

Allyship For Educators

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RAINBOW DIVERSITY
INSTITUTE



"Many would-be allies fear making mistakes that could have them labeled as "-ist" or "-ic" (racist, sexist, transphobic, homophobic, etc). But as an ally, you're also affected by a system of oppression. This means that as an ally, there is much to unlearn and learn—mistakes are expected. You need to own this as fact and should be willing to embrace the daily work of doing better." - Amélie Lamont



Purpose

This info booklet aims to give educators a general understanding of how to be an ally in the Canadian education system and various ways that they can incorporate allyship within their teaching practices.



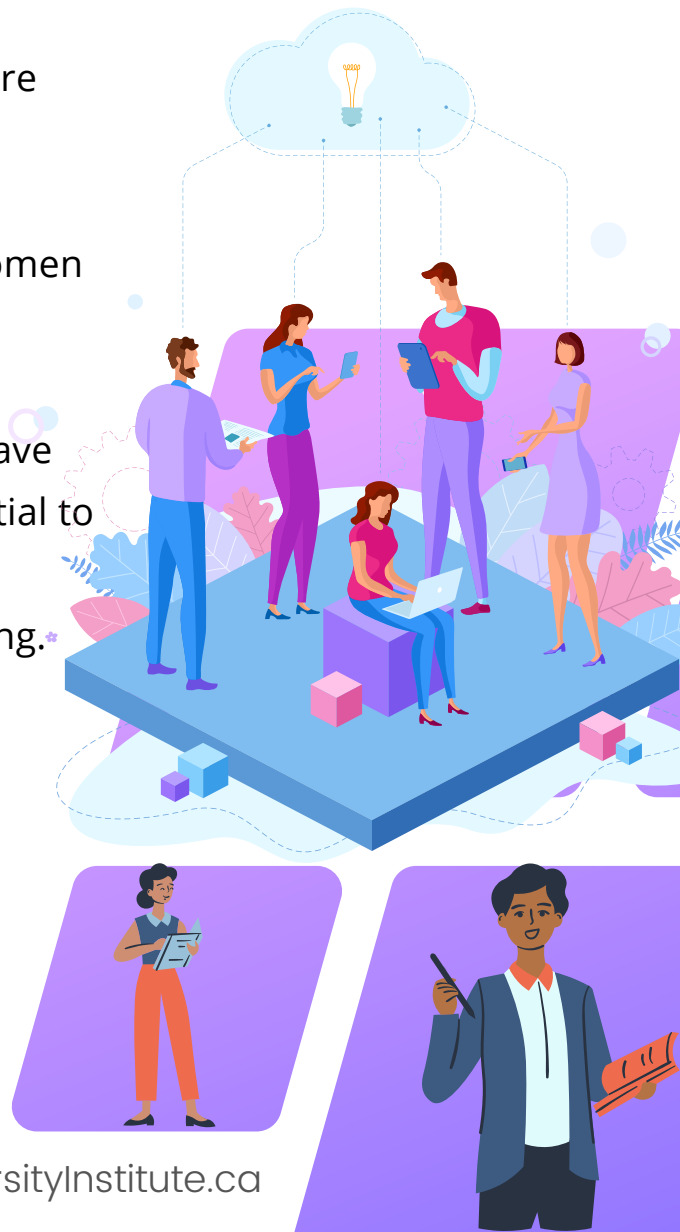
Allyship

Everyone has the ability and potential to be an ally.

An ally is someone who has privilege in relation to the oppressed group of people (or marginalized community) they are trying to support and is choosing to take “tangible, ongoing actions to dismantle systems of oppression” (YWCA, n.d.).

Marginalized communities are those who are targeted by oppression, including but not limited to: people of colour, Muslims, immigrants, refugees, LGBTQ2+ people, women and people with disabilities (YWCA, n.d.).

Allies understand that because they may have more privilege, their voices have the potential to be significantly impactful alongside the marginalized community they are supporting.*



Allyship

The most important aspect of being an ally is addressing the systems that perpetuate the marginalization of various groups.

Yes, working to change individuals' attitudes and behaviours matters and should be addressed but effective allyship recognizes that because the problem exists at a systemic level, the solution needs to too.

Being an ally is something you are; it's something you do!



Importance of Allyship



In their research article, *The Effect of Target Status on Witnesses' Reactions to Confrontations of Bias*, Heather M. Rasinski & Alexander M. Czopp have found that when a black person confronts a racist remark, they are seen as “rude,” but when a white person does the same, they are perceived as “persuasive.”

In a similar study, Gardner, D. M., & Ryan, A. M. found that diversity promoters who were demographically matched to the group for which they were advocating were perceived as more self-interested than those advocating for causes for which they were not demographically matched.

Importance of Allyship



These studies are a couple of examples of how individuals and institutions are more likely to listen to the voices of a dominant group than the voices of those being marginalized (Spicer, 2020).

You may feel that it is not your place to speak up for marginalized people or to push for anti-oppression initiatives. The reality is it is your responsibility, not oppressed people's responsibility, to address systemic oppression.

Your voice is important! Allyship can be complicated, and it is a constant journey of learning. Even those with the greatest of intentions can cause harm unknowingly. Here are some pitfalls that we can fall into as we try to support marginalized communities.

Pitfalls: Proximity Absolvement



One pitfall of allyship is what Ryan Letts calls “proximity absolvement.” He defines this concept as, *“The belief that your close proximity to diversity rids you of the need to take further action to dismantle white supremacy and oppression, or that your closeness shields you from accusations of racism, misogyny, homophobia, your complicity in white supremacy culture, etc.”* (Letts, 2020).

An example of this is when someone says that they are not a (racist, sexist, homophobic etc.) because they have a friend or family member who is part of that marginalized community. It can also show up in a less explicit way where you think that you are an amazing ally simply because you have a “wide variety of friends, family, coworkers, etc., from numerous backgrounds and marginalized groups” (Letts, 2020).

Pitfalls: Proximity Absolvement



This proximity absolvment is dangerous because it removes the need to self-critique and take actionable steps to break down systems of inequity.

To be clear, being connected to people from many different backgrounds and marginalized groups is essential to being in solidarity with them.

It is necessary to be in a relationship with marginalized communities so that you can appropriately address systemic issues by following their lead.

Pitfalls: Performative allyship

Performative allyship is when someone claims to support a certain marginalized community but does so in a way that is not helpful or even harms that community.

Performative allies often publicly show their support for a marginalized community but only for a short period of time.

The goal of performative allyship usually is to look good, to be able to claim to be a good person or not an “-ist” or an “-ic.” Utt states that “the problem with performative allyship is not that it in itself damages, but that it excuses.

It excuses privileged people from making the personal sacrifices necessary to touch the depth of the systemic issues it claims to address” (Utt, 2016).



Pitfalls: Performative allyship

Going beyond performative allyship requires you to do more than reposting social justice related content on social media at a time when a certain issue happens to be trending.

Like *proximity absolvment*, preformative allyship is dangerous because it removes the need to self-critique and take actionable steps to break down systems of inequity.

It often makes people feel that by doing a surface-level action, they are absolved from recognizing their part in maintaining the status quo and that they have done their part (Utt, 2016).

Although being an effective ally requires us to speak up and be visible, more often, it requires us to carry out simple daily acts that no one will ever see. If, when you think about it, everything you do is public, it may be an indicator that your allyship is performative (Phillips, 2020).



What You Can Do

Here is a list of steps that you can take as an educator to be a better ally in supporting marginalized communities within your school:

Listen

Active listening is a crucial part of becoming a better ally. Parts of active listening that are important are listening without judgement, listening to understand rather than thinking about what you want to say, not interrupting and being patient with pauses.

When responding, respond with the intent of understanding what the person is trying to communicate rather than attempting to rebut what they have said. Too often, people from marginalized groups choose to share a story about being discriminated against only to have the listener explain all the reasons why their experience was not discrimination (this is an example of “mansplaining” or “whitesplaining” a situation).



What You Can Do

Challenge yourself to listen, learn, and trust what staff and students from marginalized groups have to say, even when that means confronting your own bias.

Many marginalized people are accustomed to not being believed. Your ability to listen in and of itself is a valuable practice of showing support. Be open-minded and understand that what you hear might be incompatible with your assumptions.

Letting people know you can be a safe, loyal and trustworthy confidant is an invaluable form of support in any space. Listening to these problems and validating them is a form of solidarity (Spicer, 2020).



What You Can Do

Do Your research

It is **not** the responsibility of those in marginalized communities to educate you on their struggle.

Allies have a responsibility to gain foundational awareness of the daily challenges oppressed groups experience and develop a deeper understanding of the impact and hardship these challenges create.

Educate yourself about the histories, cultures, and concerns of oppressed groups, and learn about the laws and policies that affect them. Do your research to learn more about the history of the struggle in which you are participating.

You can read books and biographies and listen to podcasts, online lectures, book talks, and documentaries. You can also take a course, workshop, seminar or conference. You can find free courses online or pay for one if you have the means. For example, the University of Alberta' has an online course that you can audit for free, called "Indigenous Canada " and can be found at

<https://www.coursera.org/learn/indigenous-canada>



What You Can Do

Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is

One of the ways we can support marginalized communities is by being aware of where we spend our money.

For example, in buying books for your classroom, it is important to have a diverse selection, have marginalized voices represented, and support marginalized authors.

Too often, people from outside that community write books and get more recognition for it than the actual people in that particular community.

Another way is to donate to organizations already doing the work, especially ones led by that particular marginalized community.

Finally, on a broader note making an effort to buy from marginalized businesses instead of Amazon or Walmart makes a difference.



What You Can Do

Be an upstander

If you see or hear discriminatory behaviour at school by staff, parents or students, make sure to address it.

If someone uses inappropriate language or slurs, even as a joke, call them out, and educate them on how their behaviour is hurtful and negatively impacts the school learning environment.

An important role that an ally can play is educating and challenging members of their own group. Sometimes the best way to be an ally is to challenge people in your own group, even if it is uncomfortable.

Asking questions about why they think that way and countering with race-based information is also effective. If this behaviour continues, seek out help from an HR representative or school administrator.

If you can't yet speak up, that's okay, but recognize that fact and commit to doing your work so that, one day soon, you can.



What You Can Do

Lend Your Voice

More often than you realize, for example, marginalized staff and students at a school will keep an issue to themselves instead of voicing it.

This is because they are the only one or one of few people of their identity in that space.

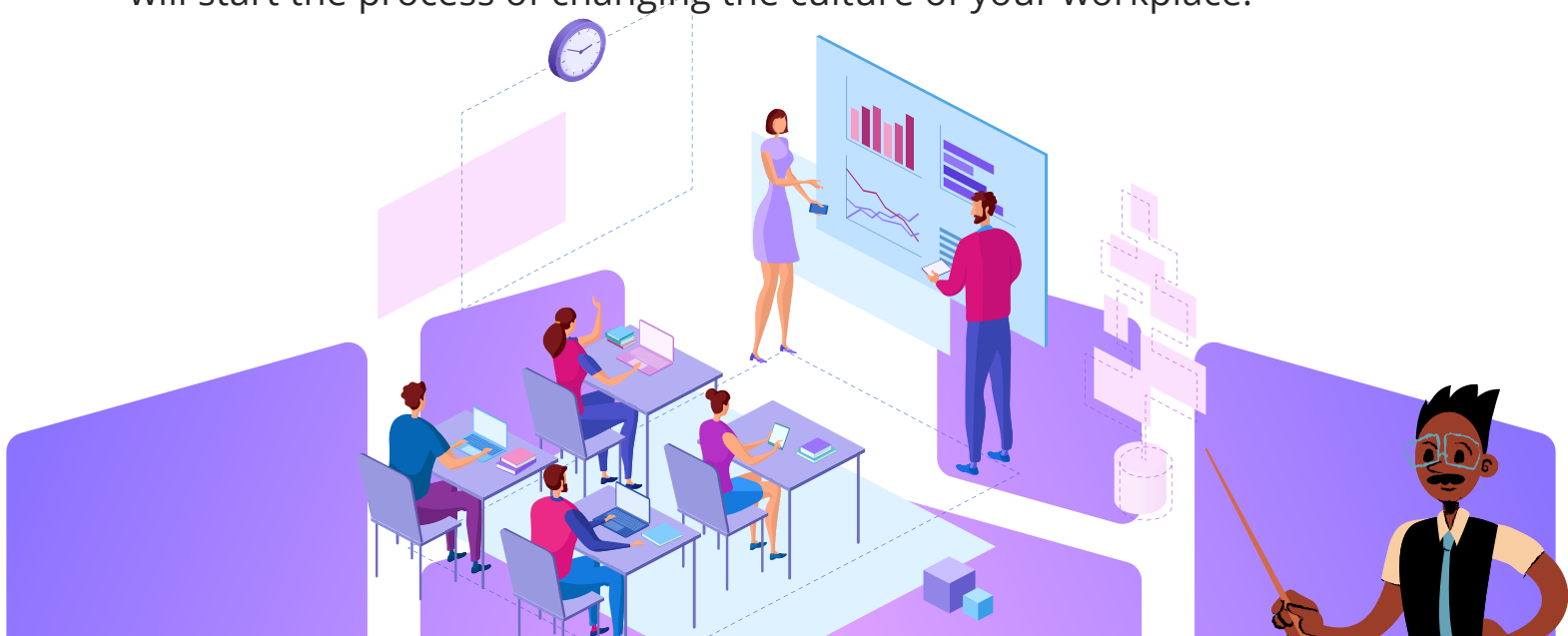
They are used to not having their feelings validated because it is not a concern of the majority. If they voice a concern or problem to you, offer your voice to back up.

Amplify

Many marginalized communities represented in schools are used to having their ideas minimized, rejected or ignored.

Something you can do when someone has a great idea that you feel is being ignored, for example, in a staff meeting or through email, is to repeat it and to give credit where credit is due.

It may not seem like a big deal, but by lending your support in this way, it will start the process of changing the culture of your workplace.



What You Can Do

Mentor

In teaching, mentoring is important. There are a lot of aspects to working at a school that is not taught in teachers' college. For marginalized people, as much as they are 'welcomed' into the work environment, they are often not supported in the same way as their other coworkers.

In this case, it is crucial to make the extra effort to lend your support. Checking in to see how they are doing, offering resources you may have and being available for any questions or just to hang out makes a difference.

Learn the difference between cultural appropriation vs. cultural appreciation

Consider the line between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation. Chelsea Vowel has a good blog post about this.

<http://apihtawikosisan.com/2012/01/the-dos-donts-maybes-i-dont-knows-of-cultural-appropriation/>



What You Can Do

Invite a speaker

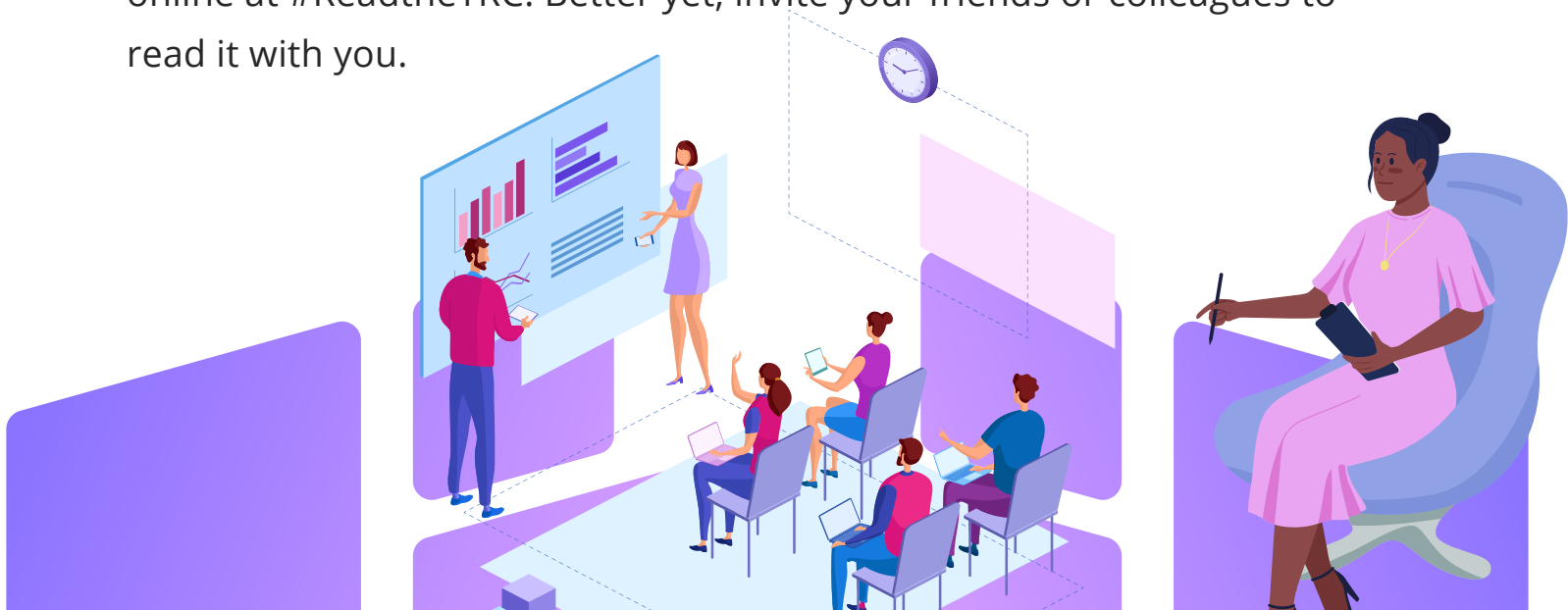
Invite speakers to educate your class or staff on a particular issue. When you invite speakers from a marginalized community to speak at your school, make sure they get paid or at the very least receive an honorarium.

Too often, people from marginalized communities are expected to offer services at little to no cost, which reinforces the oppressive systemic belief that their voices and expertise are not valuable.

Read the Truth and Reconciliation Commission document

If you live in Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Document is a mandatory read if you are not indigenous here. Even if you or your family immigrated here recently, you are implicated because of the imperialistic immigration system that allowed you to come here.

A good place of entry would be to start with reading the Calls to Action and then move on to the Executive Summary. You can even listen to it online at #ReadtheTRC. Better yet, invite your friends or colleagues to read it with you.



What You Can Do

Be Accountable

Take responsibility for your actions, privileges, and experiences that you hold, which could contribute to your biases. Don't dismiss what the person is sharing with you, justify your behaviour, or defend your intentions. It isn't helpful to the people who have been hurt, and it shifts the focus away from the people who have been harmed and onto your personal feelings of guilt, shame, or defensiveness. Remember, intention is not impact. The best apology is one that doesn't make excuses or invalidate the other person's feelings (The Trevor Project, 2021).

Allyship is a never ending journey that is essential in making the world we live in an equitable place. It will not be easy, but it will be rewarding in the sense that you will be making a difference. There will be a cost that comes with doing this work. This cost could be financial, relational and even affect your sense of comfort. Tatiana Mac, writer of *Save the Tears: White Woman's Guide* and *White Guyde to the Galaxy*, put it perfectly when she says, "Never allow yourself to stay comfortable. Comfort is complicity. Discomfort means change. Sit with it " (Mac, 2021).



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