

# Gender Ally

## Kori's Story

Facilitator's Guide

**Story Videos can be viewed at:**

<http://onmyplanet.ca/mundo/genderally/themes/human-rights-and-advocacy/kori>



**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.

## Where do you stand?

- An imaginary line is drawn from one side of the room to the other representing a spectrum or continuum. At one end is 'Always', at the other 'Never' or 'Strongly Agree' and 'Strongly Disagree' (whatever suits the statement).
- Participants place themselves along the line between the two to represent their position about the statement.
- Pose a question or statement – use some topic-related items, and some not related.

### **Sample Statements:**

- All new buildings should have gender-neutral washrooms.
- Sex and gender are the same thing.
- All forms of official identification should not have gender markers, e.g. sex.

### Video Viewing

#### Kori's Story – Synopsis

Kori is an activist and advocate for trans and queer rights. They were instrumental in creating the All Bodies Swim in Victoria, BC which was eventually co-opted by the city of Vancouver. Kori now lives with their partner in the Slocan Valley and teaches online workshops on community building and trans resiliency. Kori is also engaged in lobbying for removing gender markers from all provincial and federal identification. Kori and their new baby were recently in the news when Kori requested that baby's birth certificate have no gender marker, or an "undetermined" status.

#### Talking Points

*Content Warnings (Themes)*

**Acknowledgement of Indigenous Traditional Territories**

**'Living the Dream'**

**Community Education and Organizing**

**Urban Queer Enclaves**

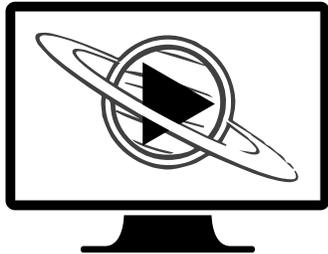
**Resilience Building**

**Creating Affirming Environment**

**Changing The Scripts**

**Transition, Restrictions of Binary**

**Identification for all Genders**



## Watch Kori'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

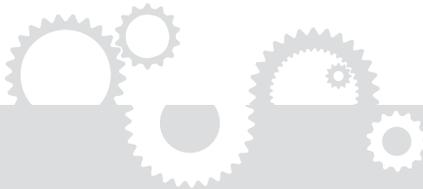
1. Kori acknowledges the Indigenous Territories in which they live. Why is this important to Kori? Why is it important in general?
2. The focus of the story comes back to community organizing. How might Kori define community? What do they mean by 'urban queer enclaves'?
3. Kori has produced an online course on Resilience Building for Trans Folks and Our Allies. What is resilience and why might building resilience be important for trans and gender non-conforming people? And for their allies?
4. What is meant by 'restrictions and expectations of the binary'? How might that influence the acceptance of trans folks in a community? How would a shift in those expectations create a freer, more accepting situation for everyone?
5. Kori talks about transition with and without medical intervention. What is the difference between transition and medical transition? How might the options implied by Kori have changed over time? (good research project topic)

## 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 Kori's story — e.g. Living In A Small Town, Having Babies, Medical Transition, Community Activism, Etc.
- The gestures collectively create a sculpture that describes the story.

### Activity 2

#### Brainstorming

- In small groups brainstorm what might be included in a course of resilience building. How would people learn how to be resilient?
- Design 1 or 2 activities that would help people learn the meaning of resilience.

**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.

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** — How can you respectfully learn more about the experiences of trans and gender diverse people in your community? What can you find out about organizations in your area that provide support and advocacy for LGBTQ2 people? What do these organizations have in common with other community-based advocacy organizations?
2. **Active Witness** — Would you consider writing to the paper that misrepresented Kori?
3. **Supportive Action** — What can you do to support initiatives that people like Kori create? Do you think the things you might learn from Kori's course on resiliency could be applicable to your life situations?
4. **Standing Up** — What can you do to help support having gender markers removed from official identification?

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.



### Kori's Story – Lobbying Vital Statistics

1. Kori has been lobbying BC Vital Statistics to have the gender marker on their new child's birth certificate recorded as 'undetermined' or to have the required gender markers removed altogether. The following article from the CBC explains:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/parent-fights-to-omit-gender-on-b-c-child-s-birth-certificate-1.4186221>

2. Compare the language between the CBC article and the following article from dailycaller.com:

<http://www.dailycaller.com/2017/07/03/mother-wants-to-record-babys-gender-as-unknown>

3. What kinds of challenges does Kori face by not having ID that accurately identifies their gender? (International travel, accessing medical services, acquiring official documents like a driver's license, tax forms, educational/institutional registrations etc.)



## **Kori's Story** – Living in the Country

1. What was Kori's strategy for finding community in a small town? What did they discover? How might Indigenous, environmental and queer groups share common concerns? What did they discover about the background of their area?

### **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. **Resilience** — Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors. It means "bouncing back" from difficult experiences.

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."*

<http://www.genderspectrum.org>, posted by Justin Clark

3. **Androgynous/Androgyne** – A person identifying and/or expressing gender outside of the gender binary. Other terms used include gender variant, genderqueer, and gender non-conformist

[Qmunity.ca](http://Qmunity.ca)

4. **Social Activism** – An intentional action with the goal of bringing about social change. If you feel strongly about a cause and are working towards a change, you could be considered an activist. An activist is anyone who is fighting for change in society.

5. **Urban Queer Enclaves** – Usually bookstores but can be other public/retail spaces, that carry LGBTQ2 (among other), books, magazines, supplies, tickets, allow posters for events to be put up, or allow/support events to occur in the space etc. A social hub for queer/trans people and information. Most of these were pre-internet and were some of the only venues for this kind of information etc. E.g.:

***Camas Book and Infoshop in Victoria***

<http://camas.ca>

***Little Sister's Book and Art Emporium in Vancouver***

<https://www.littlesisters.ca>

## Resources

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

1. **Resilience Building for Trans Folks and their Allies** – Kori Doty  
[http://www.koridoty.com/?page\\_id=122](http://www.koridoty.com/?page_id=122)
2. **Gender Free ID Coalition** – group lobbying for gender identifiers to be taken off of official identification documents.  
<http://www.gender-freeidcoalition.ca/index.html>
3. **Trans Ally Workbook Getting Pronouns Right and What It Teaches Us about Gender** – Downloadable workbook by Davey Shlasko  
[https://www.pitzer.edu/academics/wp-content/uploads/sites/38/2017/07/trans\\_ally\\_workbook\\_pdf.pdf](https://www.pitzer.edu/academics/wp-content/uploads/sites/38/2017/07/trans_ally_workbook_pdf.pdf)
4. **Trans Care BC Services List**  
<http://www.phsa.ca/our-services/programs-services/trans-care-bc/services>
5. **Canadian Academic articles on transition**  
<http://www.transpulseproject.ca/tag/medical-transition>
6. **History of Trans in Canada**  
<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/the-road-to-inclusion-transgender-health-care-in-canada>
7. **Translifeline** – is an American non-profit dedicated to the well being of transgender people, based in San Francisco, CA. Canada  
Phone: 1-877-330-6366  
<http://www.translifeline.org>

8. **barbara findlay QC** – Ms. findlay is a distinguished BC lawyer that has worked on LGBTQ2 and social justice issues for most of her long career. This link provides a list of links for trans services from changing ID to information about transitioning. Her website also includes a Case Chronology – a legal history of LGBTQ2 advancements over the years. There is also a resources list of more general articles.

<http://www.barbarafindlay.com/transgender-issues-a-work-in-progress.html>