



AT THE INTERSECTIONS

# allyship: partners for change



Allies are an important part of the movement for equality, because through their actions they can shift the status quo in a way that creates equity. One way to understand allyship is to think of ally as a verb, not an identity.<sup>1</sup> This means “allyship” always involves action and movement.

## HOW CAN I PRACTICE BEING AN ALLY?

Like all of our muscles, allyship needs regular movement to stay strong. It can be easy to slip back into privilege and comfort, so finding ways to work the allyship muscle on a regular basis is critical. Here are some ways you can keep your ally muscles strong!

### *Know your privilege*

Understand privilege and how it positions you in the world.<sup>2</sup> Privilege doesn't mean that allies haven't experienced hardship or trauma themselves. Privilege is the ability to opt in or out of anti-oppression work. If a person attempts to practice allyship without identifying and addressing their privilege, they risk harming the very people they are trying to work in partnership with.

### *Keep learning*

Allies often have a limited understanding of the issues they're working to address, because they don't experience oppression in the same way. Allies can seek out the expertise of marginalized folks by reading books, blogs, and articles. Listen to podcasts and news created by marginalized folks.<sup>3</sup> ***It's important to remember that although allies should learn from experiences of marginalized communities, it's not the job of oppressed folks in their lives to teach them.***

There's a lot of information readily available that doesn't require emotional labor from the people in our lives.

### ▶ allyship:

the act of directly engaging in learning more information, unlearning harmful ideas, and standing in support of a group you do not belong to.





### Center marginalized folks

Practice asking, “How will this decision affect the most marginalized communities?” anytime decisions are being made that will affect groups of people.<sup>4</sup> This simple question helps train the brain to think about people outside your own personal identity.

### Talk less, listen more

Allies have a responsibility to listen to those with less



privilege. Follow the leadership of folks who experience oppression, accept feedback and/or criticism, and ask how to be helpful rather than coming up with solutions. Privilege means not having to think about the daily hardships oppressed people face, so privileged folks will not recognize many of the ways that both privilege and oppression manifest in the day-to-day. Being an ally means raising up and supporting those voices rather than talking over or for them.

## I DID SOMETHING HARMFUL... NOW WHAT?

- 1 Apologize. Offer a short and sincere apology, even if it was a mistake
- 2 Take responsibility. What can you learn from this experience?
- 3 Keep practicing. Now that you know what the mistake was, practice doing better next time.

*Remember, the **impact** of our words and actions **is always greater than our intent!***

### Talk to other folks with privilege

Teach them about what you have learned, encourage them to be proactive, and let them know when they've said or done something harmful.<sup>5</sup> This can be an uncomfortable experience, but with practice allies can gain increased confidence to challenge harmful norms and even seek them out as learning opportunities for the people they care about.

### Create accountability

In addition to holding others accountable, allies must also hold themselves accountable.<sup>6</sup> Find like-minded, passionate folks committed to social justice who can call harm out and in, share resources, and help process difficult situations. The nature of privilege often means being unaware of how oppression shows up. Community accountability keeps allies aware, invested, and learning.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Utt, J. *So you call yourself an ally: 10 things all 'allies' need to know*. Everyday Feminism. November 2013.

<sup>2</sup> McIntosh, P. *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*. Excerpt from: *White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women's studies*. (1998). Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. Wellesley, MA.

<sup>3</sup> Keilty, C. *7 ways to be a better ally in 2018*. Upworthy. January 2018.

<sup>4, 5, 6</sup> Utt, J. *So you call yourself an ally: 10 things all 'allies' need to know*. Everyday Feminism. November 2013.

## RESOURCES

Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack. Peggy McIntosh. Racial Equity Tools <http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf>

GLADD. Be an Ally and a Friend. <https://www.glaad.org/resources/ally>

Supporting the Transgender people in your life: A guide to being a good Ally. National Center for Transgender Equality. <https://transequality.org/issues/resources/supporting-the-transgender-people-in-your-life-a-guide-to-being-a-good-ally>

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The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCSA) is the statewide organization representing 21 county-based rape crisis centers and Rutgers University's Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance. NJCSA elevates the voice of survivors and service providers through advocacy, training, and support for efforts to create safer communities for all people.

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