

Gender Ally

Ariya's Story

Facilitator's Guide

Story Videos can be viewed at:

<http://onmyplanet.ca/mundo/genderally/themes/two-spirit-stories/ariya>

Developing Empathy – Inform on trans, Two-Spirit and gender non-conforming issues through personal story.



Acknowledging the Territories

Find out which Indigenous peoples inhabit the land that you are on. Try to find the traditional names of the Nations and Bands in your area as opposed to names given to them by colonists. Time permitting and if the group is committed to doing the whole series – this could be a group exercise/project. The acknowledgement at the head of the introduction document can be used as an example – it is termed for the local area where the materials were developed. The Anti-Violence Project at the University of Victoria has an excellent resource page for identifying and acknowledging Indigenous Communities on Vancouver Island and in BC.

<http://www.antiviolenceproject.org/about/territory-acknowledgement>

Safer Space Guidelines

It is important to establish a working agreement or contract with the students while discussing this type of sensitive subject matter. Time permitting: engage the group members in establishing their own agreement – asking what they think they would need to feel safe to discuss their feelings and/or this type of subject matter. Write the items down on a flipchart or similar so that you can refer back to the established agreement during the session or for subsequent sessions. There is a list of questions below that may help in establishing what a safer space might look like for your group. It is also important to discuss accountability for situations where participants do not follow the group agreement.

The following is a list of Safer Space Guidelines that is commonly used by LGBTQ2 support groups. It was initiated by TransAction in 2010 and edited by Homospun in Victoria, BC, in 2013.

Each individual in the group is asked to:

- Respect your own physical, mental and emotional boundaries
- Please communicate your needs and speak up if you are uncomfortable
- Remember you are welcome to take space away if you need time alone/away/quiet
- Respect the physical, mental and emotional boundaries of others – ask for consent before engaging in physical contact
- Avoid making assumptions about the identity, experiences, and/or histories of other people
- Respect the confidentiality of information and narratives shared with you
- Remember, everyone makes mistakes
- Try to speak with “I” statements and avoid personal attacks when communicating with others about mistakes they made
- Assume that others are acting and speaking from a place of positive intent
- Be aware of the impacts of your own behaviour and take responsibility for what you say and do
- Be open to being approached and talked with if you make a mistake
- Remember that we are gathered to share an open and engaging environment

Participants can add to or change these guidelines. If the group is going to do the whole series of workshops, spend the time to develop the guidelines with the group. Alternatively, you can provide a few and ask for others from the group or simply review the guidelines provided. A verbal agreement, a show of hands or similar, cements the contract. We urge both facilitators and participants to help maintain the group agreement. Once established, the group agreement should promote learning for all involved using respectful communication and discussion. Discuss, establish and record as part of the guidelines, what should happen if someone does not follow the agreement.

Questions To Help Establish A Safer Space

- What do we need to feel safe to share our questions and stories with this group?
- How do we tell the difference between 'not knowing' and 'disrespect'?
- What does it look like to show respect to the person in the video? To your peers?
- What happens to the group when someone doesn't follow the agreement?
- What are our options if we feel someone is being disrespectful?
- What should happen when a group member does not follow the agreement?

The group may agree to choose 5 or 6 key points from the guidelines provided above to review at the opening of each session.

Definition of Ally

- After introducing the purpose of working with the materials — developing empathy, building understanding and taking action — ask each person to write down one or more words that define the term 'ally'.

Group Introductions

Going around the room each participant tells the group their name and their pronouns. Depending on the group this could extend to any other identifier that the participants feel is important to share about themselves (establish this beforehand). This gives everyone a chance to identify themselves as opposed to accepting/enforcing an expected (often binary) identity. It reduces assumptions about gender identity and encourages respect for how individuals expect to be seen and addressed. The facilitator will need to model: "I'm ____ and I go by she/her, ze/hir, they/them. What about you?" An individual may choose more than one. You may indicate that this comes up in conversation normally and using everyone's specified pronouns demonstrates allyship. Someone's pronouns may change over time so it is important to ask everyone and ask frequently.

Witnessing people (most often cis-gender people) jokingly play with their gender can be difficult. Be attentive to how the group responds to their pronoun identification. If you suspect that someone is using a pronoun or gender identification in a disrespectful way — trying to make a joke out of the exercise — we suggest that you investigate this with the group. For example, if someone says that their gender is 'cupcake' or 'dog', to diffuse the situation, you can take this seriously with a question such as: "I'm not familiar with that, can you elaborate on how that works?" or "I'm not quite understanding that one, can you use that in a sentence?"



Icebreaker Activity

This type of exercise is helpful when the group is new to each other. There are a number of other sample Icebreaker activities in the Activities List if you would like to choose a different activity.

Ball Toss

- Group stands in a circle.
- While holding the ball one member of the group tells the group something about themselves that other people may not know and then throws the ball to another person in the circle.

Video Viewing

Ariya's Story – Synopsis

Ariya is an Indigenous trans woman. She talks in a direct, advice-giving way to queer and trans youth about her experience of coming to accept her gender identity and beginning to transition. She notes that if she had to do it again that she might not spend quite so much time trying to find acceptance from her family and would focus more on the more positive and supportive people in her life.

Talking Points

Content Warnings (Themes)

“Coming To”

Suppressing (Early) Effeminate Behavior

Indigenous Heritage

Negative Information About 'Gay'

Acknowledged by Only One Person in Her Family

Addictions

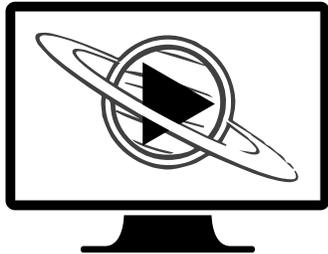
Family Violence

Sexual Violence

Generational Trauma

Letting Go of Family Expectations

Focusing On More Positive and Supportive Relationships



Watch Ariya's Story Video

Exercise For Identifying Themes

- Participants pair off and spend 4 minutes talking about their reactions to the video story.
- While in pairs, ask the participants 3 questions:
 1. What stood out to you – visually or emotionally?
 2. What are you curious to know more about?
 3. What experiences can you relate to from the story?
- One member of each pair presents the reactions that came up in the pair's conversation.
- Record themes brought up by each pair. Ask about themes identified above if themes do not emerge from participants' conversations.

Building Understanding — Provide a safe container in which to discuss pertinent issues and practice difficult conversations.

Discussion Topics

1. Ariya speaks about “coming to”, accepting being a transgender woman. Ariya experienced a lot of confusion leading up to this. How might a sense of gender identity be confusing? What feelings might come up? For example, when trying to suppress her gender, feeling miserable in part drove Ariya to learn self-acceptance. How would a shift in our perception of gender help with the kind of confusion Ariya had?
2. Addiction, alcohol, family violence are also a big part of Ariya's family story. Ariya came from a remote town, where the attitude toward being gay was "bad". How do her family history and her need for family approval contribute to Ariya's own drug and alcohol use?
3. A key support was her Grandmother, buying her feminine things and allowing her to be herself. What other kind of supports should be made available to trans and gender non-conforming (GNC) youth and their families?
4. Ariya needed to let go of any expectations of family approval and relationships as a transgender woman. How might her family's willingness and/or disinterest in participating in her life, affect her sense of self and self-esteem?

Activities for the Discussion Topics

If time is running short, cut down the discussion section (e.g. one activity instead of two) to insure that the 'Ally Practices' section is included.

There are a number of other sample exercises to use with the discussion topics in the Activities List if you would like to use different exercises.

You can also use the themes and reactions that came up in the previous exercise to create your own questions for the following exercises.



Activity 1

Group Drawing

- Attach a large sheet of paper to the wall.
- Provide crayons or other art materials to contribute to the drawing.
- Participants collectively draw their responses to a topic from video themes, e.g. Gender Confusion, Self-Acceptance, Addiction, Intergenerational Trauma, Support Person(s).

Activity 2

Caption Making – Offers opportunity to engage participants in a conversation about appropriate language, and challenges their assumptions about people's experiences.

- In small groups, discuss an assigned topic.
- Participants devise slogans, titles, headlines, advertisements, and verbal encapsulations that summarize one of the discussion topics – Gender Confusion, Self-Acceptance, Addiction, Intergenerational Trauma, Support Person(s).
- Share with the rest of the class. Write on a board, and have open, meaningful conversations about each one, allowing participants to question each other and correct each other's use of language in a gentle, non-judgmental way. e.g. using 'they' or 'ze/hir' instead of 'he' or 'she'.

Taking Action – Assist participants in identifying ways to practice allyship with trans, Two-Spirit and gender non-conforming youth.

Allyship Practices

In this section the empathy and understanding established with the video story and discussion is connected to ally practices. There are a number of ways to practice allyship; educating yourself and others, being inclusive in both your language and your actions, being supportive, standing up, calling out, calling in and others. It is important to understand that allyship involves not just an initial learning curve but ongoing self-education and practice. Becoming informed and developing awareness are the first steps to practicing allyship.



Present the info graphic, discuss the two lists of tips for interactions and go through the examples of Allyship Techniques, before engaging the group in the discussion questions for this section.

There are several good "How to be a Good Ally" lists and documents out there. A few are listed here and there are more in the resources list. "Being An Effective Trans Ally", from the 519 Community Centre in Toronto, outlines a number of elements of allyship quite succinctly (makes a great handout). The info graphic can be downloaded here:

<http://www.the519.org/education-training/training-resources/our-resources/creating-authentic-spaces/being-an-effective-trans-allys>

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Present the info graphic to the group and invite discussion.

Points to Cover in Discussion:

- 'Ally' is not an identity. Too many 'allies' claim the label and don't necessarily do the work, so the term 'ally' should be treated as a verb. An ally is only an ally while they are practicing allyship.
- Allyship is never perfect nor will it ever be complete.
- An ally isn't in it to be thanked or even recognized and will never be able to rest on their laurels.
- The reason allies are allies is because understanding your own privilege, learning about people that are different than you, helping others understand their privilege, standing up for equality, and using the right pronouns are the right things to do.
- Ally techniques let the people around you know that "...you want to help change the world for marginalized communities, even if you are not a part of a particular group." (Being an Effective Trans Ally – link below)
- The more people know about and practice allyship, the better it will be for everyone.

If the group is doing more than one workshop segment, a good homework assignment for participants to familiarize themselves with the elements of allyship between sessions is to download and read the entire pdf info graphic. This should significantly improve the discussion.

The following list of things to remember for Trans Allyship is based on 'The Basics' at Transequality.org. The full pdf can be downloaded here:

<http://www.transequality.org/issues/resources/supporting-the-transgender-people-in-your-life-a-guide-to-being-a-good-ally>



Discuss the following lists of tips:

- There is no one way to be a 'perfect' ally.
- You don't have to understand someone's identity to respect it.
- You can't always tell if someone is trans simply by looking at them (and do you really want or need to?).
- There is no 'one right way' to be trans, Two-Spirit or gender non-conforming (GNC).
- Continue to educate yourself.

Interacting with Transgender people

- Use the language a trans person uses for themselves.
- Ask everyone and ask often. Pronouns can change, asking regularly is always a good idea.
- Be careful and considerate about what other questions you ask.
- Someone's gender identity is their private information to share, or not.
- Avoid compliments or advice based on stereotypes about transgender people, or about how men and women should look or act. (e.g.: comments about looking like a "real woman or man").

The following techniques outline the first steps of allyship and draw an effective path toward activism:

Examples of Allyship Techniques

1. **Active Witnessing** – making your presence known in the situation.
2. **Supportive Actions** – correcting pronoun/language use when the person in question isn't present, discouraging discriminating conversation or put-down comments when the person is question isn't present etc., regularly including someone in an activity, sitting with or talking to a person who is being bullied.
3. **Standing Up** – calling someone out, telling someone when you witness bullying or discrimination (friends, teacher, parent, counsellor or someone you trust).
4. **Calling In** – calling someone in is very similar to calling someone out in that you are calling attention to oppressive beliefs and behaviour, but it's done with a little more compassion and offers a conversation and some education on the topic. The following article describes the process of Calling In:

<http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/01/guide-to-calling-in>

Some discussions may be emotionally challenging or difficult for some participants. While many facilitators are able to provide appropriate support, if you feel unprepared or out of your depth, consider inviting a counsellor or other supports (i.e. an Elder, a community youth leader, etc.) to join the discussion for the first session or for sessions that are anticipated to be more intense.



In pairs or small groups identify things an individual can do in each of the areas listed below.

Relating Video Discussion Topics and Allyship Techniques

- 1. Self-education** – What can you learn about Intergenerational Trauma in Indigenous culture? Do you think that Intergenerational Trauma exists for LGBTQ2 people? How do you think this affects Two-Spirit people both within and outside Indigenous cultures?
- 2. Active Witness** – Think about three people that you trust in your immediate surroundings. Could you tell them about something you witnessed? What might those people do to help the situation?
- 3. Supportive Action** – How can you let Two-Spirit, trans or gender-diverse people know you support their right to gender and cultural expression?
- 4. Standing Up** – How can you let someone who speaks against or disparages the experience of Two-Spirit, trans, gender non-conforming, or LGBTQ individuals know that you don't agree with their view?

Practicing allyship is usually uncomfortable and will undoubtedly involve some failure. Don't be afraid to make mistakes, it's bound to happen sooner or later. Best practice is to listen when what you've done has had a negative impact, be accountable for your mistakes without getting super defensive, apologize and move on. This article from Everyday Feminism describes some common mistakes made by trans allies (and praises them for sticking with it):

<http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/06/6-common-mistakes-trans-allies/0>

Using Additional Clips

Additional shorter clips may be available to focus attention on a particular topic — e.g. Two-Spirit, gender identity, bullying, inner conflict and coming out to a parent. Not all videos have additional video clips. The additional clips can reinforce or deepen the conversation about a topic or be provided as an assignment.



Ariya's Story – When I Came Out

1. Ariya seeks inner peace, self-acceptance and appreciation for her body, 'as-is', during her transition. How does this help her deal with her earlier anger and her "whatever you want" response to pronoun use?

Research and Larger Projects

Discussion topics can be used by individuals or small groups to do further research or complete a follow-up assignment. Use the Resources List and Glossary to support the work.

Closing the Session

At the end of each segment, remind the participants of some of the key elements of your safer space group agreement, and/or some key ally practices e.g.:

- Respect the confidentiality of information and narratives shared with you.
- Avoid making assumptions about the identity, experiences, and/or histories of other people.
- Assume that others are acting and speaking from a place of positive intent.
- Be aware of the impacts of your own behaviour and take responsibility for what you say and do.
- Remember that we are gathered to share an open and engaging environment.
- You don't have to understand someone's identity to respect it.
- Continue to educate yourself.

Definition of Ally

- At the close of the session, ask each person to write down how the definition of 'ally' has changed as a result of working with the materials.

Terms and Definitions

1. **Intergenerational Trauma** – the transmission of historical oppression and its negative consequences across generations. There is evidence of the impact of intergenerational trauma on the health and well-being and on the health and social disparities facing Aboriginal peoples in Canada and other countries. There is also evidence of the further impact of intergenerational trauma on the health and well-being of Two-Spirit and LGBTQ people:

"Existing data on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and Two-Spirit Indigenous people suggests that they experience unique barriers to culturally safe health care, and are at greater risk for negative mental and physical health outcomes than their non-Indigenous LGBTQ peers and their non-LGBTQ Indigenous peers."

Indigenous Health Fact Sheet, Rainbow Health Ontario
(Resource link listed below)

2. **Transition**

"Transition is the term commonly used to include the steps a transgender, agender, or non-binary person takes in order to align aspects of their life to be consistent with their gender identity. This term can be misleading, however, as it implies the person's gender is changing from one gender to another; in actuality the person's gender remains relatively stable. It is others' understanding of that gender that shifts. What people see as a "transition" is actually an alignment in one or more dimensions of the individual's gender, as they seek congruence across those dimensions. A transition is taking place, but it is often those associated with the person (parents and other family members, support professionals, employers, etc.) who

are transitioning in how they see the individual's gender, and not the person themselves.

Thus we prefer the term seeking congruence or congruence measures. A person can seek congruence in any or all of the following ways: social congruence – through changes of social identifiers such as clothing, hairstyle, gender identity, name and/or pronouns; hormonal congruence – through the use of medicines such as hormone “blockers” or cross-hormones to promote gender-based body changes; surgical congruence in which an individual's body is modified through the addition or removal of gender-related physical traits; and legal congruence through changing identification documents such as one's birth certificate, driver's license, and passport.”

www.genderspectrum.org, posted by Justin Clark

3. **Transphobia** – The fear and dislike of, and discrimination against, trans people. Transphobia can take the form of disparaging jokes, rejection, exclusion, denial of services, employment discrimination, name-calling and violence.
4. **Body Shaming** – The action or practice of humiliating someone by making mocking or critical comments about their body shape or size. (This often extends to trans bodies)

Oxford Living Dictionaries

Resources

Articles, websites, services and books (available at the library) to provide additional information.

1. **“Beyond the Talk”** – Island Sexual Health, resources for youth on Vancouver Island BC.

<http://www.beyondthetalk.ca/resources>

2. **The Body is Not an Apology** – Radical Self-Love for Everybody and Every Body. Check out their articles on Gender.

<http://www.thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/tag/gender>

3. **Transmisogyny** – Two articles on transmisogyny; Trans-misogyny Primer by Julia Serano and Transmisogyny 101 by Laura Kacere at everydayfeminism.com;

<https://www.juliaserano.com/av/TransmisogynyPrimer-Serano.pdf>

<http://everydayfeminism.com/2014/01/transmisogyny>

4. **My Gender Workbook** – by Kate Bornstein (1998). Kate Bornstein is a trans author, playwright and performance artist, whose seven books are taught in over 120 colleges and universities around the world.

<http://katebornstein.com>

5. **QMUNITY** – BC’s Queer Resource Centre

<http://www.qmunity.ca/get-support/youth>

6. **Intervention to Address Intergenerational Trauma**

Overcoming, Resisting and Preventing Structural Violence – University of Calgary, Faculty of Medicine, Family and Community Support Services, YMCA Calgary, Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth. Downloadable article:

http://www.ucalgary.ca/wethurston/files/wethurston/Report_

[InterventionToAddressIntergenerationalTrauma.pdf](http://www.ucalgary.ca/wethurston/files/wethurston/Report_InterventionToAddressIntergenerationalTrauma.pdf)

7. **Two-Spirit Resource of and for Two-Spirit Women**

Download link from 2spirits.com

<http://www.2spirits.com/PDFolder/Two Spirit Women.pdf>

8. **Victoria Sexual Assault Centre (VSAC)**—A feminist organization dedicated to supporting women and all trans survivors of sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse, through advocacy, counselling, and empowerment.

<http://www.vsac.ca>

9. **Twitter account of Taryn Brumfitt** — Director/Creator of EMBRACE the documentary and the #ihaveembraced campaign

<http://www.twitter.com/tarynbrumfitt>

10. **Binding, Packing, Tucking and Padding** — Trans Care BC articles:

<http://www.phsa.ca/transcarebc/care-support/transitioning/bind-pack-tuck-pad>

11. **Indigenous Health Fact Sheet from Rainbow Health Ontario**

<http://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/2SLGBTQINDIGENOUSHEALTHFactSheet.pdf>

Contains an additional resource page within the document — specifically:

<http://www.2spirits.com/index.html>

<http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/twospiritdirectory.html>

Resources for Health Care professionals:

<http://www.ipac-amac.ca>