A GUIDE TO ALLYSHIP

Allyship *an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person of privilege seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group of people*

Allyship is not an identity—it is a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people

Allyship is not self-defined—our work and our efforts must be recognized by the people we seek to ally ourselves with

It is important to be intentional in how we frame the work we do;

*i.e. we are showing support for…, we are showing our commitment to ending [a system of oppression] by…, we are using our privilege to help by…*

* responsibilities: *we are not acting out of guilt, but rather out of responsibility*
* we actively acknowledge our privileges and openly discuss them: we recognize that as recipients of privilege we will always be capable of perpetuating systems of oppression from which our privilege came
* we listen more and speak less: we hold back on our ideas, opinions, and ideologies, and resist the urge to “save” the people we seek to work with as they will figure out their own solutions that meet their needs
* we do our work with integrity and direct communication: we take guidance and direction from the people we seek to work with (not the other way around), and we keep our word
* we do not expect to be educated by others: we continuously do our own research on the oppressions experienced by the people we seek to work with, including herstory/history, current news, and what realities created by systems of oppression look, feel, smell, taste and sound like
* we build our capacity to receive criticism, to be honest and accountable with our mistakes, and recognize that being called out for making a mistake is a gift—that it is an honour of trust to receive a chance to be a better person, to learn, to grow, and to do things differently
* we embrace the emotions that come out of the process of allyship, understanding that we will feel uncomfortable, challenged, and hurt
* our needs are secondary to the people we seek to work with: we are responsible for our self-care and recognize that part of the privilege of our identity is that we have a choice about whether or not to resist oppression; we do not expect the people we seek to work with to provide emotional support
* we do not expect awards or special recognition for confronting issues that people have to live with every day

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Roles:

* *we act out of a genuine interest in challenging larger oppressive power structures*
* *we* are here to support and make use of our privilege for the people we seek to work with
* *we* turn the spotlight we are given away from ourselves and towards the voices of those who are continuously marginalized, silenced, and ignored; we give credit where credit is due
* *we* use opportunities to engage people with whom we share identity and privilege in
 conversations about oppression experienced by those we seek to work with

It is important to talk about allyship in this way, as much confusion has come out of problematic ideologies of “being an ally”. These may be well-meaning, but they often recreate the same oppressions or perpetuate new ones.

Allyship is greatly valued and a huge step towards challenging oppression, however, we must understand possible feelings of resentment, bitterness, and even resistance towards us from the people we seek to work with. These feelings are not personal to us, but are reflective of peoples’ experiences with allyship with others like us (past and present.) building trust takes time, so we must recognize that what we can offer may not always be immediately needed or accepted.

We have opportunities to practice allyship every day:

* how much space are we taking up in conversations? in rooms? in organizing?
* how do we actively improve access to our meetings? our actions?
* how are our identities taking up space? physically? verbally?
* how much do we know about the people we seek to work with? what are our assumptions and from where did they originate?
* who are we leaving behind?

In particular to colonization, take special effort to acknowledge the original peoples of the area/region/location and connect with your local indigenous communities to involve them from the start, including elders, chiefs, and youth.

**TO EQUALIZE POWER AMONG US**

**Tools for Change**

We can make active choices to create the space for transformation. For those of us who bring the pattern of privilege, here are some guidelines to help us equalize relations. Privilege is invisible to those who have it. To create a context which embraces diversity, in which no one is marginalized, a conscious and ongoing effort is required. Noticing and changing what we take for granted, we make room for everyone's contribution. From a place of Fair Witness, with a desire to examine our sensitivity to respecting boundaries in the presence of power imbalances, **Consider the following questions**

Do I tend to always speak first, interrupt or take more than my share of space'?

Do I unilaterally set the agenda?

Do I assume I'm more capable?

Do I trivialize the experience of others?

Do I challenge or question the tone, attitude or manner of others?

Do I make assumptions about what someone is more "suited" for?

Do I take responsibility for, think for, or speak for others?

Do I assume an individual speaks for others from their group?

Do I control the organization's resources?

Do I reduce difficulties to personality conflicts, ignoring history or power factors?

Do I assume the root of a problem is misunderstanding or lack of information?

Do I ask others to explain, prove, or justify themselves?

Do I mimic other cultural traditions or religious practices?

Do I expect to be treated as an individual outside of my group's history?

Do I ignore or minimize differences by emphasizing similarities?

Do I equate all oppressions as equal?

Do I expect others to be grateful?

Do I defend mistakes by focusing on good intentions?

Do I take things personally and miss the systemic aspects?

Do I assume everyone has the same options I do?

Do I assume that the visible reality is the only one operating?

Do I expect "others" to educate me about their group's history, or sensibilities?

o I assume someone is exceptional compared to the "average" person of their group?

Do I always expect to be trusted?

**The Ways We've Been Oppressed**

Chaos theory and study of complex adaptive systems teaches that the richest innovations and learning happen at the margin. Yet, we tend to ignore the margins, those with privilege have never needed to understand the experience of others. Offending behaviors may not be calculated to protect power but simply a reflection of ignorance reinforced by complacency.

For all to survive, we can't afford to collude with our own marginalization or oppression by being silent. It is precisely our experience at the margins that is needed to inform and shape decisions. So, in addition to keeping ourselves in check regarding whatever ways we possess privilege, it is vital that we stop constraining ourselves—despite the fierceness of the force and fear that push on us in the particular ways that relate to how we have experienced being an "outsider." We have to take the risk of putting our experience into the center.

**Am I willing to do the following?**

Remember that others speak about more than the conditions of their own group.

Take responsibility to learn about the history, culture and struggles of other groups as told by them. Notice what I expect from and assume about others, and note what experiences formed my ideas.

Address accessibility include such things as money, space, transportation, child-care and language. Make sure the context welcomes everyone's voice and listen.

Regard people as whole human beings with families, interests and ideas.

Name unacknowledged realities to include everyone's experience.

Expect discomfort when relating to people different from myself.

Take responsibility for equalizing power.

Name dominating behavior when I see it.

Encourage pride in my own and other's ancestry and history.

Understand individuals in the context of their social history.

Ask questions and respect disagreements.

Struggle over matters of principle and politics.

Make all information accessible so others can decide if they are interested.

Appreciate efforts that point out my mistakes or lack of awareness

Appreciate the risk a person takes in sharing their experience with me.

Take risks, trust others.

**Adapted from:**

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Tools for Change offers

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