



Oregon Coalition

Against Domestic & Sexual Violence

Working Definition of Allyship: The Handout

What is allyship?ⁱ

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.
- 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.ⁱⁱ
- 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.
- Interrupt stuff. 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 (e.g. instead of making a documentary about their experiences, figure out if they have already done work to document and share their own experiences, and offer to publicize that work more).
- 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!!!!).ⁱⁱⁱ
- 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."
- 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.^{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).