

Ally Action: A Process of Growth Handout



As you strive to be an effective ally, you are bound to make mistakes – it’s a given! Yet, you’ll experience your share of triumphs, too. For instance, what about those “light bulb” moments when someone really gets what you’re saying? Or those times when you confront an inappropriate comment and wind up having a great conversation? It’s all a process, for you and for those people with whom you’re interacting.

Part of this process is recognizing a few key things, including...

- ▶ Many oppressed people are survivors and have a long history of resistance
- ▶ You are good enough and smart enough to be an effective ally
- ▶ Your main purpose is not convincing target group members that you are “on their side;” it’s more about simply being there
- ▶ Being an ally is a no strings attached gig; nobody “owes” you anything
- ▶ Sometimes you’ll receive thanks but gratitude shouldn’t be an expectation
- ▶ Members of the target group are experts on their own experience; you have *much* to learn from them!
- ▶ You have a right to be concerned with other people’s liberation issues
- ▶ With that right comes the responsibility to better understand the issues of concern to the target population
- ▶ Acknowledging and apologizing for mistakes is part of the learning curve – just don’t retreat!

Consider what it means to become an ally, in theory and in reality. You may decide to be an ally to several different populations or to one in particular. After all, as the Human Rights Campaign Foundation says, “Allies to racial, religious and ethnic minorities have been remarkably effective in promoting positive change in the dominant culture, and only recently has their instrumental position been extended to the area of sexual orientation.” Expand that statement to ally with whatever groups you choose. Your concern, care and action can make a difference.

An Ally is Not...

The Human Rights Campaign stresses that there are a few things an ally is NOT...

- Someone with ready-made answers
- Necessarily a counselor, nor necessarily trained to deal with crisis situations
- Expected to proceed with an interaction if levels of comfort or personal safety have been violated

Sources: “Tips for Creating Allies” handout (Brenda L. Froisland, 1992); Human Rights Campaign site at www.hrc.org/ncop/allies/; “Working Assumptions & Guidelines for Alliance-Building,” R. Sherover-Marcuse, 1990; “Becoming an Ally” in *Beyond Tolerance* by Evans and Washington, 1991