

# **After School Revolution**

**or, A Guide to Practical High School Anarchism\***

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The radicals\* keep getting younger and younger — and we couldn't be happier. We've all witnessed the horrors of authority — the alienation\*, the backbreaking work, the mind-numbing, muscle-destroying labor capitalism\* puts us through — and we can all relate those to our own experiences in school. Now the pressing question for the youth of today is: how can we fulfill our anarchist ideals in the school? How can we do praxis\* when we are still entrenched in the school system?

We (the authors, Song and Dartt) have been anarchists for some time now — and with our experiences in student advocacy (specifically in leadership positions of our high school's Gay-Straight Alliance), we'll provide some of our wisdom, as well as general guidelines for creating a difference in your community.

## 1. Why Anarchism?

Anarchism sounds like a scary word to most — it brings up images of violent narcissists screwing over other people in service of themselves; images of spiky punks overthrowing the government; of disorder, chaos and despair. That characterization of anarchism is something the ruling class wants you to believe; the fact of the matter is, anarchists are almost nothing like that.

Yes, it's true some of us are motivated by our self-interests; that's why we seek to cooperate with others, so that we can live happily without having to risk our own lives. Yes, it's true all of us wish to get rid of the government; when the government restricts our freedom to live how we desire, enforces the rulership of the rich and powerful in society over the common person, and sics the police or military on those who wish to live outside of its influence, of course the government is something we would want to do away with. The reason we say anarchism is the way society should be is because anarchism is the way most people want to be — free from oppressors who would impose their will on others, free to live as we see fit as long as we don't harm others.

We all want things that will allow us to have free access to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness — but we can't produce all the things that are required for us to do all three. Thus, we cooperate and collaborate with our neighbors; we distribute bread to our neighbors, and in turn they will provide us with tools, shelter, and clothing. That way, everyone is happy, everyone is fed and everyone is free. Nowhere does some kind of government or state\* need to intervene — a state only exists to further the interests of the person or people at the head of it. The government doesn't need to “take care of us” — we can take care of ourselves. For example, the government demands us to pay our taxes so they can do things like fix our potholes. But how do they fix our potholes? You and your neighbors would have to report it to the local government first. Then, when the government decides if it's important to fix the pothole, they have to bring people over to measure the dimensions of the pothole. Then they cordon off the road with the hole. Then they hire a contractor to fill the pothole. The contractor crunches the numbers to figure out which materials can plug the hole without straining their treasury. Then they fill the hole. This could take weeks to do — all the while, the people in the community cannot use the road to travel, cannot visit family or friends, and cannot get food or clothing without wasting time and gas rerouting. What should be just one afternoon of work at most becomes a month of bureaucratic foot-shuffling. And that's even if the government decides to fix potholes instead of hosting lavish dinner parties or holding useless parades. Not every government official is corrupt like that — but

power corrupts, and people can't truly hold the government accountable when the government has the police at its disposal, ready to strike down dissent.

In the same way, your school is like a state. Rather than focusing on educating young people, many schools are focused on having these young people pass state tests. Rather than allowing students to have an input in their own education, many schools will just grade students on a strict, inflexible scale that only reflects their utility, not ability. Rather than genuinely helping troubled kids who might be in bad home situations, schools will throw them in detention for "being disobedient." Not to mention, school systems, at least in the United States, are funded via property tax — that is, the richer the area is, the better the funding, and the better the quality of education. School as it is now is an authoritarian\* institution — and that's why anarchism is essential for the school system.

So, how do we create anarchism in our communities and our schools? Here's how.

## 2. How to Find Like-Minded People

The most important thing to do as a high school anarchist is to find others who share your goals and values. They don't need to be explicitly anarchist — that's not important, ESPECIALLY if you live in a small suburban or rural town. The main focus here is finding a group that can help you achieve your goals of accomplishing praxis.

Community service groups — Key Clubs and Optimist Clubs come to mind — are decent for charity. You can do good things for the poor in your community by joining one of their clubs. The community service and fundraising they do genuinely does alleviate some of the suffering of the poor in the community. However, most of these Key Clubs and Optimist Clubs are run as top-down hierarchies\* with adults at the top — we are not sure that these clubs are the best options for making genuine, lasting change in your school and community when all your actions must be stamped and approved by a higher-up. Not to mention, charity is not exactly the end-all be-all of anarchist praxis, as we'll explain later.

Minority clubs like Gay-Straight Alliances, Black student clubs or Feminist clubs are, in our opinion, more effective for channeling your Anarchist principles. To start, minority clubs are generally more receptive to the idea of resisting authority, considering the fact that most members of these clubs resent hierarchy on a daily basis — the hierarchies of white supremacy\*, cisheteronormativity\* and patriarchy\*, to name a few. These kinds of minority clubs can almost be considered dual power structures\* — where the school's so-called counselors fail in the realm of mental health support, minority clubs succeed by providing a sense of community and camaraderie. Where teachers fail in educating, minority clubs succeed through patient tutoring motivated by friendship and solidarity rather than a paycheck. Where school resource officers and administrators fail in enforcing "peace" through discipline, minority clubs succeed through direct action — usually, this is manifested as trolling or more "extrajudicial\*\*" means against deserving targets (of course, the clubs officially never condone these actions, but the individuals within the clubs may use it as a means to meet and organize). Here, mutual aid\* is a given.

The leaders of minority clubs are usually elected by the people of the club, rather than being chosen by a previous president or a teacher. Minority club leaders should be elected by popular consent; if they do a good job, they keep doing their job, and if they do a bad job, they can and should be easily recalled. It's not perfectly anarchist, but it's a lot more horizontally organized

than a lot of other clubs. All in all, diversity groups are already a form of proto-anarchism in action, and something you should join if you want anarchy.

One thing to note — you should almost NEVER form some kind of “Anarchist book club,” or any other kind of explicitly Anarchist club. That sort of organizing is both dangerous and ineffective. For one, teachers are almost NEVER going to endorse an “Anarchist club,” because Anarchism, to many, is still scary and misunderstood — and that endorsement may be important if you want to attract those who want to make a difference. You won’t get anyone to join if you hit them immediately with a scary word. Those who are genuine anarchists would not join, either, because people who join an “anarchist book club” generally get a huge target painted on their backs. While this situation is similar to what members of minority clubs suffer, minority clubs at least have the benefit of having a community to support them. With such a small openly anarchist population willing to join an “Anarchist club,” you do not get the support from a community like a minority club would have.

If there are no minority clubs at your school, you can start one if you are a minority (i.e. a person of color\*, queer\*, femme\*, disabled, neurodivergent\*, etc.). Lots of teachers would reject an “anarchism club;” not many would reject a Gay-Straight alliance or Black Student Club without expecting at least some pushback, at least not in a Western country with a liberal democracy like the United States. And of course, if you can’t get the approval of a teacher, you can always organize meetings of fellow anarchists or people of the same minority group outside of school.

If you are not a minority and you plan on joining a minority club to advance anarchism, make sure to respect the wishes of the people in the club. Do NOT attempt to exclusively proselytize about anarchism in the club, or make some empty promise that “Once we destroy capitalism, we can destroy white supremacy/the patriarchy/cisheteronormativity!” The liberation of marginalized peoples must happen at the same time that liberation from all forms of hierarchy happens — don’t ask us to wait for our freedom while yours comes first. Actions speak louder than words — so instead of telling your black or gay or women allies about the wonders of anarchism, show them the wonders of anarchism through your praxis.

In conclusion, minority clubs are your best bet when it comes to anarchist praxis in the school system. Just make sure to be respectful in those spaces if you are not part of that minority. If your school has no minority-led groups, then a community service club can be a decent substitute, but not a very horizontal one. If you can’t find any pre-established minority clubs and you are part of a minority, chances are there are people like you who can be persuaded to anarchism if you help establish a minority club. Ultimately, when you’re an anarchist in high school, you will want to move silently. Anarchism isn’t just hatred of resource officers and crappy teachers — it’s the mutual aid of minority clubs, the community service you provide, and the relationships you cultivate; not everyone realizes this. Show them the value of anarchism rather than telling them.

### **3. Mutual Aid and Praxis**

Of course, the most pressing question that high school poses to an anarchist is: “How can I practice anarchism in the community?” Praxis in the community is a noble cause, and one that requires a lot of thought. There are many methods of praxis, but the principal values of anarchist praxis, values that one must ALWAYS keep in mind, are the values of mutual aid and decentralization.

Let's start with mutual aid. Mutual aid is basically when people in the community offer whatever they can to each other — be it money, food, service or what have you — in order to support each other and serve each other's interests. This can take a few forms.

There's the act of giving to charities, although it's often argued this is distinct from mutual aid. These can improve the conditions of the poor members of the community temporarily. Another target for fundraising and mutual aid, and a probably more effective one, would be horizontally organized mutual aid funds, women's shelters and homeless shelters. All three of those prioritize the most vulnerable in the current system of governance — the urban poor, battered women and the homeless, respectively. As long as you are helping the less fortunate in the community you are making your community a better place — provided your help comes with no strings attached.

Thus the second priority an anarchist should have with their praxis — decentralization. Decentralization is the act of moving the power to make change and decisions over a whole group from a single body or entity to the group itself. It's the difference between a king ordering his subjects to create change, and a community working together to create change.

When you contribute to mutual aid, you should almost always tend towards decentralization at the same time. This is the reason why charities are ineffective. Charities are often run by boards of directors. They decide where to focus their efforts — and sometimes the places where they focus their efforts are not the right places. For example, a charity for homeless people may seek to create some kind of "job preparation program" for the people they serve, when they really need food, water and shelter first. Charities often seek to "help the poor" through work that is not directly tied to struggles against the very systems that cause poverty. They believe that inequality is an exception, not a given, in our current capitalist society, and that the best way to alleviate inequality is through strong authority "saving" the poor — an obvious contradiction, and one that ends up making the disadvantaged dependent on charity, rather than self-reliant. Charities are often connected to hierarchical organizations — churches, either of the two major political parties (at least in the US), corporations, etc. — that don't take the community into account. This contributes to the patronizing attitude that these charities adopt, and makes it harder for these charities to actually do anything meaningful. They are also subject to laws and regulations that tie their efforts up in bureaucratic red tape. Charities help the poor temporarily, but in the long term it wastes activist energy.

In contrast, a volunteer-run mutual aid project (such as a mutual aid fund or women's shelter) is more effective for causing lasting changes in the conditions of the disadvantaged. Rather than being run by an authority who thinks they know all the interests of the community they serve, they are run by the community themselves. Mutual aid projects are organized in a more anarchist manner — rather than having a board of directors who determines where resources should go, a mutual aid project is operated through consensus-based decision making where everyone who participates have a say. People can take what they need from a mutual aid fund, no questions asked — within reason. Members of mutual aid projects also don't just limit themselves to just giving to the poor — many volunteers will be found at the front lines of protests for social justice, or fighting cops who abuse their power, or giving the city council a piece of their mind. Decentralization, then, is one of the most important aspects of anarchist praxis. Without decentralization, anarchism is just charity.

Decentralization doesn't just stop at helping the poor in the community, either. You've often heard the refrain "support local businesses!" The reason why support for local businesses is espoused by many is because again, it is decentralization in process. Local businesses are often

run by people of the community — the owner of the donut shop could be your neighbor — as opposed to a large business run by a major capitalist who doesn't even live in the same state or province. Local businesses are therefore more accountable to the community than a big capitalist venture, and are thus more likely to serve the interests of the community. It's easier to build class consciousness\* and social consciousness\* among local business owners when their livelihoods depend on the goodwill of the community.

Supporting local businesses is still support of a capitalist — make no mistake about that. A small capitalist will have some interests that contradict with the interests of their workers. However, your support of a local business should be a reason why the local business owner has solidarity with the people of the community. Speaking from personal experience, our school's GSA ran a fundraiser at a local Bolivian restaurant. We ended up making about \$550 from people who decided to participate in the fundraiser, and afterward the owner of the restaurant reaffirmed his support of the LGBT+ community, and expressed solidarity based on his own experience as a Hispanic man in the United States. In that moment, we built community and made an ally. Support of a local businesses may fund a capitalist's lifestyle, sure, but it's also a way to remind a local business owner who their community is, and what they want. If a local business fails to support the community — whether it's through their politics or through business decisions that harms the worker or the clientele — then the community should fail to support that local business, whether it's through a strike or a boycott. Conditional support of local businesses, therefore, is an exercise in decentralization.

In the end, helping those in your community, whether through charity or mutual aid, is always good — it's just the question of decentralization that separates the temporary from the genuine, self-reliance building, solidarity boosting change.

## **4. Organize Without Hierarchy**

When looking to organize in an anarchist fashion, creativity and unbiased thinking in every party involved is required. Often, groups are set up with a similar structure to that of the US government — a loosely democratic and somewhat oligarchal\* system. This includes one person or a small group making decisions that impact all the members of the club, even those who have no decision-making power. This structure infringes on members of the groups autonomy\* and is what anarchists seek to tear down and replace it with a more horizontally distributed, decentralized power structure. Every member of the group has a place, and should be given a role to play in deciding the future of your committee. A simple fix may be to do away with roles such as “president”, “leader”, “boss”, etc... and instead give each member, or let members decide upon, a task they can complete every time the meetings are held.

For example: in an art club there may be a couple members who work on gathering resources for projects, a member who works on advertising the group, a few who work on fundraising and community outreach, and another who comes up with t-shirt ideas. No part is too small as long as the group members feel as though they are contributing in a positive way to the longevity of the club. Having all members involved in the continuation of the club also ensures that everybody feels needed and stays invested in the project. Too often the reason why people leave the group is because they feel unnoticed, disposable, or underappreciated. Keep these three things in mind

and make it clear to the club they all are worthy of attention and every idea should be taken with equal merit.

However, you will need to make sure the opposite — that people are coerced into doing things for the club — is not true either. People tend to not like being bossed around, and forcing someone into doing things for the club is not only a violation of anarchist ideals, it's also ineffective. Let people do what they want in the club — as long as they don't infringe on other people's freedoms — and they will also feel freer and will come back time and time again to help.

When it comes to dealing with authority figures in your community — principals, teachers, business owners, parents, etc. — it's an unfortunate observation that often they will only respect people with "authority," especially if you plan to advocate for your welfare and the welfare of others. A "leadership position" may be necessary, such as a "president" position, if only to deal with other authority figures. However, under anarchist organization, such a position would not be "leadership" as much as it would be a "delegate position." Ideally, such a position would be easily recallable by the people of the club, rotate somewhat regularly, and have no true authority over other members. They would act instead as messengers to authority figures in the community — they would represent the wishes of the club, not make one-sided decisions on their behalf. We (the authors) were both presidents of our school's GSA — and while Dartt's term was spent transitioning out of a more hierarchical form of organization, Song's was more horizontal in that there were committees made up of rank-and-file GSA members who would help with GSA tasks such as drafting new school policy and maintaining relations with parents and teachers, and Song's power was not absolute. Their position was still that of "leadership" — but the people who were "under" them were the ones who they depended on for their power in dealing with community authority figures. Not to mention, the things they had to do were made much less stressful when it was the task of many people rather than the task of one.

One thing to watch out for is the people who are elected into delegate roles acting like they're genuine "leaders". When electing delegates to deal with school authorities, you need to make sure you are voting based on the candidate's **COMPETENCE**, rather than your relation to them. If someone who was elected as a delegate starts acting tyrannically and their friends support it, it's your duty to inform others of the evils of tyranny and work together to either remove that person from their position or create your own group that's free of hierarchy. Anarchism isn't something set in stone; it's not a one-and-done deal, where you don't need to worry about it after it's been "established." Always question authority, whether its other's authority over you or your authority over others.

Anarchism isn't just the good you do for the outside world — it also means putting your own house in order. The ways we practice anarchism is the way we will live in it — and if our road to anarchism is paved with authoritarianism, then the "freedom" we find at the end is a lie.

## **5. Be Realistic!**

Some of the most important things to keep in mind when you are doing praxis are your conditions and your environment. We (the authors) went to school in an upper-middle-to-working class suburban high school that was, and still is, highly conservative. If some of our advice seems impractical in your environment, then feel free to apply it differently or even ignore it. If you live in a poorer area, then mutual aid might be of more relevance than charity. If you live in a

wealthy gated community, you might want to focus on redistributing your wealth to the victims of capitalism and persuading your community to have solidarity for the poor. If your area is liberal, be careful not to sound like you hate liberals — talk about how you agree with their stance on social justice issues, and your belief that no one should be dominated based on their identity. If your area is conservative, be careful not to sound like you hate conservatives — talk about how you agree with their stance on making the government leave common people alone, and that authoritarianism leads to ruin. Praxis doesn't mean putting yourself in danger for no reason whatsoever; it means making sure no one else in your community is in danger, and that starts by molding your strategy to your community.

Another important thing to keep in mind when you are an anarchist in a high school setting is this: change won't happen overnight. Your school's GSA or Black Student Union may still operate in a hierarchical way, and that's okay. Your community may still hold many bigoted opinions based on the domination of a certain people or group, and that's okay. Many people, even those who have faced systemic oppression, are still indoctrinated\* into an authoritarian mode of thinking by society. Authority and hierarchy are still deeply ingrained in US culture because most of society functions (albeit poorly) on authoritarian methods of organization. This is why, as anarchists, we need to convince our communities to embrace anarchy, not through coercion or force, but through gentle persuasion, through our good actions — through our praxis.

If the only organization in your area that helps the poor is a charity run by a board of directors, then there's no shame in supporting them at first. As your group of like-minded individuals grows in size and influence, however, you can create your own mutual aid projects that benefit the wider community — setting up mutual aid funds, or creating a free breakfast program or tutoring group or some similar program for your community when you all have enough money, power and influence to do so.

There's no shame in being part of a group that is still run hierarchically, as long as you and your fellow anarchists are doing everything in their power to organize without hierarchy. Our school's GSA originally only had one president and one vice president, and they made all the decisions. Over the course of a year, we broke down the hierarchical power structures and gave power and self-reliance to the people of the GSA. At first, we created more varied leadership positions, which gave more people a chance to enact change through the GSA. Then, we introduced "committees" made up of rank-and-file members of the GSA that would help with certain tasks, such as drafting and proposing new school policy, planning meetings, keeping records of club transactions and doing community outreach. We are not totally anarchist yet, but with the work we've done to eliminate hierarchy, we are sure the future generations of the GSA will get rid of the leadership positions altogether in favor of a completely horizontal order.

The point is, it doesn't matter if your community is still bigoted or authoritarian. It doesn't matter if your ideas fall on deaf ears at first. It doesn't matter that you may be the only anarchist you know in your town. What really matters is that you try your hardest to turn your anarchist ideals into reality, for a better, safer, freer community. You will have to be smart about your strategy. You will have to couch your explicitly anarchist speech in less offensive euphemisms. But as long as you try, whether it takes five minutes or five decades, you will make your anarchist dreams reality. That is praxis, and that is something any and all of us can do.

## Glossary

- Anarchism — Anarchism is the practice of removing all oppressive forms of hierarchy in one's community. This means no one singular person makes decisions for the masses. In anarchism every person is treated as an equal and is encouraged to take part in the growth of their community, whether it be a town, an organization, or even in the workplace.
- Praxis — Praxis is the practice of bringing political theory into the real world. In an anarchist context, this means doing away with authority and being free in your daily life.
- Radicals — A radical is a person who advocates for complete political or social reform or revolution.
- Alienation — Alienation is the state or experience of being isolated from a group or an activity to which one should belong or in which one should be involved.
- Capitalism — Capitalism is an economic structure in which private ownership takes the front seat. All money (capital) is held by individuals or privately owned businesses and used to trade for other goods and services. This can pose quite an issue as capitalism tends to favor the extremely wealthy, who make most of their money through the exploitation of workers and refuse to distribute it to those in need.
- State — A centrally-organized entity under the rule of one person or one small group of people. Places like the United States, where power is centralized in the Federal Government, and China, where power is centralized in the national government, are states. In this text, government and state are somewhat interchangeable in that the government is a political state; schools can be considered states under the reign of an administrator or superintendent.
- Authoritarian — An authoritarian system is one that enforces strict obedience to authority, especially that of the government, at the expense of personal freedom and autonomy.
- Hierarchy — Hierarchy is a system or organization in which people or groups are ranked one above the other according to status or authority. People at the top rung of the "social ladder" have much more control over their lives than the majority of the working class.
- White Supremacy — the belief that white people constitute a superior race and should therefore dominate society, typically to the exclusion or detriment of other racial and ethnic groups.
- Cisheteronormativity — The societal notion that being cisgender (not trans) and heterosexual is the norm and all others are labels as deviants or outcasts.
- Patriarchy — Patriarchy is a system of society or government in which men hold the power while women and gender minorities are largely excluded from it.
- Dual Power Structure — A community operating outside of the established ruling institutions. These communities may not necessarily be horizontally organized, but they serve as alternatives to an overarching ruling body and often practice forms of mutual aid.

- Extrajudicial — Extrajudicial actions are those not authorized or endorsed by the ruling system that claims jurisdiction over either party involved. Any anarchist praxis that does not involve the state or ruling authority is extrajudicial.
- Mutual Aid: The exchange and redistribution of communal resources to benefit all members of the community. Usually, this follows the form of “From each according to their ability, to each according to their need” — those who need more accommodations (whether they be homeless, a minority, disabled, etc.) will get what they require
- Leftist — Leftist can take many different meanings, but the most objective is anyone who identifies farther left than the political parties in their country. Leftists often advocate for socialism, communism, anarchism, or other political theories meant to rebuild societal structure so it better serves the entire population.
- Person of Color — A person who is not considered white by society (such as black people, Asian people, Native American people, etc.) and does not experience the full benefits of white supremacy. This includes people who are mixed-race (including mixed with white) and white-passing people who are not white.
- Queer — Queer is an all encompassing term used by the LGBTQ+ community to describe themselves. A queer person may not wish to use more descriptive terms such as “lesbian”, “gay”, “bisexual”, “transgender”, “genderfluid”, etc... and their wishes should be respected and enforced.
  - To all the LGBTQ+ allies reading, please keep in mind that the term “queer” is a reclaimed slur and should not be used in conversation by those not a part of that group. This paper was written by two queer people which is why the term can be seen throughout.
- Femme — Femme is a term used in the queer community to describe feminine aligned people identifying as lesbians.
  - Please note that the term “femme” originated in black trans spaces and that origin should be respected whenever the term is used.
- Neurodivergent — A neurodivergent individual differs from the neurology of those considered “normal” or “typical”. Some diagnoses related to neurotypicality include Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, Dyslexia, and those who have learning differences.
  - It is important to note that while diagnoses may be a good benchmark for some to describe their neurotypical nature, it is often very difficult for minority groups and/or those living in poverty to receive a diagnosis. You do not need a diagnosis to be neurodivergent.
- Decentralization — Decentralization is the transfer of control over an activity or organization to the member of the organization from a singular individual or group. Decentralization is one of the key tenets of anarchist praxis.

- Class Consciousness — The awareness of one’s place in the system of socioeconomic class (e.g. working class, middle class, bourgeois), as well as commitment to eliminating class disparity.
- Social Consciousness — The awareness of one’s social identity (color, gender, sexuality, neurology, disability, etc.) and how it affects their status in society, as well as commitment to eliminating all forms of bigotry against these identities.
- Oligarchal — An oligarchal system lets a small group of usually wealthy, powerful individuals decide the fate of the whole community that they “represent”.
- Autonomy — Autonomy is the power of every individual to govern themselves, rather than be governed by an outside force. The protection of individual autonomy through the destruction of hierarchy is another key tenet of anarchist praxis.

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Published as a zine in 2021 among highschoolers. Submitted by authors. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-GjaZYWbdTOP67M6dzNrUxsvUD3xSFIsCrpts88ydp8/edit>  
A glossary has been added to the bottom of this guide to ensure that anybody can read and understand the words written, as anarchy should always seek to be accessible for all willing to listen. Some definitions may be pulled straight from the dictionary, while others are personal descriptions. An asterisk (\*) next to a word indicates that its definition can be found in the glossary.

**[usa.anarchistlibraries.net](http://usa.anarchistlibraries.net)**