Counterprotesting in Niagara 101 & Emotional Health and Safety Guide

Version 2.0 - Updated January 2026

created by **Niagara Reproductive Justice**
niagarareproductivejustice.com

Introduction

This Guide will walk you through emotional health and safety, legal, and logistical considerations when counterprotesting. It also provides some additional resources for reproductive justice (RJ) and abortion issues locally and nationally.

We recommend that you familiarize yourself with the FAQ: Abortion in Canada page on NRJ's website that provides important information before engaging in counterprotesting: **bit.ly/NRJFAQ**

In this guide:

HEALTH & SAFETY (P. 2)

GROUP NORMS (P. 4)

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS (P. 5)

COUNTERPROTESTING STRATEGIES (P. 5)

LOGISTICS (P. 9)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (P. 10)

This Guide was created by members of NRJ and contains recommendations and advice gathered from personal experience and research. Please treat it as a *guide*, not as an official set of rules to follow. While we have included what we believe to be best practices, situations will vary and will call for a diversity of tactics. **Always prioritize your own emotional health and personal safety needs.** Keep in mind your own positionality, taking into account the barriers and privileges you experience in regards to safety, activism, and reproductive justice, and the positionality of those around you. We can't do this work if we aren't accountable and considerate of those doing it with us!

Please contact us to contribute information and recommendations to this guide.

Emotional Health & Safety Considerations

Health Precautions

Anti-choicers are known anti-maskers. **Wear a mask** and stand at least 6 feet apart from them at all times. Masks can help protect your identity as well.

Personal Information

While it is unlikely that the anti-choicers you confront will try to gather information about your identity to harass or use against you later, **it is safest to not tell them anything about yourself**.

- Do not counterprotest while wearing identifiable work or school clothes.
- Do not tell them your real name. Do not reveal the names of the people with you.
- Do not identify yourself as a member of Niagara Reproductive Justice or any other group.

Buddy System

As much as possible, it is **always best to counterprotest with another person.** Bring a friend along (who has also read this guide) or join us as a volunteer to find out when others are counterprotesting. *You are not expected to do this work alone.*

Do not give them any excuse to call the police

Drawing the police to an area endangers everyone there, including any passersby and unhoused people who live nearby and are already a constant target of police. Police are likely to side with the anti-choicers regardless of the events that transpired.

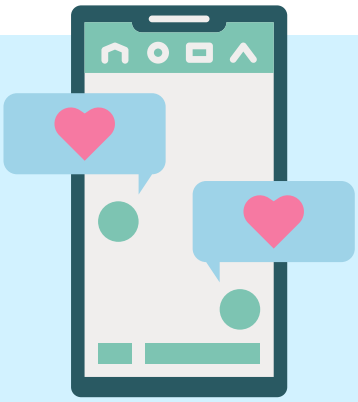
Be aware of the space and who is around

The protesters may be disrupting unhoused people who live nearby, harrassing people walking nearby, and blocking the sidewalks for people with strollers or mobility devices. **Ensure you are not contributing to these disruptions.**

If the protesters are near or on private property, **be careful not to step onto the private property**. This could include certain sections of sidewalks outside of government buildings or businesses.

Emotional Health & Safety Considerations (cont.)

Debriefing



- **Encountering anti-choicers in any form, even if you don't directly speak to them, is exhausting and can be emotionally triggering.** Talking it through can be helpful, even if you just want to let out your frustration or explain what happened.

- If you've been counterprotesting as a group, it's a good idea to debrief in-person immediately following the activity, if possible.

- Every time you engage with anti-choicers, please contact NRJ to let us know what happened so we can record the information for internal use.
  - **bit.ly/reportantichoicers**

Additional Security Recommendations

Web Security

- Facebook: Check your privacy settings. Figure out what of your personal information is viewable to the public by using the "view as" function, and then change your settings to make information viewable to friends only if you want. You may want to use an alternate last name or profile picture.
- Instagram: Ensure your account is "Private". Go to settings, "Account Privacy" and set to private.

- It's a good idea to Google yourself occasionally to see what comes up and who might be talking about you, or what people might find out about you if they search your name.

Never leave a protest alone if possible. Be conscious of where you travel to after, and if you're going somewhere close by, don't go directly there.

Establishing Group Norms

Plan for safety and establish group norms for protesting.

Make sure you have a plan and that you are on the same page.

It is better to **go with others** than to counterprotest alone, and its important that you know that you are all on the same page.

Establishing group norms needs to happen at the beginning of ***every*** counterprotesting or postering activity, even if you have been out with the same people before.

Discuss the following as a group before going out:

Do you want to split into smaller groups or stay together as a group?

- Either way, it is recommended that no person is ever completely on their own. If somebody is going to separate from the group, have them take a buddy with them.

Do you want to engage with the anti-choicers?

- It is likely you will be approached by the anti-choicers and asked to have a conversation. Decide beforehand if the group is okay engaging with them, or if anyone in the group prefers to not have to overhear that conversation or be in the close presence of the anti-choicers for long.

If things escalate or if the police show up, what will the response be?

- Some volunteers may wish to immediately leave the area. It should be made clear that it is not necessarily other volunteers' job to intervene in a situation.

Did anybody in the group walk here, and if so, do they need a ride home?

- It's not good practice to let a volunteer leave on their own, in case they are followed by an anti-choicer.

Does anybody have any concerns they'd like to discuss?

- For example, maybe somebody wants to make it known that they have precarious immigration status and therefore need to take every precaution that the police will not be drawn to the area
- Is there anything else anybody wants to discuss?

Legal Considerations

As we emphasize throughout this guide, do not engage in any activities that could result in the police being called or you being fined or arrested. Case after case has shown that the police will side with the anti-choicers regardless of the situation.

Best Practices:

- Do not step onto private property while counterprotesting.
- Do not get within 6 feet of the protesters.
- Do not make threatening motions toward them or threaten them verbally.
- Do not carry anything with you that could be perceived as a weapon.
- Do not steal or destroy their signs.
- If you are with a lot of counterprotesters, do not crowd the protesters or block them from leaving.

BE OVERLY CAUTIOUS.

NRJ cannot provide financial or legal support if you are fined or arrested.

Strategies for Counterprotesting

Strategy 1: Gathering Information

If you don't have time to counterprotest but you do feel comfortable approaching the anti-choicers, try to gather as much information as you can from them.

- What group are they with?
- How often do they protest? Where?
- Where did they get their materials from?
- Do they ever work with any other local groups or organizations?
- Do they have funding? Where does it come from?
- What is the name of the person you are talking to?

Take any materials they offer you. You can pass this material off to an NRJ core member or throw it away if you know we have already collected the same material from protesters before.

If you can talk to them a bit before they know you're in opposition to them, you may be able to get more information out of them, such as what church they belong to or more details about the organizations they are affiliated with. *This information is helpful for us to understand the anti-choice networks in Niagara.*

Strategies for Counterprotesting (cont.)

Strategy 2: Leafleting and Sign Holding

The most effective counterprotesting strategy is to hold pro-choice signs near the protesters and pass out pro-choice materials. NRJ has some of these signs already made that you can access (*see the Logistics section of this guide*), but if you want to make your own, here are some ideas to get you started:

- Abortion access saves lives
- Protect abortion access
- They're wrong (with an arrow pointing toward the anti-choicers)

Your sign should be very clearly pro-choice so that you don't get confused with the anti-choicers by passerbys. They might confuse you anyways despite your efforts.

You can also **pass out reproductive justice materials.** NRJ's website has small zines that counter some of the most common anti-choice talking points that you can access download and print (see the Logistics section of this guide). If you can't easily print yourself, reach out to NRJ and we may have copies available.

If you see anti-choicers hand a leaflet to passerbys, you can offer them one of your pro-choice leaflets, and if possible switch out their anti-choice material. Remember to approach with consideration and calmness. They've just been approached by anti-choicers, which can be a jarring and unpleasant experience, and they may be confused or wary of you.

It is **not advised to hand out leaflets or zines unless you are also holding a pro-choice sign**. Otherwise, passerbys may think you are passing out anti-choice material.

Strategies for Counterprotesting (cont.)

Strategy 3: Wasting Their Time

If you are by yourself or don't have any counterprotesting materials with you, you can waste the time of the protesters by talking to them. For this strategy, it is useful to approach the protester who looks the most inexperienced or new.

While you are not going to be able to convince the protesters that they are wrong, they may believe that they can convince you. You can use their false belief to your advantage by engaging in conversation with them and wasting their time. As long as they are talking to you, they can't talk to someone else who might actually be susceptible to their arguments.

You can engage in a variety of conversation topics with the anti-choicers. It's always good to collect as much information from them as you can (see the "Gathering Information" section above). Arguing with them is the natural default, as the first question they ask you is likely to be "what are your thoughts on abortion?" You can be as agreeable or disagreeable as you want, it is inconsequential since it is extremely unlikely that either of you will convince the other.

They may be better at arguing their points than you are at arguing yours. Try not to get caught up in proving them wrong. Remember that the goal is to waste their time, not convince them that you're right.

They will likely end the conversation once they realize you cannot be convinced and are trying to waste their time or if they feel like you are disrespecting them. At this point, you probably won't be able to approach any other protester because they will have noticed you talking to their friend. The protesters also may decide to move location once they finish talking to you. You can choose to follow them, but do it safely and from a distance.

Please note that this strategy can be emotionally exhausting and generally unpleasant. If you need to debrief afterward, you can contact NRJ and somebody will be able to chat by phone or text with you.

Strategies for Counterprotesting (cont.)

If you don't want to approach anti-choicers but you still want to be involved, here are a few options:

- Report the activity with our Anti-Choice Activity Reporting Form: **bit.ly/ReportAntiChoicers**
- Spread the word about our Anti-Choice in Niagara Reporting Form on social media and by talking about it and sharing the link with your friends and family
- Help coordinate a response by handling the logistics or any printing or materials needs
- Go postering! Make sure you review our Postering Safety Guide beforehand!
- Monitor the online presence of anti-choice organizations and alert NRJ if you see that they're planning a protest or event in Niagara

On-the-Go Counterprotesting

If you spot anti-choice activity happening and want to counterprotest on the spot, here are some tips that might help you be prepared for any moment!

- If you have a car, keep a pro-choice sign in your trunk.
- If you don't have a car, use a pillowcase and paint to make a protest sign. This way you can roll it up and keep it in the bottom of your bag. If it's a windy day, you can place rocks or something heavy in the pillowcase to stop it from blowing in the wind.
- If you don't have materials with you and don't want to stand there on your own, you could consider approaching the anti-choicers to find out information about them. Make sure you're not wearing anything that would identify you. Only do this if you feel comfortable, and remember to debrief with somebody if possible!

Logistics

Who to contact when you see anti-choicers

- **Message NRJ on social media.** Include the following information: time, location, estimated number of protesters, and whether or not they have graphic posters
  - Instagram: **@Niagarareproductivejustice**
  - Facebook: **Niagara Reproductive Justice**

- Fill out the **reporting form** after seeing them or going out to counterprotest, the sooner the better so you'll remember the details.
  - **bit.ly/reportantichoicers**

Where to get counterprotesting materials

NRJ has signs, counterprotesting zines, and other materials on our website! These are **FREE resources** for you to print and use whenever you need them. Find them at **www.niagarareproductivejustice.com/materials/**

What to do Afterward

- **Debrief** with others about your experience.

- **Reach out to NRJ with the details of your experience!** This way, we can log any information for internal purposes moving forward.

- **Take care of yourself!** Ensure you engage in some self-care following an interaction with anti-choicers. This can be a very exhausting task, so fill your cup back up afterwards!

Additional Resources

NRJ Resources

Please read our Values Statement on our website: www.niagarareproductivejustice.com/our-values

Anti-Choice Activity in Niagara Reporting Form: bit.ly/reportantichoicers

Our Niagara Resources page lists sexual health resources in the Niagara Region: www.niagarareproductivejustice.com/niagara-resources

You can find our zines (The Truth About Abortion in Canada; Debunking Crisis Pregnancy Centres; Sexual Health Resources in Niagara) on our Materials page, www.niagarareproductivejustice.com/materials

You can also review some of the basic information about abortion in Canada on our FAQ page: www.niagarareproductivejustice.com/FAQ

It's always good to know how to help people access abortion in Niagara: www.niagarareproductivejustice.com/support

Follow us on Instagram (@niagarareproductivejustice) for updates and links to other resources

Educational Resources

What is Reproductive Justice? | SisterSong

Abortion in Canada | The Canadian Encyclopedia

Crisis pregnancy centres mislead women, report says | Global News

Five Years After Abortion, Nearly All Women Say It Was the Right Decision, Study Finds | University of California San Francisco

Canada's anti-abortion movement is rebranding — and pushing for political impact | CBC

Additional Resources (cont.)

Abortion Issues in Niagara

'Fatigue, frustration and anger' felt in Hamilton, Niagara region after Roe v. Wade overturned in U.S. | CBC

'People need to be very vigilant': concerns rising over future of abortion access in Canada | St. Catharines Standard

Niagara MPP Oosterhoff headlining event after organizer compared abortion to Holocaust | CBC

My Unthinkable Abortion: St. Catharines Reg. Councillor Goes Public and Sends Letter to Oosterhoff | iHeartRadio

Organizations Doing Related Work

Local to Niagara

- OPIRG Brock: www.opirgbrock.com
- Niagara Falls Community Health Centre: www.nfchc.ca
- Quest Community Health Centre: www.questchc.ca
- OUTNiagara: www.outniagara.org
- Positive Living Niagara and Streetworks: www.positivelivingniagara.com
- Student Justice Centre at Brock University: www.brocku.ca/human-rights/student-justice-centre

Online & National

- Maggie's Toronto Sex Workers Action Project: www.maggiesto.org
- Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC): www.arcc-cdac.ca
- SisterSong: Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective: www.sistersong.net
- Native Youth Sexual Health Network: www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com
- Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights: www.actioncanadashr.org
- National Abortion Federation of Canada: www.nafcanada.org
- University of Victoria's Anti-Violence Project: www.antiviolenceproject.org

See www.niagarareproductivejustice.com/rj-resources for more local organizations and reproductive justice resource recommendations.

nrj niagara reproductive justice

Stay in touch!

Niagara Reproductive Justice

@niagarareproductivejustice

niagarareproductivejustice.com

Contact us!
niagarareproductivejustice@gmail.com