

Becoming an Ally

What Is an Ally?

An ally is a member of the dominant social group who takes a stand against social injustice directed at a target group(s)—for example, white people who speak out against racism, or heterosexual individuals who speak out against heterosexism and homophobia. An ally works to be an agent of social change rather than an agent of oppression. When a form of oppression has multiple target groups, as do racism, ableism, and heterosexism, target group members can be allies to other targeted social groups (African Americans can be allies to Native Americans, blind people can be allies to people who use wheelchair, and lesbians can be allies to bisexuals).

Allies Should Remember that Members of Groups that Face Oppression:

- don't always want to be "teachers" to allies
- don't represent all members of a particular group
- may be members of more than one group that faces oppression
- may not describe themselves the same way as other members of a particular group
- know what it feels like to be both targeted and made "invisible"
- are experts on their own cultures and oppressions
- can be prejudiced themselves
- are not more sexist, racist, heterosexist, etc. than members of other groups
- may tire of answering questions about their cultures and lives
- tire of and resent stereotyping
- can become weary, anxious, irritable, or angry because of living in the dominant culture
- do not necessarily want to become more like the dominant culture in attitudes or behavior
- may share some of the same values as the dominant culture
- do not appreciate appropriation of their cultures by non-members
- have been a part of history, art, science, religion, education, etc., but their contributions have often been ignored or downplayed
- may use typically derogatory terms for themselves and other members of their group, but may prefer that non-members do not use these words