

Session 11 Parts 1 & 2: Being An Ally

Learning Objectives:

- To explore what it means to be an ally
- To use case studies to examine particular situations on the best ways to be an ally

Session Summary:

This session will begin by focusing on what it means to be an ally. It will use case studies to give participants practice in thinking about being a good ally to other oppressed people. You may decide how thorough you wish to be. Part 1 gives an overview of being an effective ally and then gives the group an opportunity to practice with a case study. Part 2 allows the group to further explore and practice being an ally by examining several case studies in small groups.

Background:

Everyone can be an ally to someone. It often takes a shift from the unconscious to the conscious to start to become an ally for others. The case studies in this workshop are actual situations that have been adapted for discussion.

Materials:

- Newsprint
- Markers
- Case studies
- Handout (Principles of Anti-Oppression)

Preparation:

Part 1

- Have the introductory questions for the small groups ready to read aloud.

- Have the questions for the large group discussion posted on newsprint.
- Prepare copies or put on newsprint the handouts “Principles for Anti-Oppression” and “Anti-Oppression Practice”.
- Prepare the case study for the larger group.

Part 2

- Prepare the case studies for use in small groups.

Workshop Plan

Opening Reading/Hymn (5 Minutes)

(You are invited to pick a reading and/or an opening hymn. Singing The Living Tradition is an excellent resource. Other options are a moment of silence, a prayer, or a brief check-in. You are encouraged to also begin with a chalice lighting. Please submit any readings and/or hymn choices that you have used successfully to the OBGLTC as feedback for possible inclusion in future editions of LWC.)

Activities:

PART 1

Introductory Questions (45 minutes)

Explain to the participants that they will divide into groups of 4 to examine what it has meant for them to be an ally and how others have been allies for them. Encourage people to sit with people they don't know well. Tell participants that they will reflect on & discuss six questions. Let them know that you will give them a minute to reflect and then they will have 5 minutes to discuss each question. You may need to keep track of time for them.

1. Who has been a good ally to you? How?
2. Who have you been a good ally to? What did you do?

3. When would you have liked to have been a better ally for a person or group and what kept you from being that?
4. What are the roadblocks that keep your good intentions from becoming actions?
5. What makes you go numb in life?
6. What needs to happen for you to be more engaged and active in life and life around you?

When the last question is done, invite participants back to the large group. Take a few minutes for people to reflect on how the exercise was for them and to share what insights they had.

Being An Ally to Oppressed People (45 minutes)

Display the following three questions on newsprint for all to see.

1. How does oppression work?
2. Who needs allies in anti-oppression work?
3. What are the qualities of being a good ally?

Take the questions one at time and use the indicated time for each question. You will have an extra 5 minutes (out of the total 45) to use as you need.

Question #1 – Discussion:

(20 minutes) You will probably want to record the responses on newsprint. If some of these words do not appear, put them up toward the end of the time and ask how they are part of the way oppression works;

- Power—who makes the decisions and has decisions made for them
- Prejudice—while actually a neutral word, the connotations are about favoring or disfavoring a particular group

- Privilege—the benefits of being in the dominant group of people, often unspoken and even unaware
- Silence
- Numbness
- Assimilation—where members of an oppressed group act more like the dominant group as a way of being treated better
- Cultural Appropriation—taking from another culture and making it your own without permission or credit; or trying to be of a particular group by doing something of that group

Question #2 – Discussion

(10 minutes) Participants should arrive at an answer that includes both the oppressed and allies. Be sure to ask why allies need other allies in this work.

Question #3 – Discussion

(20 minutes) Ask for and list responses. You may also wish to ask for examples as people list their ways of being ally. After about fifteen minutes, distribute the handouts and compare the lists. Discuss similarities and differences. Tell the participants to use this paper as we move on to our next activity case studies, to practice being an ally.

Case studies (20 minutes)

Tell the group they are now going to use these conversations about being an ally and apply them to some case studies. The first one will be done as a large group, and then next week they will examine different case studies in smaller groups in greater depth.

Large group case study

A person dressed as a woman who is assumed to be male has been coming to church. She signs up to be a greeter, and someone suggests that would not be appropriate.

How can you be an ally?

Present the case study to the entire group and allow for a moment of reflection. Refer back to the three questions from the previous section:

1. Who will need allies here?
2. What is the oppression in this case study and how is it played out?
3. How can you be an ally in this situation?

Allow for about fifteen minutes of conversation to work through this situation. Then tell the group that the next session will involve a variety of case studies with different oppressed groups in order to become a better ally.

PART 2

Case Studies (90 minutes)

This second session has some flexibility. You will want to divide the group into smaller groups. You can determine the best way to divide the group and the case studies: You may wish to hand out several different case studies for each group with no group having the same case study. You may wish to have all groups have the same case studies. There are many ways this can work.

However you choose to approach this session, make sure you allow enough time for the large group to share, debrief, and further discuss the case studies. If the small groups did not have the same case studies, the large group discussion could be longer so that the small groups can present/discuss their experience and what they learned.

Closing Reading/Hymn (5 minutes)

(You are encouraged to find a suitable one. The difference between the Opening and Closing is that we suggest that one reading and/or one hymn is selected to be used as the closing for all sessions. The Opening may vary from session to session.)

Suggested Hymns

Suggested Readings

Add Your Suggestion

Ask participants to hold hands as they are willing, able, and comfortable.

Principles of Anti-Oppression

1. Power and privilege operate in our group dynamics and we must continually struggle with how we challenge power and privilege in our lives/actions.
2. We can only identify how power and privilege play out when we are conscious and committed to understanding how ableism, classism, genderism, heterosexism, racism, sexism, and all other forms of oppression affect each one of us.
3. Until we are clearly committed to practice anti-oppression, all forms of oppression will continue to divide our movements and weaken our power.
4. Developing an anti-oppression practice is life-long work and requires a life-long commitment. No single workshop is sufficient for learning to change one's behaviors. We are all vulnerable to being oppressive and we need to continuously struggle with these issues.
5. Dialogue and discussion are necessary and we need to learn how to listen non-defensively and communicate respectfully if we are going to have an effective anti-oppression practice. Challenge yourself to be honest, open and take risks to address oppression head-on.

Anti-Oppression Practice *(adapted from Los Angeles Direct Action Network)*

These practices are based on a series of conversations on the issue of racism. We recognize that there are many other forms of oppression that must be addressed. We have taken these practices and attempted to generalize them to other forms of oppression. This list is a beginning and it needs to be expanded upon. In the future we will continue discussions on all forms of oppression.

- When witnessing or experiencing racism, sexism, etc. interrupt the behavior and address it on the spot or later; either one on one, or with a few allies.
- Give people the benefit of the doubt. Think about ways to address behavior that will encourage change. Foster dialogue, not debate.
- Keep space open for anti-oppression discussions; try focusing on one form of oppression at a time - sexism, racism, classism, etc.
- Respect different styles of leadership and communication.
- White people need to take responsibility for holding other white people accountable. The same is true for people in all dominant groups.
- Try not to call people out because they are not speaking.
- Be conscious of how much space you take up or how much you speak.
- Be conscious of how your language may perpetuate oppression.
- Don't push people to do things just because of their race and gender, base it on their word, experience and skills.
- Promote anti-oppression in everything you do, in and outside of activist space.
- Avoid generalizing feelings, thoughts, behaviors etc. to a whole group.
- Set anti-oppression goals and continually evaluate whether or not you are meeting them.
- Don't feel guilty. Feel motivated. Realizing that you are part of the problem doesn't mean you can't be an active part of the solution!

Case Study #1:

You are having a conversation with people at work about the presidential election. Someone brings up Florida and talks about people of color reporting that there was voter intimidation that changed the results of the election. Someone else suggests that people of color are just complaining because their candidate lost.

How would you respond?

Case Study #2:

You are at a restaurant with friends, including a friend who uses an electric cart. You have called ahead and the restaurant said that they are accessible. In this case, accessible means, going through the backdoor, up a freight elevator, and through the kitchen. Your friend with the cart gets angry, and refuses to eat there, saying “You all go ahead. I am going to go home.”

What would you do?

Case Study #3:

Your state legislation has introduced a bill to suggest that a marriage is only between a man and a woman and the state will not recognize marriage or some other legal documents that suggests that two people of the same gender are a couple.

How could you be an ally?

Case Study #4:

An older white man in your extended family meets a family friend. The friend is Asian American. He is very courteous, complimenting her on her manners. “You have nice manners. You could teach these other women about how to be quiet.” Later, you hear him confide that the friend looks “exotic.”

What would you do amongst all these family members?

Case Study #5:

You are talking with a new member of your congregation and meet her six-year old. Another person asks the child “Where’s Daddy?” and both mom and the daughter look at each other quickly and look away. Another woman joins you and is introduced carefully as the mother’s friend.

How can you be an ally here?

Case Study #6:

The social action committee has decided that this year the focus will be on racism and expresses its interest in working with the African-American community on the other side of town.

To be an ally, what issues might you want to be aware of?

Case Study #7:

At a religious education meeting, a white teacher suggests that the entire religious education program should celebrate Cinco de Mayo in grand style this year.

Since you are running the meeting, how would you handle it?

Case Study #8:

You are at an anti-racism training. An African American man gets angry at the white people in the room, saying “You just don’t get it, do you?” He stays angry and glares.

How can you be an ally here?

Case Study #9:

A member of the youth group you are leading confides to the group that he thinks he is gay or at least “bisexual.” He doesn’t know whether or not to accept his Eagle Scout award next week, accept it and say something, or just not go. His father is scoutmaster there. The youth says his father doesn’t know about him being gay or “bisexual”.

What would you say?

Case Study #10:

Someone suggests at the congregation’s annual meeting that the church should have a service project to help the poor. We should build a Habitat for Humanity home, he says. He adds, the poor need our help.

What thoughts do you have about this in terms of being an ally to the poor?

Case Study #11:

You are talking at the front of the church with a friend. Two newer members of the congregation, both men, catch your eye, as they greet each other with a hug and a kiss. A long time respected member of the congregation goes up and tells the two men in a loud tone of voice that they shouldn’t do that here.

What would you do?

Case Study #12:

An African American minister in your community is speaking out in favor of Pres. Bush’s faith-based initiative plan. He is a minister in a progressive congregation that votes overwhelmingly Democratic. He will be at an interfaith meeting where you are going to discuss the initiative.

How can you be an ally in this situation?

Case Study #13:

Your city is sponsoring a series of forums on racism and improving race relations among the First Nations/Native American and White communities there. There are many folks on the congregation’s anti-racism team that think this is a great idea.

As an ally, what issues might you need to be aware of in this?