

# Being an Ally

The notion of an ally comes from social justice activism. The premise is that there is a perspective and work that can be done by someone who is the direct target of oppression or violence, and there is a perspective and work that can best be done by others. Own It applies this thinking to engaging men and boys, and outlined some of the core values of someone who acts as an ally.

## **Know Yourself**

*An ally is someone who has a strong sense of their own identity, as well as the ways in which their own identities are either privileged or oppressed.*

Ali Michael, University of Pennsylvania's Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education

Being an ally requires a lot of self-awareness - both in general and specific to issues of sexism, homophobia and violence/abuse. We all have experiences with all of these, and remaining aware of their impact on us is an important aspect of being an ally.

## **Listen**

Allies seek the perspective and listen to the voices of women and other men regarding their experiences of violence, abuse, threats and overall sexism. In particular, and since gender based violence primarily effects women, allies listen to women, and seek to understand what women say they want and need from men.

## **Avoid Defensiveness**

Allies remain open to the concerns and possible criticism of feminists and other women about what we do and how we're doing it. Allies strive to respond to this criticism without defensiveness.

## **Accept Responsibility**

Allies accept the full responsibility to educate ourselves about the issues we're striving to address. Men take the responsibility to notice and respond proactively when sexism, abuse or violence occur.

## **Own the Issue**

Allies speak for themselves and recognize the personal impact that sexism, abuse and violence have on us and our lives. We do not attempt to speak for, or on behalf of, women.

Men also own it by identifying how we can speak up to challenge sexism and male entitlement, and act in ways that support women.

## **Open Doors**

Rather than accepting opportunities for ourselves, allies primarily strive to advance opportunities for women. Historically, men have had opportunities that women have not had.

## **Take Chances**

There are few "road maps" for men about how to best work alongside women and girls to prevent gender based violence and promote gender respect. To a large degree, we are still making it up as we go. Allies take chances recognizing that sometimes we're going to make mistakes. What's critical is that allies find ways to notice our own mistakes, learn from them, and are open about our process.

### **Seek and Offer Support**

Men cannot be effective allies in isolation. We need support from each other and women in order to continue and to be effective. Allies are responsible for seeking and securing the support we need and deserve.

Allies also seek out ways to support other men who are striving to be allies.

### **Earn Trust**

Men are not entitled to all women's trust automatically, even the men who are actively engaged in working to prevent gender based violence or promote gender respect. An ally actively takes responsibility to earn and re-earn the trust of the women with whom we work.

### **Act Reliably**

Allies strive to be consistent. Acting reliably means that men follow through. When we can't, we are up front and honest about not being able to follow through.

### **Take the Lead (at times)**

There are times and situations in which men can and should take the lead in confronting sexism violence and abuse. Allies take responsibility for proactively responding. Being an ally means knowing both *when* and *how* to take the lead, and working with women in a way that help identify when it is appropriate for us to take the lead and when we should defer to women's leadership.

### **Check in**

Allies "check in" with feminist and other women to get feedback on what we're doing and how we're doing it. Most of us are blind to some aspects of our privilege and entitlement and we need to have a way to "check" ourselves to identify when and how we're acting out of our privilege or entitlement.

Furthermore, allies check in with their efforts and strategies to be sure that what we're doing is in line, and not counter, to what the feminist and other women's leadership needs and wants.

### **Are Accountable**

Perhaps most importantly, allies are accountable. Being accountable means doing what we say we're doing to do, following through and acting in ways that are consistent with our stated values and beliefs. Being accountable also means recognizing that we will and do make mistakes. As such, we must acknowledge when we make mistakes and strive to make amends.

Clearly none of us are able to fulfill all of these behaviors all of the time. Allies seek towards these ideals and create processes that support our efforts to be an effective ally.