

Basic Concepts

What is an Ally?

A member of a social group who enjoys some privilege who is working to end oppression and understand their own privilege. To be an ally you must take action which challenges oppression.

What is privilege?

An unearned advantage given to some people but not all.

What is oppression?

Systemic, pervasive inequality present throughout society that benefits people with more privilege and harms those with fewer privileges.

What is a marginalised person?

A member of a group that is the primary target of a system of oppression.

What is power?

The ability to control circumstances or access to resources and/or privileges

What is intersectionality?

The concept that people can be subject to multiple systems of oppression that intersect and interact with each other, coined by legal scholar Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw

Terminology and Language

Using the right words and keeping up with changes in language is important ally work but changing the language you use can take years. If you make a mistake, that is ok, just apologise, correct yourself, and move on.

Members of a marginalised group can agree to call themselves anything they want, including terms outsiders should not use. Part of the process of "reclaiming" slurs is members of a marginalised group agreeing to use a slur to refer to each other positively, gradually neutralising the slur, after which everyone can use it. For example, "queer" has been reclaimed in many parts of the world.

Being an Ally

- Ensure your safety first before responding
- Do not try to be funny
- Use practical, short, simple yet firm responses
- Being an ally can be very uncomfortable; practice often with friends you trust; be ok with a little bit of discomfort
- Choose your battles and play for the audience
- Take action:
 - Research areas you are unsure about
 - Challenge those who are discriminatory – *see quick one-liners below*
 - Write to or better still visit your political representatives and let them know how you feel about those laws or behaviours that continue to marginalise people
 - Speak up to superiors or your Human Resource department about discriminatory behaviours or policies in the workplace
 - Make space and allow marginalised people a voice in activities you participate in
 - Join or start a discussion group that is working towards ending oppression.

Quick One-liners

Here are some simple comebacks to discriminatory comments:

- *Did you mean to say that word?*
- *I don't get it, why is that funny?*
- *I don't know why I just laughed*
- *What did you mean by that?*
- *I try avoiding using that word because it is harmful*
- *We don't say that here*
- *What you said makes me uncomfortable because of my values of being inclusive*
- *Wow (sarcastic tone)*

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