

# Gender Ally

## Rebecca's Story

Facilitator's Guide

**Story Videos can be viewed at:**

<http://onmyplanet.ca/mundo/genderally/themes/allyship/rebecca>



**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.

## Looking For Similarities

- Starting in pairs, participants talk until they find something that they have in common (it has to be a less obvious thing, not that they live in the same city or that they are in the same class).
- Once they find something in common they join with another pair, creating a group of 4 and continue to find something they all have in common.
- Once they find something they all have in common they join with another group of 4 to make a group of 8 and continue until they are sitting with the whole group.
- Once in the whole group more obvious things may be cited if no other common denominator can be found.

### Video Viewing

#### Rebecca's Story – Synopsis

Rebecca is a young lesbian who talks about events leading up to her coming out - including her twin sister creating the Gay Straight Alliance group at their high school specifically so that Rebecca would know that it was okay for her to come out.

#### Talking Points

*Content Warnings (Themes)*

**Confusion (pre-coming out)**

**Obsession With Role Model**

**Coming Out**

**Lesbian**

**Influence of Sexual Abuse on  
Sexual Orientation**

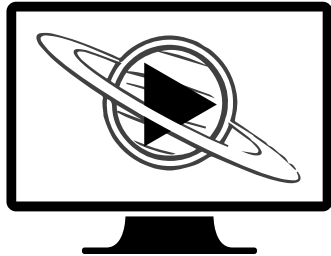
**GSA**

**Dating Scene**

**Tolerance (vs: Acceptance)**

**Self Love/Self Image**





## Watch Rebecca'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. Rebecca expresses confusion about her gender, before knowing about being a lesbian. How do you think young people can learn about sexuality and sexual expression in a safe environment?
2. What connection, if any, is there between a history of sexual abuse and gender expression? Why might Rebecca think these two things might be related?
3. How can advocacy organizations like the Gay Straight Alliance groups help those who are questioning their gender or sexual orientation? Why was it important to Rebecca?
4. Rebecca suggests tolerance has increased in society. Is that your experience? What do you notice about your peers who exhibit non-conforming gender expression or sexual orientation? Are they accepted in your school? How can you support people's right to gender expression? What's the difference between tolerance and acceptance?

### 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

### Resonance Statements

- Ask the participants to come up with statements that reflect their own experience or questions about the video. Example statements: 'Bullying happens at school', 'Everyone can feel isolation', and 'Family support is important'.
- The group can choose which statements to use then each one is assigned a place in the room.
- Statements are read aloud one at a time - participants move to the statement that resonates with them the most.
- Discuss and find common experience/reactions among the group.

## Activity 2

### Brainstorming

- Look at the website for GSAs in Canada <https://egale.ca/portfolio/mygsa/>.
- In small groups brainstorm what you might do to support those who do not identify as male or female on the gender spectrum. How can people learn good ally practice?
- Design 1 or 2 activities that would help people learn the meaning of allyship.

**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

12

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 in 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 do you know about the Gay Straight Alliance groups? Since people are everywhere on the gender spectrum, how do Gay Straight Alliance groups help develop understanding and acceptance?
2. **Active Witness** — What can you do to help others find options for support?
3. **Supportive Action** — Rebecca's twin sister started the GSA in their school to make sure Rebecca knew it was safe to come out. If a family member or one of your friends was coming out, what kinds of supportive action can you take?
4. **Standing Up** — Family and friends often don't understand what's going on for a person who is struggling with their gender or sexual orientation. What can you do to respectfully stand up for them?

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>



## 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. **Lesbian** — A woman who is primarily romantically and sexually attracted to women. The term originates from the name of the Greek island of Lesbos which was home to Sappho, a poet, teacher, and a woman who loved other women. Although not as common, sometimes the term 'gay woman' is used instead.
  2. **Gay Straight Alliance (GSA)** — A Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) is an official student club with lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirit, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) and heterosexual student membership and one or two teachers who serve as faculty advisors. Students in a school with a GSA know that they have at least one or two adults they can talk to about LGBTQ matters. The purpose of a GSA is to provide a much-needed safer space in which LGBTQ students and allies can work together on making their schools more welcoming for all members of school communities, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Egale.ca**
3. **Xena: Warrior Princess** — An American fantasy television series filmed on location in New Zealand, produced between 1995 and 2001. The series follows Xena (played by Lucy Lawless), an infamous warrior on a quest to seek redemption for her past sins against the innocent by using her formidable fighting skills to now help those who are unable to defend themselves. The show is known for its lesbian content with secondary characters and the ever-present attraction between the two main characters; Xena and her sidekick Gabrielle.

## Resources

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

1. **A Resource Guide to Coming Out** — The Human Rights Campaign (HRC.org) guide to coming out. Downloadable PDF file.

[http://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/resource\\_guide\\_april\\_2014.pdf](http://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/resource_guide_april_2014.pdf)

2. **Gay Straight Alliance in Canada** — Egale has put together some resources to assist in creating Gay Straight Alliance groups in Ontario schools.

<http://egale.ca/portfolio/mygsa>

3. **The Queer Story Archive** — Onmyplanet.ca has an ever-expanding collection of LGBTQ2 stories, a number of them are coming out stories. Check the tag cloud to find the 'coming out' section.

<http://onmyplanet.ca>

4. **Gender Ally** — A series of Workshops promoting trans, Two-Spirit and gender non-conforming Inclusion. Once a GSA group is established these workshops are a useful tool that can be used in the GSA meetings.

<http://onmyplanet.ca/mundo/genderally>

5. **Tolerance vs: Acceptance** — An article in the Huffington Post by Brynn Tannehill describing the difference between Tolerance and Acceptance for LGBTQ people.

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brynn-tannehill/the-difference-between-to\\_1\\_b\\_5791076.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brynn-tannehill/the-difference-between-to_1_b_5791076.html)

## 6. Does Sexual Abuse Effect Sexual Orientation?

StopitNow – A support site for survivors of sexual abuse

<http://www.stopitnow.org/advice-column-entry/can-being-sexually-abused-determine-sexual-orientation>

lin6.org – A site for the masculine identified:

<http://lin6.org/get-information/myths>

7. **Trans\* Ally Workbook** – Getting Pronouns Right and What It Teaches Us about Gender, Short Book by Davey Shlasko. Book can be purchased at amazon.ca or download the PDF file:

[http://www.pitzer.edu/academics/wp-content/uploads/sites/38/2017/07/trans\\_ally\\_workbook\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.pitzer.edu/academics/wp-content/uploads/sites/38/2017/07/trans_ally_workbook_pdf.pdf)

8. **Supporting Trans, Two-Spirit and Gender Diverse Survivors** – For Health Care Professionals and Service Providers, a booklet produced by the Victoria Sexual Assault Centre. Downloadable PDF file:

<http://vsac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Supporting-Trans-Two-Spirit-and-GenderDiverse-Survivors.pdf>

## 9. Trans Lifeline SF

US: (877) 565-8860

Canada: (877) 330-6366

<http://www.translifeline.org>