

Gender Ally

Ruben's Story

Facilitator's Guide

Story Videos can be viewed at:

<http://onmyplanet.ca/mundo/genderally/themes/gender-non-conforming/ruben>

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

Ruben's Story – Synopsis

Ruben is a pansexual, trans-identified, gender queer artist and self-proclaimed, angry femme. Ruben has recently moved from Winnipeg to Toronto and talks about the transphobia they experienced in Winnipeg and how they are liking the larger more supportive trans community in Toronto. They came from a trans and queer supportive family but still felt the need to leave Winnipeg. Ruben is currently pursuing an art career in Toronto.

Talking Points

Content Warnings (Themes)

Pansexual, Transphobia

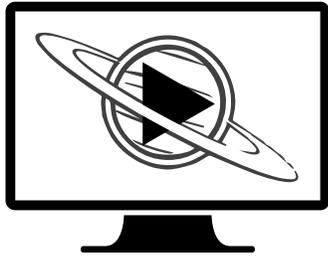
'Gender is Fluid'

Escape from a Small Town

Having a Supportive Family

Creating Your Own Reality

Creative Self-expression



Watch Ruben'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. Ruben states 'Gender is fluid'; what do they mean by that?
2. They described their experience as being in a 'toxic environment'. What are some examples of that? They go on to say that it was only in the escape that they realized how toxic it was. Why do you think it might have been difficult for Ruben to leave Winnipeg?
3. Ruben was lucky to have an informed and supportive family. Ruben's gender expression and activism in the community are big themes. How might this type of upbringing influence what a person does moving forward?
4. Ruben also uses the term 'androgynous' to describe their gender expression. How might that be expressed in dress, behavior or in selecting partners?
5. They label themselves 'pansexual'. What does that mean to you?
6. Ruben speaks about 'escape from a small town'. How might small towns be different than big cities in the acceptance of gender diversity? Are the stereotypes about small towns always true? Do you think that Ruben should have behaved differently in order to avoid transphobic reactions? Why?

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

Gestures

- Participants stand in a circle
- Use a topic from the video that has feeling qualities. Ask participants to identify the feelings.
- Participants make a gesture that represents one of the feelings.
- Participants imagine they are the person in the video, and repeat the exercise.
- Debrief — does it shift how the participants relate to the person in the video? A journal assignment following may be appropriate.

Activity 2

Role on the Wall

Context and connection building activity. Used to guide conversation and build empathy toward person in the video.

- First, draw an outline of a person on a white board or on a large sheet of paper.
- Ask participants to discuss and share what they believe is happening internally (emotionally) for the person given different scenarios (use either a scenario from the video, or provide other scenarios).
- Write participant suggestions inside the outline of the figure on the board or on paper.
- Next, ask participants to reflect and share what they believe are the external struggles, responses, and experiences of this person.
- Write these on the board outside the figure.

Discuss how the outward impacts the inward responses. Find connection between experiences and feelings, contextualizing the person's feelings of anxiety/depression/frustration/fear, etc.

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>

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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** – 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?
2. **Active Witness** – You likely see different forms of gender policing every day. Start keeping track of them, post them online, ask your group of friends if and why they think this is important.
3. **Supportive Action** – What can you do to let gender-diverse people feel welcome where you live, work and play?
4. **Standing Up** – If you were on the Winnipeg night bus with Ruben, what could you do to support them or help stop the discrimination from continuing? How does it make you feel when you see someone say or do something that is noticeably transphobic, homophobic, racist or sexist?

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. **Pansexual or Omnisexual** – The sexual, romantic or emotional attraction towards people regardless of their sex or gender identity.
2. **Androgynous/Androgyne** – A person identifying and/or expressing gender outside of the gender binary. Other terms used include gender variant, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming.
Qmunity.ca
3. **Gender** – The social construction of concepts such as masculinity and femininity in a specific culture in time. It involves gender assignment (the gender designation of someone at birth), gender roles (the expectations imposed on someone based on their gender), gender attribution (how others perceive someone's gender), and gender identity (how someone defines their own gender). [Gender may be] Fundamentally different from the sex one is assigned at birth.
Qmunity.ca
4. **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.
Qmunity.ca
5. **Romantic Orientation** – Describes an individual's pattern of romantic attraction based on a person's gender(s) regardless of one's sexual orientation. For individuals who experience sexual attraction, their sexual orientation and romantic orientation are often in alignment.
6. **Gender Policing** – The imposition or enforcement of normative gender expressions on an individual who is perceived as not adequately performing, through appearance or behavior, the sex that

was assigned to them at birth. Gender policing can also happen within the trans community – where someone may be pressured to perform or express a more binary gender during or after transition.

Resources

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

1. **Gender 101** – Youtube video, produced by Ygender & Minus 18!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3ZzpTxjgRw&t=>
2. **My New Gender Workbook: A Step-by-Step Guide to Achieving World Peace Through Gender Anarchy and Sex Positivity** – by Kate Bornstein, 2013, Routledge. 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>
3. **Policing Gender Video** – Youtube Video – 2011, produced by itl media
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d06MM6wUdzQ>
4. **Trans* Ally Workbook** Getting Pronouns Right and What It Teaches Us about Gender – free, downloadable workbook by Davey Shlasko.
http://www.pitzer.edu/academics/wp-content/uploads/sites/38/2017/07/trans_ally_workbook_pdf.pdf

5. **Bi and Pansexual Identities Info Page** – University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill LGBT Center:

<http://lgbtq.unc.edu/resources/exploring-identities/bisexual-pansexual-identities>

6. **Asexuality Visibility & Education Network** – AVEN strives to create open, honest discussion about asexuality among sexual and asexual people alike.

<http://www.asexuality.org>