

# Gender Ally

## Anne's Story

Facilitator's Guide

**Story Videos can be viewed at:**

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



**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 story-related items, and some not related.

### **Sample Statements:**

- Gender non-conforming individuals present a full spectrum of gender expression.
- Sex and gender are the same thing.
- All lesbians are proficient at sports.

### Video Viewing

#### Anne's Story – Synopsis

Anne is the president of the Toronto Chapter of PFLAG. She tells the story of her lesbian daughter who had a relatively hard time coming out and finding her queer community. Anne recounts the story of going to her first PFLAG meeting and gradually becoming its leader. Anne is a fierce LGBTQ2 advocate and ally.

#### Talking Points

##### *Content Warnings (Themes)*

Allyship

Joining a Group

Understanding Through Support Groups

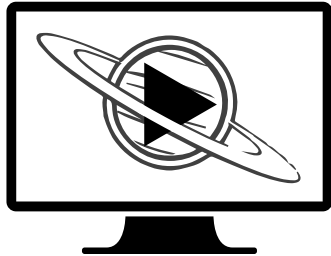
Parental Support

Activism

Pride (Additional Clip)

**Note:** Family support or lack thereof is a central issue for the majority of youth. For someone that doesn't have parental or family acceptance or support it can be quite upsetting to watch someone that does.





## Watch Anne'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. Anne thought she knew everything about being a parent of a lesbian daughter yet a whole new world opened when she joined the PFLAG support group. She believes that if love underlies the anguish in a damaged relationship there is no way people can't find their way back. What do you think is required in order for her theory to work?
2. Anne encourages us to stand in the place of those being harassed or bullied, not waiting for them to complain. How might you handle a situation where you see that happening?
3. She speaks of an obligation to be nicer to the LGBTQ2 people in our homophobic world. How do you do that? Without inadvertently 'outing' anyone, think about who in your family, neighbourhood or community would benefit from your allyship? What examples have you seen around you? What would it take for you to act in a supportive way?
4. Anne describes what she and her husband did to create a gay positive environment for their daughter. How does that modeling of acceptance affect other people outside of their immediate family?

### 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

### Safety - Discomfort - Alarm

- Identify places in the room to signify Safety – Discomfort – Alarm.
- Introduce topics such as going to a public washroom, riding a bus at night, going to church, being in a room where you look different than everyone else, going to a health clinic/ doctor's appointment, traveling internationally.
- Ask participants to move to the spot that most closely represents their level of comfort as the topic changes.
- Participants imagine they are the person in the video – repeat the activity.
- Discuss what triggers the shift from one category to the next – this could also be a journaling exercise.

## Activity 2

### Brainstorming

- In small groups brainstorm what might be included in a course on the story or on allyship. How would 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

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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 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** — Anne is a joiner. What groups are you aware of in your community that advocate for trans and gender non-conforming youth? It is often easier to work together than to tackle advocacy alone. What can you do?
2. **Active Witness** — What kinds of things did Anne witness at her PFLAG group meetings? What kinds of appropriate behaviours did she model in response? What else does she advocate doing for LGBTQ2 kids and families?
3. **Supportive Action** — What kind of trans and gender non-conforming community actions, support groups or events might you get involved in to show your support?
4. **Standing Up** — When Amy was outed by her roommate there were several levels of discrimination at play — the students mistreated her but the teachers and other staff at the school also allowed that to continue. If you were a student at Amy's school, what could you do to support Amy? What can you do to discourage the way she was treated by other students and/or by the school?

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.



### Anne's Story – Amy Comes Out

1. Anne's daughter Amy had a difficult time when she was 'outed' by her roommate. What do you think Amy's experience was like? Was the roommate right to have outed Amy? Why or why not?

2. When Amy 'came home in pieces', another lesbian's advice to Anne was to get Amy to Pride. Amy's volunteer involvement was very important and allowed her to experience a sense of belonging and get some support in the LGBTQ2 communities. But Pride is a short annual series of events. How might a young person find and get involved with the LGBTQ2 communities at other times of the year?

## 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.

Qmunity.ca

2. **Transgender (Trans)** – Trans gender, frequently abbreviated to 'trans' is an umbrella term that describes a wide range of people whose gender identity and/or expression differs from conventional expectations based on their assigned biological birth sex. Some of the many people who may or may not identify as transgender or trans include people on the male-to-female or female-to-male spectrums, people who identify and/or express their gender outside of the male/female binary, people whose gender identity and/or expression is fluid, people who explore gender for pleasure or performance, and many more. Identifying as transgender or trans is something that can only be decided by an individual for themselves and does not depend on criteria such as surgery or hormone treatment status.

Qmunity.ca

3. **Cisgender** – Identifying with the same gender that one was assigned at birth. A gender identity that society considers to match the biological sex assigned at birth. The prefix cis- means 'on this side of' or 'not across from.' A term used to call attention to the privilege of people who are not trans.

4. **PFLAG Canada** (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)

*"PFLAG Canada is a national charitable organization, founded by parents who wished to help themselves and their family members understand and accept their non-heterosexual children."*

<http://www.pflagcanada.ca>

5. **Homophobic** (homophobia) — Fear or hatred of, aversion to, and discrimination against homosexuals or homosexual behaviour. There are many levels and forms of homophobia, including cultural/institutional homophobia, interpersonal homophobia, and internalized homophobia. Many forms of homophobia are related to how restrictive binary gender roles are (see 'oppositional sexism'). An example of this might be a lesbian who is harassed with homophobic language for being perceived to be masculine. Many of the problems faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, including health and income disparities, stem from homophobia and heterosexism.

**Qmunity.ca**

## Resources

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

1. **"How Homophobia Hurts Us All"** — by Warren J. Blumenfeld, Web page abbreviated from *Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.

<https://www.case.edu/lgbt/resources/safe-zone-resources/homophobia>

2. **Queer Youth Resources in Victoria** – Camosun College page of local resources:

<http://www.camosun.ca/services/counselling-centre/resources/lgbtq-resources.html>

3. **Island Sexual Health** – “Beyond the Talk”, resources for youth

<http://www.beyondthetalk.ca/resources> or <http://www.islandsexualhealth.org>

4. **QMUNITY** – BC’s Queer Resource Centre:

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

5. **Advocates for Youth (American Website):**

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/publications-a-z/727-resources-for-gay-lesbian-bisexual-and-transgender-youth-select-organizations-web-sites-videos>

6. **MyPronouns.org** – Dedicated to the empowering and inclusive use of personal pronouns in the English language.

<https://www.mypronouns.org>

7. **Resources for Teachers, BC Teachers Federation** (BCTF)

[https://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/SocialJustice/Issues/LGBTQ/LGBTQ-YouthResources\(1\).pdf](https://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/SocialJustice/Issues/LGBTQ/LGBTQ-YouthResources(1).pdf)