

Gender Ally

Jack's Story

Facilitator's Guide

Story Videos can be viewed at:

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

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.

Gestures

- Ask participants to stand in a circle and one at a time, make a gesture that is representative of how they feel in the moment.
- Debrief — does it shift how participants relate to the other participants?

Video Viewing

Jack's Story – Synopsis

Jack describes his experience as a young, Two-Spirit, transgender, gay man. His First Nations background adds layers of cultural and racial complexity to the navigation of his gender expression and sexual orientation. In addition to being bullied from a very young age, a significant factor in Jack's teenage life was the lack of visible role models. This contributed to his extreme feelings of isolation that led him to attempt suicide. Although Jack's family initially tried to encourage him to conform to traditional gender roles, once Jack was able to communicate with his family about the issues he was facing they became very supportive of him in his gender expression, his transition and his activism. Jack now sits on a number of Provincial and National Advisory Boards and is a public advocate for Indigenous rights, Two-Spirit and LGBTQ2 rights, and mental health issues.

Talking Points

Content Warnings (Themes)

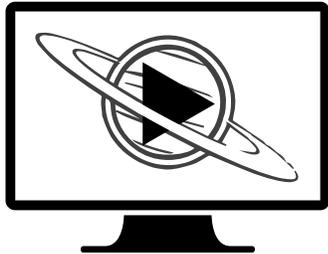
Isolation

Bullying

Mental Health

Suicide

Family's Reactions and Support



Watch Jack'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

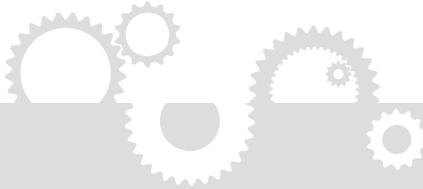
1. What happens when a person has an intersectional identity? What does the term "othering" refer to? How does that apply to Jack's situation? What's the newest addition to the Grounds of Discrimination list in the Canadian Charter of Human Rights?
2. Jack mentions more than once feeling alone and isolated. What happens when you feel like that? How do you reach out? To whom do you reach out? If it doesn't feel safe to talk to someone, who might you call?
3. What is the meaning of Two-Spirit in your experience?
4. Imagine yourself in Jack's place — he didn't see any positive examples or role models of any of his identities — Indigenous, Two-Spirit, gender questioning — or of his romantic orientation in his community or in the media. How would that feel?
5. Jack's family became very supportive once they realized what was going on, but Jack's situation got pretty bad before he felt he could talk to them about it. What are some ways to prevent a situation from reaching a crisis point? How do you bring up hard topics — with friends, teachers, school staff or parents?

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 Sculpture

- Group stands in a circle.
- Each participant makes a silent gesture that represents their feeling about an aspect of the story. e.g. Othering, Isolation, Being Bullied, Having Role Models, Family Support, Being Two-Spirit.
- The gestures collectively create a sculpture that describes the story.

Activity 2

Small Group Discussion

- In groups of 4, each group discusses the same discussion topic/question. Discuss the question for a set period of time (7-8 mins).
- Two participants move to different groups and share what was discussed and deepen the discussion (5 mins).

This exercise is good for moving the participants through the whole group.

By the end of the exercise everyone will have been in two different groups.

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/trans-inclusion-matters/creating-authentic-spaces/being-an-effective-trans-ally>



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.

Gender Ally

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The following list of things to remember for Trans Allyship is based on 'The Basics' at [Transequality.org](http://www.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** — How can you learn more about the Indigenous Peoples in your area? What traditional roles did Two-Spirit people have within these specific Nations? Are there any service organizations or support groups in your area for Two-Spirit people?
2. **Active Witness** — Jack describes being bullied at school. What anti-bullying programs and techniques are available where you live? What can you do to actively witness in a bullying situation?
3. **Supportive Action** — Mental health issues such as suicidal ideation are more prevalent among Indigenous, Two-Spirit and LGBTQ2 people. Why might that be? How can you be more supportive of these individuals?
4. **Standing Up** — Holding space for Two-Spirit, trans and gender-diverse people is an important thing for allies to do. What kind of effect would this have? What happens when people who aren't often heard have a chance to talk?

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.



Jack's Story — The Briefs

1. At 3 or 4 years old, when Jack puts on the briefs he realizes 'I'm a guy, I've always been a guy'. How is that meaningful in the story? If Jack knew about his gender at that age, what do you think his life was like before he began to transition?



Jack's Story — The Bathroom

1. At a young age and as Jack started school, his family encouraged him to use the girls' washroom. Then when the Grade 6 boys yelled at him to not use the girls' washroom it became a 'big world issue' to Jack and the conflict caused a lot of anxiety. How do Jack's experiences make you feel toward him? How might this situation play out in a more trans-positive and supportive environment?

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. **Two-Spirit** — Two-Spirit is an English language term used to describe individuals who are Indigenous and are on the gender expression spectrum and/or the sexual orientation spectrum. There are a number of other terms in each Indigenous language to further describe the cultural roles of Two-Spirit people within each Nation's distinct culture.
2. **Intersectionality** (or *intersectional* theory) — The study of overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination. The term was first coined in 1989 by American civil rights advocate and leading scholar of critical race theory, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw.
3. **Suicidal Ideation** — Suicidal thoughts, also known as suicidal ideation, are thoughts about how to kill oneself, which can range from a detailed plan to a fleeting consideration and does not include the final act of killing oneself.
4. **Othering** — definition from 'There Are No Others' website

"By "othering", we mean any action by which an individual or group becomes mentally classified in somebody's mind as "not one of us". Rather than always remembering that every person is a complex bundle of emotions, ideas, motivations, reflexes, priorities, and many other subtle aspects, it's sometimes easier to dismiss them as being in some way less human, and less worthy of respect and dignity, than we are."

<https://therearenoothers.wordpress.com/2011/12/28/othering-101-what-is-othering>

5. **Discrimination** – Discrimination is an action or a decision that treats a person or a group negatively for reasons such as their race, age or disability. These reasons are known as grounds of discrimination. Federal employers and service providers, as well as employers and service providers in private companies that are regulated by the federal government, cannot discriminate against individuals for these reasons.

These 13 grounds are protected under the Canadian Human Rights Act:

1. race
2. national or ethnic origin
3. colour
4. religion
5. age
6. sex
7. sexual orientation
8. gender identity or expression
9. marital status
10. family status
11. genetic characteristics,
12. disability
13. a conviction for which a pardon has been granted or a record suspended.

Resources

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

1. **Two-Spirit Resource Directory** — Prepared by Harlan Pruden (Nehiyawe/First Nations Cree), Managing Editor Two-Spirit Journal -- TwoSpiritJournal.com, January 2016:

<http://www.ohtn.on.ca/northern-exposures/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2016/01/Two-Spirit-Resource-Directory-Jan-2016.pdf>

2. **Two-Spirit Powwow** — Article on Two-Spirit Powwow in San Francisco, features some Two-Spirit participants.

<http://www.fusion.net/story/46014/native-americans-talk-gender-identity-at-a-two-spirit-powwow>

3. **Free Online Course "Indigenous Canada"** — offered at University of Alberta

<https://www.coursera.org/learn/indigenous-canada>

4. **Canadian Human Rights Act**

<http://www.laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/h-6>

5. **Intersectionality** — Washington Post online Article by Kimberlé Crenshaw

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2015/09/24/why-intersectionality-cant-wait>

6. **Helping Families Support Their Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Children** — This is a downloadable article to share with families and the adults close to LGBTQ2 youth:

https://nccc.georgetown.edu/documents/LGBT_Brief.pdf

7. **KidsHelpPhone.ca** – Youth phone line/mental health resources

1(800) 668-6868 phone line and live chat with a counsellor

<http://www.kidshelpphone.ca/Teens/InfoBooth/LGBTQ.aspx>

8. **Coming In to Indigenous Sovereignty: Relationality and Resurgence** – 50min Lecture by Dr. Alex Wilson recorded at University of Winnipeg, 2016.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkQo_yr4A_w