

10 WAYS TO BE A GENUINE ALLY WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Human rights activists stand up for the rights of everyone, everywhere. When we learn that someone's rights have been abused, we jump into action time and time again. What we don't always do very well is reflect on how our presence has impacted the individuals and communities we are standing in support of. Sometimes despite our best intentions we have actually done harm without realising it, because we have not taken the time to be a genuine ally.

What does it mean to be a genuine ally?

Being a genuine ally involves a lot of self reflection, education and listening. It means knowing that we're often coming into this space from a position of power and privilege. Privilege that we've gained through unjust systems that marginalise the groups we seek to ally with. It's not enough to just show up in solidarity and speak out against the unjust system, we have to do what is within our power to dismantle the system and differentiate ourselves from the opponents of these groups. We have to change our own behaviours and be mindful that we are not contributing to keeping that system going.

It's also important to keep in mind that these groups do not need saviours to come in to fix everything on their behalf. They are leading the fight against the injustices they face, as allies we are there to follow their lead.

Why is it important to be an genuine ally?

Committing to be an ally is not easy, but we cannot change the way our system treats marginalised groups without people from the side of power rallying against it. Amnesty International's Indigenous Rights Advisor Rodney Dillon has a few words on why it's important to be an ally.

"I think that there's half a million Indigenous people in Australia. We've been flat out campaigning for the last 200 years. We've done well in some places but not well in other places. We need supporters like you to campaigning on these things, talking to polities, doing this and that. We need people to not only campaign, but to understand what's happened in the past as well. There's a lot to it, and how we turn that around to give people a better understanding of why people have done this."

It's important for us as an organisation to be that bridge between two groups. It gives the two people a bit of reconciliation and exposure to what the problems are. I think that non-Indigenous peoples support and influence can be really really important to make change. These are the people we need on our side. We need people who are willing to understand the past so these families have got a safer future. Being an ally makes families who understand it richer. The people who put the wall up, I can understand why it's there, but the people who pull it down - they're the ones we need."

Inspired by a similar resource created at Amnesty International USA by Kalaya'an Mendoza.

For more information about Amnesty International Australia's work on Indigenous rights, go to: www.amnesty.org.au/campaigns/indigenous-justice/

When working with Indigenous communities there isn't one way to be an ally as every community and individual is different. Every relationship you build needs a different approach. But here are some suggestions that will help you to get started.

1 LISTEN TO & FOLLOW THE COMMUNITY

Find out who the traditional owners and Elders are of the land you are on. When doing long term work on Indigenous rights build strong relationships within the community and make sure everything is Indigenous-led.

2 CENTRE THE STORIES AROUND COMMUNITY

A big part of your involvement is to amplify the voices of Indigenous communities, don't make it about yourself. You should directly share these messages with your networks in their words without alteration.

3 KNOW THE HISTORICAL & CULTURAL CONTEXT

Knowing the history and being culturally competent is vital. The issues the community face come from hundreds of years of ongoing trauma and discrimination. It is not the responsibility of the community to educate you.

4 NEVER SHOW UP EMPTY HANDED

Showing up in support is great, but offer to lend a hand as well. Use your labour, resources and skills to help out. What additional value can you bring the community?

5 ALWAYS SEEK CONSENT & PERMISSION

Consent is a continuous process, not a one time request. Seek permission before taking part in community events, particularly around cultural & spiritual events. They'll usually be labeled something like 'all community & allies welcome'.

6 BE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOURSELF

Be aware of what resources you're taking away from communities through your presence. Ensure you've given back to the community more than you've taken away.

7 KNOW WHEN TO STEP BACK

Be aware of what space you are taking up. Always remember that you are there as a guest in a supportive role. There will be times when the community need to act alone, respect their boundaries.

8 SAVIOURS ARE NOT NEEDED, SOLIDARITY IS

Solidarity is only meaningful if it is substantive and not merely performative. This means showing up to support the community with your presence alone should be the baseline, not the end game.

9 BE MINDFUL OF PEOPLE'S TIME AND ENERGY

Indigenous people often have to be advocates on a wide range of issues that affect them and their community first hand. They don't have the choice to switch off from being involved and can be spread thin in many directions.

10 DO NO HARM TO THE COMMUNITY

The community should be better off or the same because of your presence, not worse. Follow all of these suggestions and keep reflecting on your behaviour and you're on your way to doing your part in bringing down an unjust system.

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