

# LET'S TALK ABOUT *Being an Ally*

## WHAT IS AN ALLY?

An ally is someone who seeks to support a person or group who experiences vulnerability and/or marginalization.

Being an ally is an ongoing process in which a person demonstrates commitment, consistency, and accountability for their words, thoughts, and actions while standing in solidarity with others.

An ally prioritizes the voices and experiences of those who are oppressed and/or marginalized.

Being an ally is not a self-defined term, but rather earned through the relationships being built with others. Allies do not seek the spotlight for themselves but strive for the uplifting of the communities they are supporting.

Being an ally means

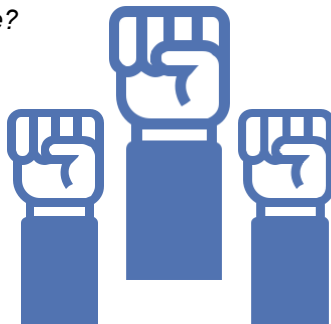
- acting out of a genuine interest in challenging and changing oppressive power structures and systems.
- using your privilege for the benefit of the people with whom you seek to support.
- turning the spotlight away from yourself and toward the voices of those who are marginalized, vulnerable, and silenced.
- using opportunities to engage others in conversations about oppression and human rights.

### **An ally asks**

1) *What privileges do I have?*

2) *How do I benefit from these privileges?*

3) *How can my privilege(s) be used to support and uplift others?*



## ALLYSHIP IS ACCOUNTABILITY

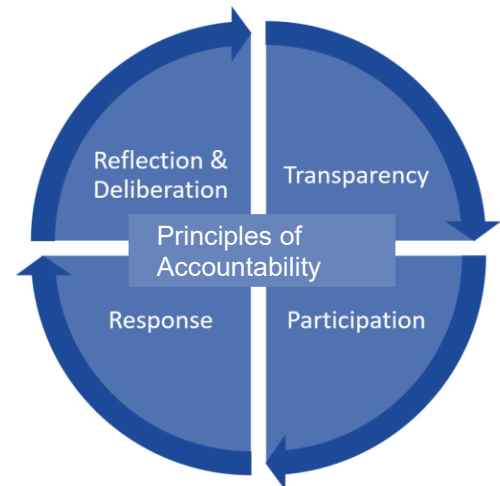
Allyship is solidarity in action. True solidarity cannot be achieved without accountability to ourselves and to others. It is a reciprocal and continual process of reflection and support.

**Transparency** - Be open about your perspectives and motivations.

**Participation** - Be an active, equitable, and contributing member.

**Reflection & Deliberation** - Make a commitment to being open, inclusive, and accountable.

**Response** - Keep learning and strive to make continual adjustments.



Hilary Moore and Joshua Kahn Russel, 2011

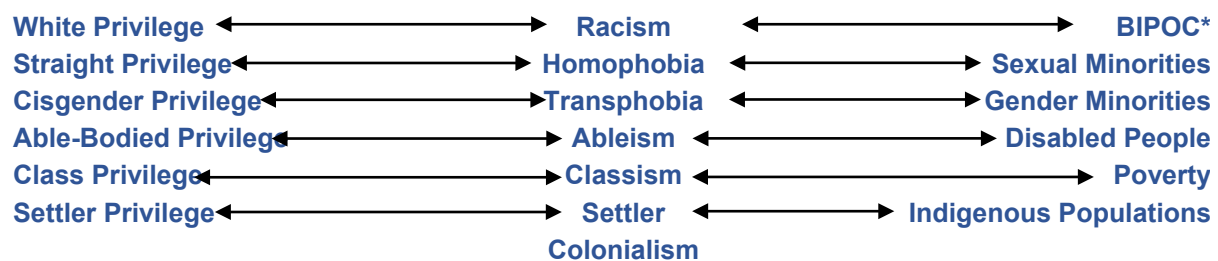
Moore and Russel propose a circular model of accountability to reflect its continual and ongoing process. Effective allyship requires learning and unlearning the ways in which oppressive structures have shaped our society and impacted our internalized biases. This work can be challenging and difficult as it asks us to analyze the ways in which we may have been complicit in ongoing systems of oppression and discrimination.

An important aspect to this work is to actively **listen, learn, and reflect**. Remember that people are experts in their own experiences, and one of an ally's most important roles is to simply listen to and learn from the people they wish to support.

# Understanding Privilege

Simply put, privilege is a set of unearned benefits a person has been afforded for being a member of a particular advantaged social group. For example, being heterosexual, male, and white are often perceived as identities that benefit from specific advantages in our society. The challenge with understanding privilege is that its effects are often invisible to us. For example, privilege is not related to how hard you've worked to accomplish something, rather it is about the opportunities afforded to you because of your gender, class, race, ability, culture, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and so on. This is often what makes privilege challenging to talk about, as it affords individuals certain advantages in their career, family, or relationships that may not exist for others.

Oppression sits in opposition to privilege, like two sides of a coin. The middle of the coin names the system of oppression. Those who do not benefit from a particular privilege will often be disadvantaged and/or face discrimination. This is not the fault of the individual, but a reflection of how larger power dynamics and social hierarchies advantage some individuals and groups and disadvantage others. The chart below provides some examples of how privilege operates.



Understanding how systems of privilege and oppression intersect in our daily lives allows us to identify ways in which to leverage that social power to support and uplift those without such societal benefits. The first step is being aware of our own privilege, but that means little if we do nothing about it. This means recognizing that we are a part of systems of oppression, even though our intentions may be noble and good. Privilege exists whether we like it or not, and allyship relies on our ability to be accountable for how it operates in our lives.

**Privilege is thinking that something isn't a problem, because it isn't a problem to you personally.**

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

How can I be accountable for my privilege, especially when I am not aware of it?

How can I use my privilege to uplift others who do not share in its benefits?

How does my privilege make it difficult to understand the experiences of others?

Where can I learn more about systems of privilege and oppression?

# WHAT DOES ALLYSHIP LOOK, SOUND, AND FEEL LIKE?



- Holding yourself accountable for your words and actions.
- Creating space for others to speak.
- Consistently educating yourself on the issues that others experience.
- De-centering yourself from the discussion.
- Showing up for marginalized groups at events, protests, discussions, etc.



- Listening to the experiences of others.
- Prioritizing the voices of the marginalized and vulnerable.
- Accepting, and learning from, correction.
- Apologizing when necessary, then doing better when moving forward.
- Using inclusive language.
- Calling out/in those who continue to perpetuate misunderstandings or ignorance.



- Constantly learning and unlearning internalized bias.
- Discomfort when held accountable by others.
- Accepting that you do not know all the answers and that your voice is not always warranted.
- Recognizing that not all spaces are for you.
- Listening, even when you are uncomfortable.



Active-Allyship invites us to question and challenge ourselves. It is a commitment to remaining aware and willing: aware of the unintentional ways we cause injustice, and willing to challenge our beliefs and actions.

Kyle Sawyer, Building Allies.org

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Mild stress can be a motivating force for creativity and achievement, but chronic anxiety in learning and working environments can stifle creative thought and may alienate members of the learning community.

Chronic anxiety can also lead to a myriad of physical and mental health challenges as a result

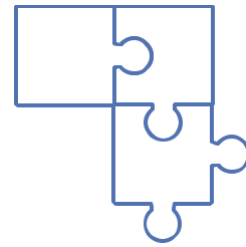
of the long-term impacts of living with stress and/or navigating hostile environments.

Striving for safe, inclusive spaces at Concordia University helps to create an environment where all staff, students, and faculty can achieve their full potential. Allies can help to ensure welcoming, respectful, and inclusive spaces are established and maintained for the benefit of everyone.

## REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

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# BEING AN ALLY AT CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY



## Listen

People are experts in their own experiences. When someone talks about their identity or attractions, theirs is the most important voice. Centre their voice and experiences, not your own.

## Attend to Language

Using inclusive language is one of the easiest ways to show support for others. For sexual and gender minorities, avoiding heteronormative language is key, as well as using someone's chosen name and correct pronouns.

## Seek Diverse Voices

Include diverse voices and perspectives in your course materials, reading lists, research, and writing.

A broader understanding of the world is often a pathway to deeper understanding.

## Leverage Your Privilege

While acknowledging and understanding privilege are integral parts of allyship, leaving it there is not enough. Seek ways to use that privilege to act in solidarity with sexual and gender minorities in the CUE community and beyond.

## Reflect

Think about how your words and actions may be excluding others. Try to identify where your privilege may create weaknesses in understanding the realities of others. Ask yourself, how you can be of support to your peers and colleagues?

## Show Up

Attend campus and community events that feature the voices of sexual and gender minorities. If there are no events, ask for them or organize them!

## Interrupt Ignorance

When you witness injustice, bigotry, exclusion or discrimination, speak up! Challenge discrimination and prejudice when it is safe to do so.

## Listen

Listen more and speak less. Learn from those around you and avoid speaking over, or for others.

For more information on Concordia University and Community Resources please visit the CUE Wellness Google Site:

<https://sites.google.com/concordia.ab.ca/cue-wellness/home?authuser=0>