

Allyship and Advocacy

Originally authored by Jenna Hua and Meng Tang. Modified by Melissa E. Ko (mesako@stanford.edu). This is a product of VPTL's Identity in the Classroom Learning Community (ICLC) 2017.

What is an Ally?

An ally is an individual who stands up for a person that is targeted and discriminated against on the basis of their identity. An ally works to end oppression by supporting and advocating for people who are stigmatized or treated unfairly.

Why be an Ally?

All students are at risk of being discriminated against. A teacher can disrupt discriminatory behaviors and show support for all students by fostering an inclusive classroom environment. Meaningful changes in one's teaching can make real differences in student learning, class engagement, and teamwork. After learning how to be an ally through the framework of Spiral Model of Learning/Action-Reflection Model, teachers and students can transfer this skill to other settings, such as family life, communities, and future workplaces.

How to Be an Ally

(Adapted from Anne Bishop's writing "Becoming an Ally, Breaking the Cycle of Oppression in People")

1. Use the framework of the Spiral Model of Learning to reflect on and understand the patterns and effects of oppression. Start from the center by "Placing Ourselves" and then follow the spiral to work towards "Action" in order to break through oppression in different scenarios.

Spiral Model of Learning*



2. Help members of your own group understand oppression and connect between different forms of oppression.
3. Listen and reflect.
4. Think structurally rather than individually. Everyone in the oppressor group is part of the oppression.
5. Learn to separate guilt from responsibility.
6. Ask questions and learn more about the oppression going on in a particular situation.
7. Count your privileges; help others see them. Break the invisibility of privilege.
8. If you hear an oppressive comment or see an example of oppression at work, try to speak up first.
9. Try to avoid the trap of “knowing what is good for them.”
10. Learn everything you can about the oppression: read, ask questions and listen. Your ignorance is part of the oppression.
11. Support the process of unlearning oppression with other members of your own group.

12. Try not to look to the oppressed group for emotional support. Try not to expect the oppressed group to be grateful to you.
13. Be yourself. Do not try to claim the roots and sense of connection that a history of oppressed can give to a community if it is not your own.
14. Be honest. Assume that you are a learner; good learners are open.

Example 1 – Ally with LGBTQIA students (adapted from www.tolerance.org)

Being an ally to LGBTQIA students can help these students experience feelings of safety and belonging in the classroom. Being an ally to LGBTQIA populations will also model respect for all students and zero tolerance for discrimination.

What You Can Do:

1. Post “Safe Zone” signs in your classroom and/or office. Doing so can send signals to LGBTQIA students that you support them and can be considered an ally.
2. Confront any homophobic remarks you witness in classrooms. If you hear students use terms such as “fag,” “dyke,” or “so gay” (as an insult), tell them that this language is not acceptable under any circumstances.
3. Ask for and use student’s preferred gender pronouns during introductions and in classroom settings. Do not assume any student’s gender or sexual identity.
4. Seek opportunities to incorporate contributions of LGBTQIA individuals/communities in class materials. Highlighting these contributions in the curriculum can help LGBTQIA students see themselves in the curriculum and can broaden perspectives about contributors in a variety of disciplines.
5. Work with campus advocates (e.g. Queer Student Resources) to learn more about creating a safe and respectful space in the classroom for LGBTQIA students.

Example 2 - Ally with first generation and/or low-income students (adapted from www.league.org)

First generation and/or low-income (FLI) students may face additional challenges around financial stability, high school background, and familial roles. For example, a FLI student may be a financial contributor and/or caretaker in their family as opposed to a recipient of financial support from their family. Being an ally can help FLI students feel seen and supported, as well as promote feelings of belonging and academic success.

What You Can Do:

1. Be thoughtful about the cost of course materials (e.g. consider whether previous editions of a textbook are acceptable). Be explicit about the availability of reserves at the library, desk copies of course materials, and online readings.
2. Do not make assumptions about students' prior academic exposure, i.e. making comments such as "you all may remember this from AP Calculus."
3. Avoid comments such as "when your parents were in college" or "I know no one here can imagine poverty of this kind," which can alienate FLI students.
4. Recognize that FLI students may be working significant hours outside of class and work may take priority over some academic opportunities. If possible, set up alternative office hours and provide students with more flexible ways for meeting like Skype.
5. Encourage FLI students to attend office hours. Make it clear that students do not need a "good" question to come to office hours and that you want to get to know students as individuals.
6. Provide opportunities outside the classroom for FLI students, such as employment information and leadership opportunities.

Resources:

Becoming an Ally - Breaking the Cycle of Oppression in People by Anne Bishop (PDF)

Revolutionary Solidarity - A Critical Reader for Accomplices (PDF)

Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing The Ally Industrial Complex

<http://www.indigenouaction.org/accomplices-not-allies-abolishing-the-ally-industrial-complex/>

Accomplices versus allies <http://www.seattleglobalist.com/2016/07/14/accomplices-vs-allies/53654>

Safe Space Kit, Guide to Being an Ally to LGBTQ Students by GLSEN (PDF)

<https://www.glsen.org>

<http://www.tolerance.org>

Supporting First Gen and Low Income Students, Stanford VPTL,

<https://vptl.stanford.edu/faculty-instructors/diversity-inclusion/diversity-inclusion-related-topics/supporting-first-gen-and>

Breaking down barriers: first-generation college students and college success by league.org,

<https://www.league.org/innovation-showcase/breaking-down-barriers-first-generation-college-students-and-college-success>

Teaching First-Generation College Students, Center for Teaching, Vanderbilt University,

<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/teaching-first-generation-college-students/>