

GUIDE TO ALLYSHIP

An evolving open-source guide
to help you become a more
thoughtful and effective ally.

TO BE AN ALLY IS TO...

1. Take on the struggle as your own.
2. Stand up, even when you feel scared.
3. Transfer the benefits of your privilege to those who lack it.
4. Acknowledge that while you, too, feel pain, the conversation is not about you.

SO YOU WANT TO BE AN ALLY.

Welcome to the *Guide to Allyship*, a tool meant to provide you with the resources for becoming a more effective ally.

In light of recent events and tragedies, I've been hearing the word "ally" a lot. In fact, there are many who want to be "allies", but are unable to fulfill the duties allyship requires.

I use the word "ally" loosely because we are moving to a space where the word is being overused. Despite its current misuse, using a different word would only cause confusion. The definition of "ally" you (future ally or not)

hold dear is likely not the same as the definition I want to introduce you to in this guide.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT THIS GUIDE?

There are already quite a few great guides out there, and I acknowledge their existence. What's different about this guide is that I want it to be contributed to by people from all walks of life.

I want this to be a resource where anyone who is considering becoming an ally understands the pros and cons of what being an ally entails. I want you to understand that you're in collaboration with people whose very lives can change overnight because of systemic oppression.

You can't take being an ally lightly.

WHAT THIS GUIDE COVERS:

- **Why this was created**
- **What is an ally?**
- **Why allies are necessary**
- **The Work of Allyship (dos and don'ts)**
- **How to handle mistakes**
- **Contribute to this guide**

WHY THIS WAS CREATED

In the summer of 2016, someone I considered an ally stood by and watched as I, a Black person, was berated by a racist. To make matters worse, I had a conversation with this person earlier in the day about the power allies can wield in situations of discrimination. But when the time came for them to take action, they were more interested in protecting their comfort.

Upset, I couldn't understand what happened. Did the conversation we had not get through? What was stopping them? Then it dawned on me:

Saying you're an ally is much easier than actually being a ally. Saying you're an ally looks good on paper, if you're never taken to task for doing nothing.

Many claiming the word "ally" wear the phrase and ideology like an article of clothing, easily discarded when it's no longer hip/safe to wear.

If only those who are marginalized could cast away their identities with such confidence and ease.

WHAT IS AN ALLY?

There's a lot of discussion about what an ally is or is not. It's even harder to define as the word gets carelessly tossed around by people who don't experience oppression. In fact, as I've grown older, I've moved away from the word "ally". But I do believe that there is an opportunity to better define the word. The best definition of an ally (that I've found) comes from Roxane Gay (author of *Bad Feminist*) in her article for *Marie Claire*, "**On Making Black Lives Matter.**" In it, she notes:

Black people do not need allies. We need people to stand up and take on the problems borne of oppression as their own, without remove or distance.

We need people to do this even if they cannot fully understand what it's like to be oppressed for their race or ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, class, religion, or other marker of identity.

We need people to use common sense to figure out how to participate in social justice.

To recap: Being an ally doesn't necessarily mean you fully understand what it feels like to be oppressed. It means you are taking on the struggle as your own.

A marginalized individual cannot easily cast away the weight of their identity shaped through oppression on a whim. They must carry that weight every single day, for better or for worse. An ally understands that this is a weight that they, too, must be willing to carry and never put down.

WHY ALLIES ARE NECESSARY

Anyone has the potential be an ally. Allies recognize that though they are not a member of the oppressed group(s) they support, they make a concerted effort to better understand the struggle, every single day.

Because an ally might have more privilege (and recognizes said privilege), they are powerful voices *alongside* oppressed ones.

THE WORK OF ALLYSHIP

Being an ally is hard work. Many of those who want to be allies are scared of making missteps that get them labeled as “-ist” or “-ic” (racist, sexist, transphobic, homophobic, etc). But as an ally, you are also affected by a system of oppression. This means that as an ally, there is much to unlearn and learn—mistakes are expected.

As an ally, you need to be willing to own your mistakes and be proactive in your education.

If refuse to acknowledge that your words and actions are inherently shaped and influenced by systemic oppression, you’re setting up yourself to fail. That is not the behavior of an ally. You’ll be complicit in the oppression of those you intend to help. If you choose not to understand this, but label yourself an “ally”, you’re essentially a wolf in sheep’s clothing. You’ll find ways to infiltrate vulnerable communities and you’ll wield far more power than someone who is outwardly “-ist” or “-ic” because you’re “trusted.”

Just as society will not change overnight, neither will you. Here are some do’s and don’ts that are incredibly important as you learn, grow, and step into the role of an ally.

THE DO’S

- **Do** be open to listening
- **Do** be aware of your implicit biases
- **Do** your research to learn more about the history of the struggle in which you are participating
- **Do** the inner work to figure out a way to acknowledge how you participate in oppressive systems
- **Do** the outer work and figure out how to change the oppressive systems
- **Do** amplify (online and when physically present) the voices of those without your privilege
- **Do** learn how to *listen* and accept criticism with grace, even if it’s uncomfortable

THE DON'TS

- **Do not** expect to be taught or shown. Take it upon yourself to use the tools around you to learn and answer your questions
 - **Do not** participate for the gold medal in the “Oppression Olympics” (you don’t need to compare how your struggle is just as bad)
 - **Do not** behave as though you know best
 - **Do not** take credit for the labor of those who are marginalized and did the work before you stepped into the picture
 - **Do not** assume that every member of an underinvested group feels oppressed
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BOOTS & SANDALS: HOW TO HANDLE MISTAKES

Contributed by [Presley Pizzo](#). Please credit Presley when referencing this section.

While mistakes are to be expected, what’s the best way to go about resolving them?

Note: Parts of this section were originally based on [Kayla Reed’s \(@iKaylaReed\)](#) tweet that defines how she views what it means to be an ally. - it’s a great definition and should help you follow along!

Imagine your privilege is a heavy boot that keeps you from feeling when you’re stepping on someone’s feet or they’re stepping on yours, while oppressed people have only sandals. “Ouch! You’re stepping on my toes!” How do you react?

Because we can think more clearly about stepping on someone’s literal toes than we usually do when it comes to oppression, the problems with many common responses are obvious:

- **Centering yourself:** “I can’t believe you think I’m a toe-stepper! I’m a good person!”
- **Denial that others’ experiences are different from your own:** “I don’t mind when people step on my toes.”
- **Derailing:** “Some people don’t even have toes, why aren’t we talking about them instead?”
- **Refusal to center the impacted:** “All toes matter!”
- **Tone policing:** “I’d move my foot if you’d ask me more nicely.”
- **Denial that the problem is fixable:** “Toes getting stepped on is a fact of life. You’ll be better off when you accept that.”
- **Victim blaming:** “You shouldn’t have been walking around people with boots!”
- **Withdrawing:** “I thought you wanted my help, but I guess not. I’ll just go home.”

In reality, most of us naturally know the right way to react when we step on someone’s toes, and we can use that to help us learn how to react when we commit microaggressions.

- **Center the impacted:** “Are you okay?”
- **Listen to their response and learn.**
- **Apologize for the impact, even though you didn’t intend it:** “I’m sorry!”
- **Stop the instance:** move your foot
- **Stop the pattern:** be careful where you step in the future. (When it comes to oppression, we want to actually change the “footwear” to get rid of privilege and oppression (sneakers for all!), but metaphors can only stretch so far!)

Reacting in a fair and helpful way isn’t about learning arbitrary rules or being a doormat. When we take the politics out of it, it’s just the *reasonable* thing to

do. Still, it's hard to remember in the moment, because these issues are so charged in our society. As such, it may be helpful to reframe the situation so that you don't feel defensive.

You may have noticed it's easier to handle being corrected about something you didn't know if you're grateful for (and open to) the opportunity to learn rather than embarrassed to have been wrong. Being able to let go of your ego is an incredibly important skill to develop.

Try starting with "Thanks for letting me know" to put yourself in a better frame of mind. If after you say that, you need to take some time to think about the situation, that's fine, too. Just remember that this isn't about changing the other person's frame of mind. They're allowed to be upset about being oppressed.

CONTRIBUTE TO THIS GUIDE

This is just the beginning. I'm a queer Black femme and my voice should not be the only one contributing to this guide.

If you identify as a member of an underinvested community and want to contribute, please submit a pull-request on the GitHub repository [here](#).

If you aren't a user of GitHub and would still like to contribute, send me an email at guidetoallyship@byamelie.co

a project created by [amélie lamont](#) and [by amélie. studio](#).