

## **What does it mean to be an Ally?: Definition and Characteristics**

There are many different definitions and descriptions of what it means to be an ally. The information that follows is an introduction to the concept of being an ally, but don't be surprised if you read or hear other definitions of the term.

To be an ally is to unite oneself with another to promote a common interest. As shown by the definitions above, people who are allies are not only helpers, but also have a common interest with those they desire to help. In an alliance, both parties stand to benefit from the bond or connection they share.

In the field of social justice studies, the idea of being an ally to another person or group of people has become a key concept in examining issues of oppression and privilege. When people form an alliance to speak out against prejudice and discrimination, people who are the target of that prejudice are not the only ones who benefit. They may be the ones who most directly benefit from efforts to combat prejudice, but all of us,

### **Standard Definitions**

Ally (n) - one that is associated with another as a helper

Ally (v) - to unite or form a connection between; to enter into an alliance

Alliance (n) - a bond or connection; an association formed to further the common interests of the members

### **Social Justice Ally**

A person of one social identity group who stands up in support of members of another group; typically a member of a dominant group standing beside member(s) of a group being discriminated against or treated unjustly regardless of our identity, benefit when any of us take steps toward eliminating prejudice and discrimination in our society. We all benefit from our collective efforts to create a better educated and more understanding world that treats each of us with dignity, respect, and equality. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Being an ally is more than being sympathetic towards those who experience discrimination. It is more than simply believing in equality. Being an ally means being willing to act with and for others in pursuit of ending oppression and creating equality. Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, said, "It is not enough to be compassionate. You must act."

An ally is someone whose personal commitment to fighting oppression and prejudice is reflected in willingness to:

1. Educate oneself about different identities and experiences,
2. Challenge one's own discomfort and prejudices,
3. Learn and practice the skills of being an ally,
4. Take action to create interpersonal, societal and institutional change.

**The words of Gandhi reflect the spirit of being an ally: "Be the change you wish to see in the world."** Modified from:

<http://wmpeople.wm.edu/asset/index/safezone/whatisanally>