

Becoming an Ally to Transgender People

It can be overwhelming and intimidating to think about interrupting oppression as something you have to do *right now, all the time, forever*. Start by acknowledging that you can choose your actions based on your own needs and the particular circumstances of any given situation. Do what you can this time, and try to think about what you can do differently or additionally next time.

1. Awareness

Understand your own identity (everyone has a gender identity) and how you came to have it. Think about the fact that your identity may be *normative* (statistically more common), but that does not make it *normal* ("right," making transgender identities "not normal/wrong" by comparison).

Recognize your own unearned gender-normative privilege. Recognize that you may be a member of an oppressed group in one area (i.e. class, disability, race, sexuality) and still be a beneficiary of gender normative privilege. Understand how transphobia hurts "conventionally-gendered" people. Learn to recognize transgender oppression.

2. Knowledge/Education

Recognize that it is your responsibility, and not that of trans people, to educate yourself about transgender issues. Take some time to learn about the experiences of transgender people, and about the history, culture, struggles and beliefs/values of trans communities. Learn how laws, policies, stereotypes, myths, institutions and common practices affect transgender individuals and the trans community as a whole. Educate yourself about privilege and oppression. Identify and examine your own assumptions/biases about transgender people, and work to unlearn them.

3. Skills

Develop skills in communicating what you have learned. These skills can be developed by participating in training sessions, role-playing, cultivating a support network, or choosing safe environments in which to practice your advocacy skills. Start by not laughing at a "tranny" joke.

4. Action

The most basic action you can take is refraining from *active oppression* of transgender people (harassment/violence, tranny jokes, anti-trans legislation). Expand your skills as an ally by not continuing to passively accept these behaviors by others. Take a more active role as an ally to transgender people by actively interrupting oppression, on an interpersonal level and on an institutional level. Confront someone who tells a hurtful joke. Correct someone who uses an inappropriate pronoun or other "gendered" word in reference to a transgender person. Make trans friends and attend trans events without worrying what others will think this means about your identity. Incorporate trans issues into your personal and organizational agendas in more than just "lip service." Educate other non-trans people about the issues. Do coalition work on a personal level and on an organizational level (i.e., propose that your disability rights group work with a trans group on a forum about transphobia in the disability community and ableism in the trans community). Do not expect to be rewarded for "doing the right thing."

Adapted from Aaron Lichtov, madcapricorn@hotmail.com • 612.827.1954.

Distribution permitted as long as credit is given. Alternate formats available upon request.