Ally Skills handout

This is a reference for people participating in the Ally Skills Workshop. It is not intended as a standalone reference. Learn more at: https://frameshiftconsulting.com/ally-skills-workshop/

Basic concepts

- **Privilege:** an unearned advantage given to some people but not all
- **Oppression:** systemic, pervasive inequality present throughout society that benefits people with more privilege and harms those with fewer privileges
- **Marginalized person:** a member of a group that is the primary target of a system of oppression
- **Ally:** a member of a social group that enjoys some privilege that is working to end oppression and understand their own privilege
- **Power:** The ability to control circumstances or access to resources and/or privileges
- **Intersectionality:** The concept that people can be subject to multiple systems of oppression that intersect and interact with each other, coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw

Ally is a verb, not an identity: You don't have to do anything to be a marginalized person other than simply exist, but you are only an ally when you are taking action to fight oppression. This is why we talk about "ally skills," "acting as an ally," and "ally work" more often than "allies."

Sometimes you can act as an ally, sometimes you are the marginalized person: Depending on what is most relevant about you to the situation, you may be able to act as an ally in some situations, but be the marginalized person in other situations. In the workshop, we will learn how to identify when we have power and privilege that allows us to act as an ally.

Terminology

Using the right words and keeping up with changes in language is important ally work, but changing the language you use takes years. We don't expect you to change all of your language during the workshop, just that you be considerate of others if they ask you to use different words. **If you make a mistake, that's fine! Just apologize, correct yourself, and move on.**

Note: Members of a marginalized group can agree to call themselves anything they want, including terms outsiders should not use. Part of the process of "reclaiming" slurs is members of a marginalized group agreeing to use a slur to refer to each other positively, gradually neutralizing the slur, after which everyone can use it. For example, "queer" is in the process of being reclaimed in many parts of the world.

Gender
- Cis: your gender is the same as the gender that was assigned to you at birth

- Trans: your gender is different than the gender that was assigned to you at birth
- Use "trans" or "transgender" but do not use "transgendered" or "transsexual"
- Non-binary or genderqueer: "male" or "female" doesn't describe your gender accurately
- Use men for cis and trans men, women for cis and trans women, non-binary people/folks, cis men/women, trans men/women, people of all genders, folks, people, everyone, all, y'all, all y'all, yinz…
- Don't use "girls" for women 18 years of age and over, "females" for humans, "guys" for groups that are not all men, "ladies", "people with [BODY PART or CHROMOSOME]" instead of "men" or "women"

Sexuality
- Use straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual/pansexual (attracted to people of all genders), asexual (little or no sexual attraction to anyone)
- Queer: catch-all term for anyone who is not a straight cis woman or man (recently reclaimed, may still be offensive in some cultural groups)

Racial and ethnic groups
- Avoid abbreviated forms of names of racial or ethnic groups
- Use Wikipedia to find preferred terms for racial or ethnic groups
- Don't use "ethnic," "urban," "inner city" or other euphemisms to designate people of a particular race or ethnic group
- "African-American" only applies to Black Americans; use "Black" for all people of (recent) sub-Saharan African descent
- Some people are multi-racial and/or multi-ethnic; e.g., someone can be both white and Latinx, or both Black and Jewish

Disability and neurodivergence
There is an ongoing debate about which is preferable, "person-first" ("I am a person with disabilities") or "identity-first" ("I am a disabled person") language. While many disabled people strongly prefer identity-first language, person-first is a reasonable default. When referring to a specific person or group, use their preferred terms.

- Use "abled person," "[NAME] is disabled," or "person with disabilities"
- Don't use "the disabled" (referring to a group) or "handicapped"
- Use "wheelchair user," don't use "wheelchair bound" or "confined to a wheelchair"
- Use Deaf for someone who is culturally Deaf (uses sign language, etc.), "deaf" or "hard of hearing" for any person with any level of hearing loss, and "hearing person"
- A person is "neurodivergent," a group of people with different neurotypes is "neurodiverse"
- Only use respectfully in cases of self-disclosure: ADD/ADHD, Autistic, autism spectrum, schizophrenic, bipolar, etc.

- Don't use "lame," "dumb," "retard," "stupid," "crazy," etc. - instead use "foolish," "wild," or a specific adjective like "crowded" or "disorganized"
- Don't use names of specific disabilities as metaphors or similes to indicate badness

Body size
- Describe body size using neutral descriptions: "higher weight," "lower weight," "larger body," "smaller build," "medium size"
- Don't use medicalized or value-judgement terms for body size like "healthy weight," "obese," "struggles with his weight", "normal weight," "overweight"
- The word "fat" is in the process of being reclaimed; if your audience understands that you aren't using it pejoratively, go ahead and use "fat" and "thin"
- You can't tell by looking at someone whether they struggle with an eating disorder or body image disorder

Religion, class, age, family role, etc.
- Speak respectfully about religious or spiritual beliefs, with the exception of any bigotry or intolerance that is part of those beliefs
- Don't use stereotypes about working class people (e.g. janitor), adults of particular ages, people with family roles (mother, grandparent, etc.), or caregivers
- Don't use "politically correct" in a serious or literal way, as it is a derogatory label created to criticize and deride the concept of "treating people with respect"
- Use "undocumented" not "illegal immigrant" or "illegal"

Workshop discussion guidelines
- Anonymize any sensitive stories if you repeat them outside the workshop
- **Focus on what an ally can do** in this situation, not the marginalized person
- There are no trick questions
- Each group has a report out person who takes notes and summarizes what you talked about, and a different person does this for each scenario
- Each group has a gatekeeper whose job is to interrupt people who are talking too much, and invite people who aren't talking as much to speak
- If you tend to dominate conversation, wait for half the group to speak before you speak

Guidelines for responding to oppression
- Be short, simple, and firm
- Humor usually backfires, avoid it
- Play for the audience
- Practice simple responses
- Pick your battles

- Don't be sexist, homophobic, transphobic, racist, ableist, classist, ageist, body-shaming, or make fun of people for being sexually undesirable, unattractive, etc.

Guidelines for future ally work
- Set specific goals for yourself for next week/month/year
- Treat ally actions as bare minimum expectation
- Follow and support leaders from marginalized groups
- Follow your discomfort: if something makes you feel bad, find out more and understand why before reacting
- When you make a mistake, apologize, correct yourself, and move on

Websites
https://frameshiftconsulting.com/ally-skills-workshop Ally Skills Workshop slides, video, and handouts (including this one).

https://dearally.com/ Dear Ally Skills Teacher, an advice column about ally skills by Valerie Aurora.

https://frameshiftconsulting.com/meeting-skills/ Effective and just meetings have people filling four specific meeting roles: gatekeeper, facilitator, note-taker, and timekeeper.

https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender A guide to writing or speaking about transgender people or issues.

The Wikipedia pages on names for racial and ethnic groups are remarkably useful.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradox_of_tolerance Useful explanation of why a tolerant culture must be intolerant of intolerance.

https://captainawkward.com/ The Captain Awkward advice blog has great tips for how to say uncomfortable things to people, enforce boundaries, and similar skills.

https://danceswithfat.wordpress.com/blog/ The Dances with Fat blog explains what's wrong with how our culture talks about body size and includes specific advice for allies.

https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/08/size-discrimination-facts/ Information on body size discrimination

https://hypatia.ca/2014/09/13/charles-rules-of-argument-the-short-version/ Charles' Rules of Argument are useful to avoid wasting your time and energy.

https://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Tone_argument Resources for identifying and responding to the tone argument (hint: usually involves the word "tone").

http://www.sirc.org/publik/drinking4.html How societal attitudes affect response to alcohol.

https://biasinterrupters.org/ Specific bias interrupting techniques for the workplace.

https://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Community_anti-harassment Resources for developing a community code of conduct.

https://adacamp.org/ Resources for running an inclusive conference from the Ada Initiative.

https://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Inclusive_offsites How to run inclusive offsites, by Sara Smollett et al.

Relevant papers and articles

"Does valuing diversity result in worse performance ratings for minority and female leaders?" by David Hekman, Stefanie Johnson, Wei Yang, Maw Der Foo
https://amj.aom.org/content/early/2016/03/03/amj.2014.0538.abstract

"Research: Vague Feedback Is Holding Women Back" by Shelley Correll and Caroline Simard
https://hbr.org/2016/04/research-vague-feedback-is-holding-women-back

"The one word men never see in their performance reviews" by Kathleen Davis
https://www.fastcompany.com/3034895/strong-female-lead/the-one-word-men-never-see-in-their-performance-reviews

"Alcohol and Inclusivity: Planning Tech Events with Non-Alcoholic Options" by Kara Sowles
https://blog.valerieaurora.org/2018/03/30/cross-post-alcohol-and-inclusivity-planning-tech-events-with-non-alcoholic-options/

"What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team" by Charles Duhigg (psychological safety) https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/magazine/what-google-learned-from-its-quest-to-build-the-perfect-team.html

"No more rock stars: how to stop abuse in tech communities" by Leigh Honeywell, Valerie Aurora, and Mary Gardiner https://hypatia.ca/2016/06/21/no-more-rock-stars/

"The Al Capone Theory of sexual harassment" by Leigh Honeywell and Valerie Aurora
https://blog.valerieaurora.org/2017/07/18/the-al-capone-theory-of-sexual-harassment/

 "A post-election guide to changing hearts and minds" by Valerie Aurora
https://captainawkward.com/2016/11/21/guest-post-a-post-election-guide-to-changing-hearts-and-minds/

"How to Respond to an Offensive Comment at Work" by Amy Gallo
https://hbr.org/2017/02/how-to-respond-to-an-offensive-comment-at-work

"How 'good intent' undermines diversity and inclusion" by Annalee Flower Horne
https://thebias.com/2017/09/26/how-good-intent-undermines-diversity-and-inclusion/

"Why do remote meetings suck so much?" by Chelsea Troy
https://chelseatroy.com/2018/03/29/why-do-remote-meetings-suck-so-much/

Books

Better Allies: Everyday Actions to Create Inclusive, Engaging Workplaces by Karen Catlin
https://betterallies.com/

So You Want to Talk About Race by Ijeoma Oluo https://www.sealpress.com/titles/ijeoma-oluo/so-you-want-to-talk-about-race/9781580056779/

How to Respond to Code of Conduct Reports, by Valerie Aurora and Mary Gardiner
https://frameshiftconsulting.com/code-of-conduct-book/

Is Shame Necessary? by Jennifer Jacquet http://www.isshamenecessary.com/

What Works for Women at Work: Four Patterns Working Women Need to Know by Joan C. Williams and Rachel Dempsey https://nyupress.org/books/9781479835454/

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