

Key Concepts

Some re-occurring key concepts that come up in Turning the Tide's work are

- Nonviolence
- Power
- Social change
- Participatory group-working

Turning the Tide doesn't proclaim to have the one and only definition for any of these terms, but we have built up a comprehensive body of knowledge working with these concepts over the years. Below we briefly explain what these key concepts mean to us.

Nonviolence

Nonviolence is the foundation of all of Turning the Tide's work, yet we don't have a set in stone definition because we've learned it means different things to different people, but we use the following principles of nonviolence as the basis for our work.

Turning the Tide's Principles of Nonviolence

- Respect for the opponent/everyone involved as fellow human beings.
- Care for everyone involved.
- Belief that everyone is capable of change and that the opponent's basic humanity can be reached.
- Refusal to harm, damage or degrade people/living things/the earth as a means of gaining ends.
- If suffering is inevitable, willingness to take it on oneself rather than inflict it on others; not responding to violence with violence.
- Recognition that no one has a monopoly of truth, aiming to bring together our 'truth' and the opponents' 'truth'.
- Belief that the means are the ends in the making, so the methods we use have to be consistent with the ends that we seek.
- Openness rather than secrecy.
- Necessity of training so that nonviolence thinking and behaviour become part of our everyday lives.

Power

Power is often defined as the capacity to influence others' behaviour, to get others to do what challengers want, rather than what the initial parties themselves want. It is, however, important to recognize that change can be within rather than outward. Turning the Tide is particularly interested in working with the energy generated when inward power (empowerment) is combined with organised and strategic nonviolent outward efforts to mobilise for social change. In this course we'll focus mainly on 'power over' (domination, threats, oppression) and 'power-with' (participatory collaboration, cooperation and group-working). As a point of reference we offer Starhawk's definitions of 'power over' and 'power with'.

Starhawk's Definitions of 'power-over' and 'power-with'

- **Power-over** sees the world as an object, made up of many separate, isolated parts that have no intrinsic life, awareness or value. Human beings have no inherent worth; value must be earned or granted. Power-over motivates by fear, violence or threat of violence.
- **Power-with** sees the world as a pattern of relationships, but its interest is in how that pattern can be shaped moulded, shifted. It values beings, forces, and people according to how they affect others and according to a history based on experience.

Social Change

Social change is the result of collective action taken by ordinary people to alert, educate and mobilise great numbers of people to challenge the power-holders and the whole of society to recognise and address social problems thus shifting, restoring or establishing critical social values. Most social problems require changes in policy and/or structures at a national or international level, but the strength of a national or international social movement comes from the strength of local grassroots groups doing regular and routine agitation through a variety of methods to pressure the power-holders to change policies and/or structures. These methods range from education and advocacy (via letter-writing, public events, petitions, distributing leaflets, etc) to taking direct action (boycotts, blockades, sit-ins, etc).

Nonviolent power for social change is hard work, requiring commitment, passion, strategies for resisting the injustices and equally if not more important strategies and actions for building new structures/systems or policies. The scope and power of nonviolence for social change is little understood, yet we know its potential is immense. Activists/scholar David Dellinger said we understand the power of nonviolence for social change about the same way that Edison understood the power of electricity in his day. One certainty about nonviolence is that it always heals and has potential for bringing change and violence always hurts and destroys.

Participatory group-work

We strive to make our workshops as participatory, inclusive and dynamic as possible, taking into account a range of learning-styles and ways of processing and working with information. Using a variety of methods (presentation of information, large and small group discussions, role plays, games, multimedia resources, action activities, etc) we create a space for participants to share their own experiences to build a collective and deeper understanding of the concepts or frameworks we are working with. There is no substitute for the wisdom and power of group that takes advantage of members' full range of experience and skills.

We also expect you to take responsibility for your learning and to participate at a level that is right for you. Stepping outside of our comfort zone may be scary and challenging and but it can also bring personal transformation, learning and growth. Going too far however takes us into the alarm zone where fear and distress shut down all learning possibilities. These boundaries are different for everyone, and only you know what is right for you.

Basically we believe that it's not just what you do that matters, it's how you do it. And since we are part of a larger movement working for an inclusive, just world where people feel empowered, connected and responsible, these are the starting points for all our workshops.