

Being An Ally: Supporting Myself and Supporting Others

First off, thank you for reading this resource. The fact that you made it here is already a huge step in showing your support for gender-expansive young people. These days, many groups use the term of “ally” very loosely. Sometimes, you might find yourself labeled an ally without knowing how or why. And once you’re boxed in as an ally, people start to have certain expectations of you, your thoughts and behaviors.

There are a lot of resources online about how to be a supportive ally for gender-expansive people. You can click here to see GLSEN’s (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network) one page handout on how to “Be An Ally to Trans and Gender-Nonconforming Students.” (<http://glsen.org/download/file/MzMwOQ==>) There are good tips on how to ask someone about their gender pronoun and how to make uncomfortable gender-exclusive spaces like locker rooms feel safer.

Part of being an ally is about supporting others. But often times, being a good ally means starting the work within your self. It means giving yourself enough time to learn and study an issue so that you can make an informed decision about where you stand. It takes time to learn new terminology, to curve habits and gender expectations that may have been instilled in you since birth. You’ll find yourself slipping up and making mistakes, and you may end up being the most critical person asking, “How could I call them by the wrong pronoun after they’ve told me a thousand times?!” Go easy on yourself and maintain open communication. A simple apology goes a long way!

An Ally of an Ally

However, what is often less talked about is how can gender-expansive young people be allies to their friends, family, and community? A good place to start is simply to have patience. Allies of gender-expansive young people get their fair share of bullying and mistreatment as well (especially if they’re publicly challenging gender stereotypes). If allies make a mistake, it’s important for gender-expansive young people to not be the first to cast judgment. The journey to becoming a good ally is less lonely if there’s a friend to walk with.

Bottom line is – no one can make you be an ally. Just as there is a gender spectrum, there is also an ally spectrum. For some people, accepting gender-expansive young people into their home and family is their definition of an ally. For others, they find it important to be activists challenging unfair laws that harm gender-expansive young people. If gender-expansive people have an increased understanding of the experiences of allies, we can create a cycle of them helping us, and us helping them.