

RULES FOR ALLIES

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<https://groundworkmadison.com/get-involved/rules-for-allies-by-cynthia-lin/>

RULE #1: LISTEN. REALLY LISTEN.

Be genuine in seeking to learn from the experiences of other people, as they understand them. REALLY listening can be difficult, because often it seems like or it MAY BE that you and your community are being called out as responsible for oppression. Often, natural reactions are guilt, shame, fear, and defensiveness; see Rule #2...



RULE #2: IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU.

It's not about you, so take the ego out of the picture, and deal with your own defensiveness. Often we spend a lot of energy to prove ourselves as "not those oppressors" to really be useful as allies. "My partner is a person of color, so I can't be racist." "I hung out with some gay people last night, so..." It's not about you, so check your need to assert yourself. Step back, let go of power and control. Delve into the uncomfortable spaces, and be curious.



RULE #3: IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU!

Too often the work is outward when it needs to be inward. We can fall into the trap of changing others and changing institutions but not changing ourselves. Center your own healing and UN-learning, and understand your own power and privilege. That means also reckoning how we may have benefited from systems of oppression at the expense of others—education, health care, having the freedom to express our identity as we choose.

Asked by an ally about how to support LGBTQ communities, a friend of mine once replied: "Embrace your inner queerness." This takes us back the question of who carries the burden of responsibility for challenging oppression. Perhaps the question to ask is not, "What is it like to be gay?," in seeking to understand queer communities in order to support as an ally. Perhaps the right questions are: What is it like to be 'straight?' How has heterosexism shaped my own identity? How might my own assumptions and



behaviors contribute to heterosexism and homophobia? How might this apply to unlearning racism?

RULE #4: DO THE WORK “AT HOME”

Educate and work within your own communities. Be willing to “put your body on the line,” risk yourself to hold others in your own community accountable.



RULE #5: DON'T GO IT ALONE.

Create communities for educating yourselves, taking action, and holding each other accountable.

RULE #6: LEARN ABOUT HISTORY: UNDERSTAND LEGACIES OF OPPRESSION AND OF RESISTANCE.

Ground your work in knowledge of what has happened historically and the ongoing legacies of oppression that we are still seeing today in our institutions and the ways we relate to each other. Understand and follow the leadership of the forms of resistance, through which communities have organized to defend themselves against injustice. Know that communities are capable of creating and have created their own responses. If we fail to do so, our solutions are often paternalistic and repeat the oppressive power dynamics.



RULE #7: “TO HELL WITH GOOD INTENTIONS...” – IVAN ILLICH

Sometimes people’s well-intentioned actions are downright harmful and paternalistic.

RULE #8: REMEMBER THAT ALL STRUGGLES ARE CONNECTED

Too often, “divide-and-conquer” forces pit movements against each other. For example, some class struggles have been seen as largely ‘white-led’ and pitted against anti-racist movements, even though their work might target the same root oppressions. If you are working to combat one particular form of oppression, how can you be an ally to others in other movements?



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does Rule #1 (“really listening”) line up with our core beliefs about victim services?
2. What makes for effective listening in a racial or social justice context?
3. How does Rule #1 influence all other rules?
4. Take a moment for honest self-reflection. Are there times when you felt you did not listen as deeply as you could have in a discussion about racial or social justice?

5. How can we use the Rules in our relationships with survivors as a way to empower and liberate, rather than to “fix” or “save”? How can we use the Rules in our relationships with sister programs with whom we strive to have respectful and authentic co-advocacy?
6. In what ways can we hold ourselves and others in our communities accountable for being good allies? How are you personally willing to take a risk or to step out of your comfort zone on your journey as an “aspiring ally”? What does it mean to you to “put your body on the line” (see Rule #4)?