can defend as much as possible what you have said even if it is not true. "Breaking" does not mean the end of resistance: As it was emphasized earlier, activists have different abilities and are eventually interrogated in different conditions. Under the pressure of interrogation, an activist may lose the ability to resist and break the term. If such a situation happens to you, know that your partial breakdown does not mean that your ability to resist has been completely lost. You can deny or deny part or all of your words after gaining strength again.

In all interrogations, there is pressure to confess against oneself and write specifically against other individuals. Writing confessions on paper is the last stage of interrogation. The documents of your case are your writings and not the words exchanged between you and the interrogator. Written confessions are evidence that will be used against you in court.

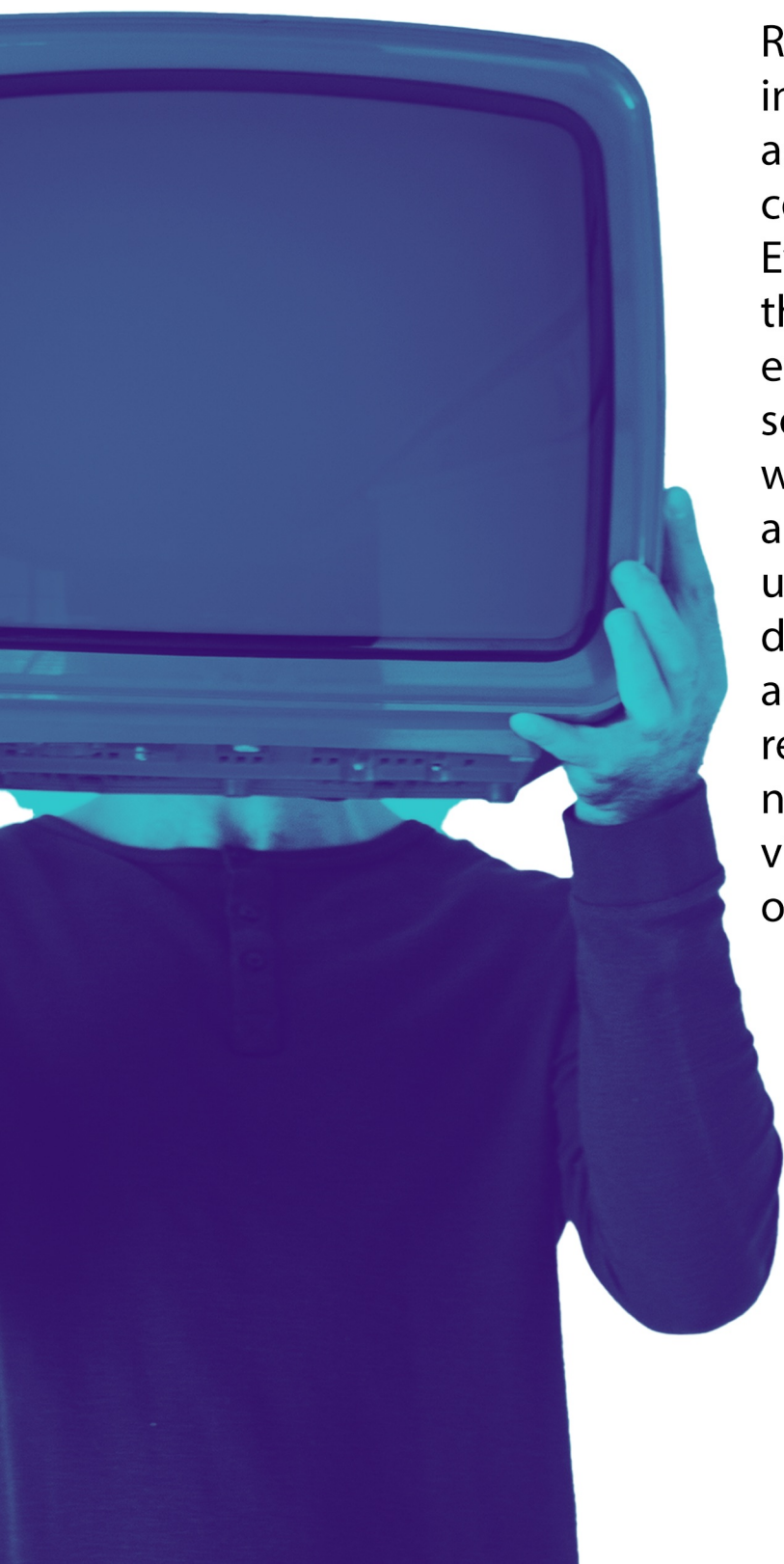


In the interrogation, you should try not to admit anything as much as possible. But in practice, most people are forced to confess to some extent. The difference is in its amount and in the importance of the given information. If the pressure increases, instead of discussing your activities or other people, do not write decisive and clear answers and use expressions such as I don't know exactly, maybe, and probably.

The interrogators will usually review your answers with you before you write them down. Regardless of what answer you agreed upon with the interrogator, write the answer you want without getting confrontational. Sometimes the interrogator may tear your writing several times. The goal of the interrogator is to eventually force you to write what he wants. But be careful not to be forced to give additional information to what they asked, or to write what the interrogator wants. You can change the sentences compared to the previous time to reduce the pressure every time you have to rewrite your content. This is a psychological game. Keep in mind that as much as you get tired, your interrogator also gets tired and agitated, with one difference, he gets paid to participate in this game, and he does not believe in the principle of the game.

If you are forced to write confessions about others, it is better to write low-risk and general information; For example, mention the academic background of the person, that he is a good person, and how you got to know him (if it is unrelated to your activities). Sometimes you can talk about some public activities of other people that you are sure are not problematic. Try to coordinate with your friends before the arrest so that in case of an emergency, you know what you can reveal about their connections and records. This preparation will help your friend to be aware of the revealed things during the interrogation and receive less harm.

If you are forced to confess under pressure and torture, you can indirectly refer to these pressures and write that according to the conditions you are in, or according to the concerns you have, you are writing this confession. These expressions can be useful later. You can also write at the end of each sheet that you wrote these contents under the pressure of the interrogator. Due to the possible strong reaction of the interrogator to the direct denial of written confessions, this issue may not be of much use in practice and the use of indirect denial methods is more feasible.



Resist requests for a televised interview or confession as much as you can, because televised confessions are rarely harmless. Every sentence you say in the video can be edited and eventually used against you or someone else. There are cases where the words of an activist about a specific event have been used in relation to a completely different event and against other activists. Where and how your recorded speech will be used is not in your control, and refusing a video interview is the best course of action.

Tolerating Solitary Confinement

Solitary prison, especially in the pre-sentence period, when the person does not know what fate awaits them, puts a lot of mental pressure on the prisoner. Remember, contrary to what the interrogators claim, the main purpose of placing you in solitary confinement is not to prevent the transmission of information. The main goal is to torture you mentally and break your resistance. Being in solitary confinement disrupts many of the prisoner's mental habits. The passage of time becomes imperceptible. Too much thinking and talking to yourself leads many to paranoia. Not talking to others makes the prisoner become emotionally attached to the interrogator.

The longer you are kept in solitary confinement, the more lonely you feel. Loneliness may lead you to doubt your beliefs and activities and make you more vulnerable to the interrogator and the interrogation process. Continually repeat your convictions in private and maintain your belief in the action you have taken; Even if you come to the conclusion that some of your actions were wrong, prison is not a place for self-reflection. It is better to postpone reviewing your actions and reasons until after your release.

Since not feeling the passage of time is the most important stressor, creating a regular schedule—as much as possible—is the best way to deal with loneliness. Some of the most effective ways to reduce the pressures caused by solitary confinement are: Daily planning and scheduling, daily exercise or dancing in the cell (so that your heart rate increases and you sweat), eating breakfast and meals regularly, drinking water, asking for medical attention, masturbating, thinking about good memories and taking refuge in the imagination and reminiscence, reading and memorizing books that you have access to, contacting neighboring cells if possible without talking about sensitive issues, cleaning the cell, making solitaire games, thinking that all these events will one day become a memory to tell others, going to the bathroom and toilet outside the cell and reading the writings on the wall and writing.

Cooperation Request

Usually, at some stage of the interrogation, you will be asked to cooperate with the intelligence authorities and give them information about various people after your release from prison. The closer you get to the end of the interrogation, the more likely you will hear this offer. At the end of the interrogation, the atmosphere is semi-friendly, and as a result, the atmosphere of pressure and resistance no longer prevails. The best and, in fact, the only useful response to an offer of cooperation is to immediately and firmly reject the request, even if you have already broken down under questioning. Apart from the moral problem, such an agreement means continued psychological control over you after your release.

You cannot consent to cooperation under false pretenses. It is wrong to think that once you are released you will be able to easily stop transmitting information. An agreement to cooperate is like a quagmire from which, although not impossible, it is very difficult to get out. Such an agreement is like giving the interrogator a weapon to continue controlling you after you are released from prison.

Meanwhile, if you don't firmly reject this request from the beginning, the interrogator will think that he can turn your potential cooperation into reality with more pressure, and therefore, he will put more pressure on you. You can explicitly reject this request without making the interrogator sensitive. For example, you can say that you are tired (of activism) and you don't intend to continue your activism in any way and you don't want to see your old [activist] friends anymore. Be careful not to sign the papers in which the topic of cooperation is raised in any way.

3. Release After Temporary Detention



After being released from detention, the detained person must wait for the outcome of their court case and probably have to contend with the personal, family, professional, etc. consequences of being detained. For many detainees, the hardships of prison only begin after their release from prison. The mental consequences of enduring torture, feeling unsafe, and always being watched, judgment of others can be part of the common problems that some detainees face.

But just like the challenges they face in prison and solitary confinement, there are effective solutions to transition to complete mental and physical health. It is suggested to make a plan for your daily exercise after release. Exercise is one of the best ways to deal with depression and uncomfortable and irrational thoughts. It is very useful to see a psychologist after release. The best psychologist is the one who gives you the feeling that he understands your situation well and you can trust him. If you do not get such a feeling from the psychologist, they are not the right psychologist for you, even if they are experienced. In such a situation, find another psychologist, you should feel that the psychologist's advice and approach are useful for your situation. It is better not to stay away from the community and try to be active. The need to be isolated may be strong in you, but hanging out with friends and family and strengthening social and emotional relationships will improve your mood and help you return to normal life. Reminiscing and talking about the events that happened to you in prison can reduce the negative impact of prison memories. Go on a trip for a while if you can, and consciously try to do things that make you happy and you enjoy doing.

Threats on Family are one of the things that may cause activists to worry more than anything else during detention and interrogation. Unfortunately, there is not much that can be done to deal with this threat, and at the same time, as mentioned earlier, the more you show that you care about your family, the more this concern will be used against you.

Before being arrested, some activists had explained to their families about their activities and told them that they might be arrested. These activists had informed their relatives about the pressure methods of security and judicial institutions. Although such conversations will have a relatively limited effect on your level of concern, they will make your loved ones more prepared.

The Role of the Media

Most of the activists who played a role in preparing this booklet have emphasized the importance of publicizing the news of the arrest and prison over any other action. The advice of the activists was clear: Spreading the news of the arrest and media attention gives strength to the prisoner and makes the interrogator more cautious. Usually, the judicial authorities threaten the families of the prisoners that if the news of their child's arrest is broadcast, they will keep them in prison longer, and they will receive heavier punishment. But this is contrary to the practical experience of the activists we talked to. The experience of these activists shows that prisoners whose arrest was not reported in the media are more vulnerable to harm. Therefore, ask your family members not to take a political position and only tell the news and details about your arrest from the standpoint of a concerned family. Of course, in mass arrests of people (for example, in the suppression of street protests), many of the arrested are released after 24 hours, and for this reason, it is recommended not to inform in the first 24 hours. But after this period, publicizing the person's arrest helps them a lot.



Court

Before going to court, try to contact your lawyer to inform you about the court process. Keep in mind that if you do not have the financial means to hire a lawyer and the punishment for the crime you are accused of committing is death or life imprisonment, the court will appoint a lawyer for you. Court-appointed lawyers may be among the most committed and ethical lawyers, but in security cases in the prosecutor's office, judges usually choose their trusted lawyers as court-appointed lawyers, so we emphasize that you should not give your information to these lawyers and not talk about your activities. Do not open up to them. In addition to the issue of the lawyer, knowing the most fundamental rights of the defendant before appearing in court can be very helpful. For this purpose, you can consult human rights lawyers, search the relevant laws on the Internet, or read the legal section of the Safe Activism booklet.

Mental Health

It is no secret that any political and social activity in Iran can have risks such as arrest, torture, prison, and similar cases. This is one of the bitter consequences that many activists face. Just as one must be prepared to deal with solitary confinement, interrogation, and court, it is better to be aware of the psychological consequences these experiences can cause and to be prepared to deal with them as much as possible.

Experiences such as detention, solitary confinement, and torture cause psychological harm to a person, and therefore it is very important to know trauma, its consequences, and how to deal with it.

Trauma is a strong reaction of the mind and body to a horrible event. In such a situation, the defense system of the mind becomes ineffective and the person loses the ability to maintain their psychological structure, which results in intense feelings of helplessness, panic, and loneliness. In trauma, a person enters a state of doubt and significantly loses the ability to understand and give meaning to events, and the world becomes an unsafe and dangerous place for them. The reaction to this terrifying event is not limited to the mind, and the body also sees this event as a sign of threat. A threat that - like death - can endanger a person's survival and cause significant changes in the brain and other organs of the body.

The impact of trauma on people is very different; What is traumatic for one person may not be as intense for another, due to differences in personal resilience, life experiences, and available support systems.

Resilience is the ability to endure the difficulties and fluctuations of life and find a suitable solution for them. Resilience increases the power of the mind to face daily challenges and traumatic events and helps maintain mental health. For this reason, it is necessary to address this issue for every person, especially for people who decide to enter a traumatic environment and who are more likely to experience trauma.

There are different ways to increase resilience, and since we are all different in terms of personality, life experiences, temperament, etc., there is no one-size-fits-all resilience approach that works for everyone. For this reason, it is recommended to read the mental health booklet carefully, choose the methods that are suitable for you, and practice them many times.

Epilogue

What was discussed in this text is a summary of what activists need in order to defend themselves against the dangers that threaten them. As we mentioned before, preparing for Safe Activism is very difficult. It is much more difficult to follow the points mentioned above in practice. For this reason, we strongly recommend reading the entire pamphlet carefully and reading other pamphlets related to your type of activity.

Best of luck.

SAFE
ACTIVISM



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