

Being an effective ally in Trans Justice Project

What is allyship?

An ally is someone who advocates, acts in solidarity with, or supports the struggles of a particular marginalized group in their fight for equity, dignity and justice. This could also mean people using their social status or social privileges to gain attention or traction for groups' causes. Allies are committed to learning how they can best support the fight for trans rights, through listening, asking questions, contributing and receiving feedback.

In trans and gender diverse spaces, effective allyship can look like cisgender people stepping up, amplifying trans voices and sharing the workload – making our movement stronger and more sustainable.

The [Trans Justice Project](#) is a trans-led, and ally supported organisation. This means while trans people are leading the strategy and vision of this movement we actively encourage allies to take action in our campaigns, to lead local action groups, and be part of conversations about strategy.

This is because we are only able to win a better future for our communities if thousands of allies are taking action alongside us. However, sometimes allies can be nervous about joining our spaces or unsure about how they can be helpful.

This resource has been created by a group of trans and gender diverse people with input from other allies, to help you on your journey to be an effective ally. We look forward to working alongside you in our powerful fight for trans justice.

Firstly, here are a few questions to reflect on:

- Why is trans justice and equity important to you?
- What are your hopes in joining the fight for trans rights?
- How are trans and gender diverse struggles for justice, equity and freedom connected to yours – are there similarities and differences?
- What are some skills, strengths and resources that you might be able to contribute?
- What are you curious to learn more about being an ally in the trans justice space?

- What do you know about yourself already, that you think might make it easier or harder to show up authentically?

It can deepen your learning if you bring a genuine willingness to reflect, and sit honestly with your responses, as you read the material. It might be helpful to come back to these questions after you've read the guide and see if there is anything you would add to the answers to your reflective questions, and anything you would like to know more about.

Be reflective and open to learning

Educate yourself about the trans community

There are a tonne of resources out there that can help you learn about our community, history, health care, and rights. We have listed some at the end of this resource.

Stay curious

Take time to learn about our existing priorities, our [principles](#), and the culture of our movement. You might want to arrange a coffee or a chat with one of the other allies in the group to make friends and learn more. Feel free to ask questions and for clarification of things in meetings if it won't derail the conversation. It might help to sit back a little, listen, and make space for others to speak early on.

Good ideas can come from anywhere

Equally, please speak up if you think your contribution might be useful to the movement. We need the skills, expertise, and talents of everyone to make a powerful movement. Learning the difference between 'speaking over' and helping is part of what being an effective ally is about.

It's ok to make mistakes

We welcome input from everyone about how to make our movement stronger, and no one is perfect. Striving for perfectionism can be a pain in the neck for well-meaning allies (particularly folks who see themselves as socially progressive) who are trying to do their best. Allies can often be scared to get things 'wrong' which can get in the way of building genuine connections with other people, and it can make things harder for us to do meaningful work together. All of us expect and accept that everything we do will be imperfect.

Whose voice might need to be heard?

Take stock of who is in the room with you, who has lived experience, expertise, and something to offer the conversation. You might ask yourself: Whose voice needs

to be heard right now? Is there something I need to learn more about? Am I being invited to contribute? Importantly, be mindful that you can see your role as helping create space for others, rather than being the person who needs to have all the ideas.

Be considerate of how you process your emotions

It is normal for this work to bring up feelings of guilt and shame for allies, especially when they consider their cis-gendered privilege*, their relationships with their partner or children, and feel grief about how trans folks in their lives are treated.

As trans folks it can often feel really jarring for these emotions to be brought up in a setting or in a way that asks the trans people in the room to hold that feeling for you, or to help you process it. This might be totally fine in situations where you have strong relationships, but could be uncomfortable for others.

Having these feelings is totally understandable but you might want to find ways to navigate this with other allies and trusted people, and be sensitive to the effects of expressing this to trans people around you.

**A note on 'privilege': What we are referring to here is the way that cis gendered people - meaning folks who identify with the gender they were assumed to be at birth - experience the world differently to trans folks. It speaks to the idea that many marginalised people are living life on 'hard mode', experiencing barriers or challenges that people who are straight, or cis, or white, or able-bodied might not. We live in a world that assumes being cis and heterosexual is the 'default' or what is 'normal'. This can make life harder for those of us who are not.*

Take action

Get involved

Feel free to put your hand up for any jobs that you would like to take on. That could mean things like running a market stall, data entry, helping to write a submission, or even meeting with your local MP.

Offer to do things that might be hard for trans folks

Help with the things that others may struggle with. Some examples of this are: liaising with police at rallies, dealing with challenging members of the public, offering to body double for hard tasks like making a submission to an enquiry, or spending time consuming administrative tasks. Consider what roles in the movement are frequently falling to trans folks, and if you can help with them?

Lean into your power

Think about how you can use your power and/or privilege strategically. For example, although we wish the world wasn't like this, politicians, police or other people in positions of authority are often more likely to listen to someone who is cis; even more so if they are a parent. Putting your hand up to do those meetings or to be the one liaising with police might not only be good allyship, it may also be more strategic.

Community care

The trans community tends to make a lot of effort to include people who have varying abilities and unique needs which can be an important way to ensure more people are included and supported. It might be about wearing respiratory masks in public spaces, thinking about accessibility, contributing to mutual aid funds, and making sure everything we do is neuro affirming and disability affirming. Learn about intersecting needs and think about how we can support people to participate (we have included some great resources at the end).

Support other allies

It is great when allies take on the role of teaching and supporting other allies to help them navigate and make friends in the group. Refer them to this document, and perhaps make time to meet with them and support them through their questions.

Taking on feedback

Developing your self-reflection and judgement

It's a very valuable relational skill to be accountable for how we show up with others, use discernment, and support the learning of others. We want people to feel safe to contribute meaningfully to our shared goal of trans justice. It can be challenging for cohesive group dynamics if allies focus on being judgemental of other allies in the trans justice space who are also trying to do their best.

Making amends

Taking accountability for making a mistake, apologising and learning from them will make everything a lot smoother for the group and avoid prolonged discomfort. Commit to understanding what happened, self-reflect, and find better ways to address the issue in the future. We all learn from making mistakes in relationships.

When we realise or learn that we have made a mistake, how we respond makes the biggest difference to how that mistake impacts on ourselves, others, and our collective goals. Here are some suggestions:

- Separate self from behaviour. You are not bad, even if an action you took is unhelpful/harmful/unwanted.
- Seek to understand what the impact is and why
- Reflect on how you might have done something differently so that you know what to do next time
- Apologise, and if someone is impacted, acknowledging the impact
- Ask others if you have understood correctly and give them an opportunity to say more about how your behaviour impacted them and what they'd prefer you do instead
- If you feel that you have gained important information from this experience, it's also good practice to thank the person who provided you feedback, as this supports a culture where people can safely communicate with each other.

Treating trans folks as people

Don't put trans people on a pedestal

There is a joke in the trans community that we are all 'so brave'. It's a nod to the comment that we often get from allies who are trying to express their support but can sometimes express it in a way that feels patronising.

Trans people are either often put up on pedestals ['you are amazing, the best, can do no wrong'] or are treated like vulnerable children ['I will protect you, no one will hurt you']. This is partly because people are seeing us primarily as 'trans' and not as a whole person. While it comes from a good place, it can feel kind of dehumanising.

Additionally, allies can sometimes come off as a bit awkward or, for lack of a better word, weird, when they talk to us because they are so worried about offending us, saying the wrong thing, or because we might be the first trans people they have ever talked to. This is understandable but not very helpful.

Just relax and try to treat trans people the same as you would anyone else in your life. Ask questions, find common interests, and chat about the show you both watched last night.

Respect privacy

As with any new relationship, it's best if you don't ask questions about people's private medical and personal information e.g. medical history, sexual preferences, previous name, sex assigned at birth. A good rule of thumb is if you wouldn't say it to someone in a professional workplace, you probably shouldn't say it to someone in an action group.

Avoid commenting on folk's appearance

It's generally best not to give compliments or comment on anyone's physical presentation unless you know them. Often, perhaps in good faith, people say things like 'you pass very well' 'you look so feminine/masculine', or 'you'd look a lot better if you xyz'. Whilst it might seem affirming to you, it can be demeaning to us. Trans folks don't all have the same ideas about how appearance and gender relate, and some people might have strong feelings about their appearance. You should expect that others won't say these kinds of things to you either.

Don't make assumptions

Be comfortable not knowing

In our movement we really try not to make assumptions about anyone else, or their relationship to gender. We respect people's gender journeys and unique expressions of who they are. It's not necessary or possible to know whether someone is cis or trans, or how they're connected to the trans community.

Folks might be trans, gender questioning, a parent of a trans kid, a friend or a partner. Not everyone is 'out' to others, or has 'worked it all out' yet. Being trans might mean different things to different people. Sometimes people come to trans justice spaces as allies and work out their own personal relationship to gender along the way.

This is private information that only needs to be shared if you choose. It's best to work on noticing and letting go of assumptions about who might be in the room with you, and instead focus on building relationships, and making a meaningful contribution.

Don't assume people's gender or pronouns

If you are not sure of how someone would like you to refer to them, just ask. Using correct names and pronouns are the very basics of using respectful language and can be gender affirming and make folks feel at ease around you. It might help people feel more comfortable if you introduce yourself by using your own name and pronouns first. It is also possible that a person might change their name or pronouns in the time you know them so it is important not to assume. If you mess up someone's pronouns, pause, discretely apologise, correct yourself, and move on.

Everyone is coming with different experiences

There is not one 'trans experience' or position on an issue. This is because trans people have vastly different experiences of life. While many of us have had similar

experiences of discrimination, harassment, or had our lives disrupted by transitioning, these experiences are then also often shaped by class, gender, race, whether we are First Nations, or disabled, or whether we have/had a supportive family or community. Don't assume people's experiences or politics simply because of how you perceive them.

For example, a First Nations trans woman (some First Nations trans people may use the terms 'Sistergirl' or 'Brotherboy') will likely hold a different social positioning and access to privilege than a white trans guy. This is because of how racism and trans-misogyny creates barriers to people's ability to thrive and live meaningful lives free of stigma and discrimination.

Respect the words that different communities use to describe their genders.

It can be really affirming for trans folks if allies learn the kinds of words that we use to describe our life experiences and relationship to gender. Be mindful, there might be a difference between what language trans folks use to refer to themselves, and what is okay for an ally to say. Different cultures and communities often use different words to describe their genders and sometimes words that are offensive in one context are totally fine in another. For example, 'tranny' is generally considered a slur, but is still commonly used by older generations of trans women to describe themselves. It generally wouldn't be appropriate for an ally to use this term to describe a trans woman, even if she uses it to talk about herself. As outlined above, if you make a mistake, make amends with the person, and move on.

Advocate for trans justice

Engage and activate others

Find ways to include other allies in the movement and support them to take a stand. Share campaign slides or your own trans allyship posts on social media, make or buy and wear merch, start conversations, sign petitions, make submissions to inquiries, donate to fundraisers and encourage others in your life to do the same.

Lift up trans voices

Trans folks are often left out of conversations about our own lives in political and social spaces. This form of discrimination results in trans people rarely being at the tables where decisions about our lives are made. If you are in a space without trans voices present, advocate for change and invite trans people in.

Use your voice

We ask that allies speak up when you hear people say incorrect or disrespectful things about trans folks and take a stand against harmful attitudes or language. It's very important to stand up against transphobia where you see it playing out among friends, families and in the media. Be visible and courageous in your support and find ways to make trans justice something that people in your life are thinking about.

[Conversations for Trans Justice – Trans Justice Project](#)

Look after yourself

Organising work can be incredibly rewarding for so many reasons. However, it is also a space where you can feel emotionally activated for a whole bunch of reasons. It might be because of the workload, or interpersonal issues, disability, or just the enormity of the problems before us.

Regardless, we want everyone to feel supported and well. We understand that you will have your own wellbeing needs. Make sure to take care of yourself so that you can show up, be healthy, and be involved. We also have a wellbeing team who may be able to assist you.

Please check out [Sustaining Ourselves as Activists](#) from the Commons Library for more great tips.

Thank you for being here. We need you to stand with us.

Written by Sorcha Conlan and Jackie Turner

Recommended resources

Readings

- [For Allies | TransHub](#)
- <https://www.transhub.org.au/language>
- [The Impact of Allyship – ACON Pride Training](#)
- [Allies – Transcend Australia \[Resource list\]](#)
- [Supporting the Transgender People in Your Life: A Guide to Being a Good Ally | A4TE](#)
- [‘The pronoun lowdown’ – Nevo Zisin](#)
- [‘A Beginners guide to being a trans ally’ – Christy Whittlesey](#)
- [‘The Transgender Issue’ – Shon Faye](#)
- [‘Transgender Australia: A History Since 1910’ – Noah Riseman](#)

- [Trans people aren't new, and neither is their oppression: a history of gender crossing in 19th-century Australia](#)

Watch

- [Effective Allyship: A Transgender Take on Intersectionality | Ashlee Marie Preston | TEDxPasadena](#)
- [Who's Afraid of Gender? | Judith Butler's public lecture at University of Cambridge 2023](#)
- [Stonewall Forever - A Documentary about the Past, Present and Future of Pride](#)

Follow

- [@nionwomen](#) - 'Not in Our name'. A UK based instagram page started by cis women who fight for trans and gender diverse people's rights.
- [@Transcend_Australia](#) - A national organisation working towards a world where trans, gender diverse and non-binary children are embraced and given every opportunity to thrive and flourish.
- [@Transjusticeau](#) - A trans-led campaigning organisation in Australia. We wrote this guide.
- [@Equalityaustralia](#) - Australia's largest LGBTQIA+ advocacy and legal reform organisation.