

Becoming an Ally

What Is an Ally?

Someone who is willing to act in support of or in coalition with someone else; someone who understands the connection between themselves, their group and other individuals and groups.

An ally is typically a member of advantaged social groups who uses social power to take a stand against injustice directed at targeted groups (e.g., white people who resist racist policies, men who challenge sexist language and behavior). An ally works to be an agent of social change rather than an agent of oppression.

However: You can be an ally to anyone –

- To groups who are targeted in ways you are not
- To groups who are privileged in ways you are not
- To those who are part of the same social group as you
- To yourself

Adapted from Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice (Second Edition, Routledge, 2007) and “Strategies for Being an Effective Ally” by Ricky Sherover-Marcuse

Characteristics of an Effective Ally

Becoming an ally is an ongoing process, and not a state of being – it is something we must always continue to do. It requires working together to learn and practice the skills necessary to intervene in statements, behaviors, policies and structures that harm, exploit or oppress others.

An ally:

- Listens to and respects the perspectives and experiences of targeted group members
- Acknowledges unearned privileges received as a result of advantaged status and works to eliminate or change privileges into rights that targeted group members also enjoy
- Is accountable to the people with whom they are allying
- Feels comfortable with their social groups, is comfortable and proud of own identity
- Takes responsibility for learning about own and targeted group heritage, culture and experience, and how oppression works in everyday life
- Recognizes that unlearning oppressive beliefs and actions is a life-long process, not a single event, and welcomes each learning opportunity
- Is willing to take risks, try new behaviors, act in spite of own fear and resistance from other advantaged group members
- Takes care of self to avoid burn-out
- Acts against social injustice that targets others because it is in their self-interest to do so (as well as in the interest of targeted group members)
- Asks what would be helpful, and listens deeply
- Is willing to make mistakes, learn from them and try again
- Is willing to be confronted about own behavior and attitudes and consider change
- Is committed to taking action against social injustice in own sphere of influence
- Understands own growth and response patterns and when they are on a learning edge
- Understands the connections among various forms of social injustice
- Believes they can make a difference by acting and speaking out against injustice

- Knows how to cultivate support from other allies

Adapted from Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice, Second Edition, Routledge, 2007