

How To Be an Ally Seedling Training Handout

Glossary of helpful terms

Ally – Someone who helps and supports other people who are part of a group that is treated badly or unfairly, although they are not themselves a member of this group.

BIPOC – Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. This acronym has come into use to recognize that in particular, Black and Indigenous people are affected by systemic racial injustices.

Cisgender – denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.

LGBTQ+ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (questioning one's sexual or gender identity). The + stands as a placeholder to acknowledge the evolving language around LGBTQ identities.

Non-binary – Non-binary or genderqueer is an umbrella term for gender identities that are neither male nor female—identities that are outside the gender binary.

Personal Pronouns – The pronouns a person uses to identify themselves. (He/Him, She/Hers, They/Them, for example)

What Is Allyship?

Allyship is an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person holding systemic power seeks to end oppressions in solidarity with a group of people who are systemically disempowered.

Since everyone holds systemic power in some areas and lacks it in others, everyone has areas in which they can practice allyship.

How do I practice allyship?

- Listen for real, and educate yourself. Believe people wholeheartedly when they share their experiences. Don't be afraid to look up and learn more about the groups and struggles with which you are aligning yourself. It is not anyone's responsibility to educate you, and there are lots of resources available. Feel free to ask your MD for help finding some of these resources if you feel overwhelmed.

- Respect lived experience. The experts on any form of oppression are the people most directly affected by it, and their analysis of that oppression always takes precedence over the opinions of people who don't experience it.
- Provide unconditional solidarity. That means no "I'd be on your side if you didn't act so angry" (e.g.). You don't get to decide when someone is being too emotional, too rash, too mean, or otherwise "undeserving of your support." Your allyship is not a favor that you can retract when someone responds to their oppression in a way you don't like. You just have to be there.
- Don't assume your presence or opinion is desired or necessary. You are not entitled to space in the community you mean to ally with. Show up when you are invited, and gracefully remove yourself when you are not.
- Stand beside, not in front of. Allying with a movement does not mean leading it.
- Provide the forms of support you're asked for, rather than the forms of support you imagine would be helpful. The latter can be condescending or actually a hindrance.
- Respect the history of the resistance movements you're stepping into. Don't act like the party started once you arrived.
- Learn to acknowledge and articulate, without guilt or apology, how oppressive systems operate.
- Get ready to make mistakes, because you will. Apologize (briefly, without asking forgiveness), fix it, and move on.
- Don't ask for emotional energy from the group you're allying with. Your feelings do matter, but this is not the space to get your feelings validated. The group is not obligated to like you, thank you, feel sorry for you, or forgive you.
- Don't treat the group you mean to ally with as homogenous. If one person shares their experiences with you or asks for your support in a particular way, don't assume they're speaking for the whole group.
- Speak up and challenge problematic behavior and systems, even if it's uncomfortable. Use your privilege to speak where other people would be silenced. There is no "neutral" under oppression.

- Teach other people with your privileges how to practice better allyship.
- Don't try to speak for people in the group you mean to ally with. Instead, help boost the visibility of their own work. Amplify marginalized voices.
- Don't refer to yourself as an ally. "Ally" is not a status that can be concretely attained – allyship is a process that requires constant work. Only the people you mean to ally with can accurately assess how you're doing at it (but don't ask them for kudos!!!!).
- Practice allyship because none of us are free until all of us are free. Show up for collective liberation (yours and theirs), not to "help."
- Respect safe spaces designated specifically for marginalized groups. Recognize that the world already holds many spaces where the dominant culture is catered to, and it's ok to let other groups have their times and spaces, too.
- Don't expect to "take breaks" from allyship. People in the group you mean to ally with don't have a choice about whether or not they're going to deal with that form of oppression today. Neither do you.¹

This sheet was compiled with a lot of help from [the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence](#) and [Ashante Bean](#).

¹ i iv i Definition adapted from theantioppressionnetwork.wordpress.com/allyship/. ii "Privilege, Allyship, & Safe Space" pamphlet, Multicultural Resource Center, Oberlin College (new.oberlin.edu/dotAsset/2012201.pdf). iii Mia McKenzie, "No More 'Allies,'" in *Black Girl Dangerous on Race, Queerness, Class and Gender* (2014). iv Jamie Utt, "So You Call Yourself an Ally: 10 Things All 'Allies' Need to Know," on everydayfeminism.com (2013).