

What Is An Ally?

According to Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, an ally is someone "***joined with another for a common purpose.***"

The Gender Education Center defines allies to the GLBT communities as ***people who support us who may or may not be a part of our community. These are people who believe in the human rights of all people. Who demonstrate by their presence and actions, their acceptance and celebration of diversity among people.***

Becoming an ally does not have to be a difficult task. By education and familiarizing yourself with issues, using inclusive language, and knowing some history, you begin the process of becoming an ally. Another part of becoming an ally is knowing resources and sharing them with others; perhaps the most important piece is being a safe person to talk to and someone who will stand up and fight for diversity.

Steps To Becoming An Ally

Awareness / Accessing Resources; Become aware of who you are and how you are different from and similar to GLBT people. Such awareness can be gained through conversations with GLBT individuals, reading about GLBT people and their lives, attending awareness building workshops and meetings, and by self-examination.

Knowledge / Education; Education on the issues, Knowing facts, statistics, laws, policies and culture.

Creating an Open and Supportive Environment; Encourage and promote an atmosphere of RESPECT. Acknowledge, appreciate and celebrate differences among individuals and within groups. Be a safe and open person to talk with.

Teach others / Action; Teach, share your knowledge. Action is the only way to change society as a whole. Stand up for and fight for human rights.

**Once you have become an ally,
you now have the power to educate and teach others what you know.
After all, what good is knowledge if it is not shared?**

When Someone Comes Out To You

Don't be surprised. Respect their confidentiality, they have placed a trust in you. A breach of this confidence can be devastating.

Do not be nervous. Chances are that you have dealt with GLBT issues before. Youth and your peers will be able to determine if you are uncomfortable talking about issues around sexuality and gender orientation. Be honest.

Be supportive. Explain that many people have struggled with these issues in the past. Admit that dealing with one's sexual or gender orientation can be a difficult and confusing process. There are no easy and fast answers. Keep the door open for further conversations and help. If you are feeling uncertain or don't think you can be supportive, refer them to someone who can be.

Do not put words in their mouth. It is not our jobs to tell people what their issues are, but rather to help them deal with the issues they present. If a supportive environment is provided, people who would like to talk about issues of sexuality or gender orientation will know that this is all right. Allow them to define their own issues. Listen.

Remember that everyone is a complex and unique individual. Sexuality is only a part of the whole of a person. Issues of sexuality and gender do not replace other issues.

Be someone who cares!

Gender Education Center

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Dedicated to transgender support, advocacy and education.

What Kind Of An Ally Are You?

1. Active Oppression

- Laughing at or telling jokes about GLBT people.
- Making fun of people that don't fit traditional notions of gender roles and sexual identity.
- Verbal and/or physical harassment.
- Working for anti-GLBT legislation, i.e. employment and housing discrimination, etc.
- Gay-bashing and other forms of violence.

2. Indifference & Ignorance

- Business as usual attitude.
- Passive acceptance of actions by others which demeans GLBT individuals. i.e. walking away and /or not confronting, behaviors.
- Ignoring the topic, i.e. lack of programming, discussions, training.
- Adopting a liberal attitude of "What people do in the privacy of their own bedroom is none of my business. I just don't want to hear about it."
- Being friendly before you knew someone was GLBT but ignoring them after.

3. Oppression Through Lack of Action

- If you here a friend telling a demeaning joke recognizing it as oppressive, not laughing at this joke but not saying anything to your friend.
- Being uncomfortable but not confronting, i.e. noticing something on the exterior of a door which is inappropriate but not saying anything.
- Students or young people sitting around labeling individuals based upon stereotypes and staff member or adult not confronting.
- Avoiding participating in activities, such as this program, based upon what others might think.

4. Confronting Oppression

- When you hear an inappropriate joke you would go beyond not laughing and would confront the joke teller by saying, "Jokes that put down GLBT people are not funny."
- Making a choice to participate in activities regardless of what others might think.
- Be aware of and confront statements such as "I am not prejudice, but . . ."

5. Growing as an Ally

- Read books and journals by, for and about GLBT people.
- Be aware of and sensitive to issues that GLBT people face.
- Attend cultural events like Twin Cities Pride Parade and Festival.
- Listen to GLBT music, attend GLBT films, etc.
- Educate yourself; don't rely on GLBT people to be the experts.
- Make yourself aware of individuals, organizations, agencies, staff, faculty and courses which deal with GLBT issues.

6. Becoming Active as an Ally

- Educate others, engage people in dialogue about the issue. Present programs to others.
- Be "out" and public about your support for GLBT individuals and issues.
- Be willing to speak on behalf of the person(s)/group being targeted
- Recognize the efforts of others to confront inappropriate behaviors.
- Encourage and promote an atmosphere of RESPECT. Acknowledge, appreciate and celebrate differences among individuals and within groups.

7. Challenging Systems

- Create a climate where individual and cultural diversity is recognized and celebrated
- Work for GLBT positive legislation. i.e. human rights, civil rights, etc.
- Address GLBT issues through training.
- Support "Out" GLBT people who can serve as roll models for others.
- Change discriminatory institutional practices. Identify and work to change such practices. i.e. employee benefits, etc.

portions from Metro State ally training program

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