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 **How to be an Ally

Anyone can all themselves an ally,**but if we don’t explore our ourselves, our own subconscious biases and privileges and actively listen to marginalized communities, who are we really serving? **The purpose of this document** is to allow us educate ourselves by thinking critically and to better understand marginalized people’s concerns.

This document also coincides with two of Welcome Home’s key tenets:

**Listening without judgment or blame** - Our network is receptive and hospitable to all vulnerable individuals. We avoid victim-blaming and trust people despite our own privilege and bias.

**Actively, constantly learning about vulnerable individuals concerns** -  The Welcome Home network cannot be effective or representative if we do not also listen to feedback from groups we serve.

**Note:**This document was created by an intersectional group of people, including people of color, lgbtqia people, immigrants and religious minorities.

1. **Trust marginalized voices.** If a person from a marginalized community tells you that he or she feels discriminated against, take them at their word. You do not get decide how someone feels.

2.  **You are an ally if someone sees you as an ally**.   If people can’t trust you and if people don’t feel you are an ally to them, then you are not an ally.  It is not about what you claim to be it’s about what those in marginalized communities feel from you. This is where you need to ask how you can be a better ally and gain people’s trust.

3. **Stand up for what is right by using your privilege as a megaphone.**  Use your privilege to break down barriers in schools, in businesses, in politics - in every aspect of life where systematic discrimination has deemed that our voices are worth a fraction of yours.  No one should have to make you comfortable as an ally. Marginalized people, now and long before the current political climate, have lived in fear. You are in a position, as an ally, to stand up and voice their concerns. Now is the time, anywhere is the place. If you are afraid of social repercussions, think of the very real loss marginalized people have faced. People have been killed or imprisoned for the color of their skin, denied jobs and housing for their gender identity, detained or deported for not having certain legal documents. People’s lives and well being are at stake and this is too dire for us to wait for a “good time” or “comfortable place” to voice these concerns.

4.  **Confidentiality.**Trust is priceless.  If someone from any marginalized community seeks help or confides in you – respect it. NEVER further marginalize a group of people, in real life or on social media, by outing people, disclosing private information or using their plight for political capital.

5.  **Confront your racism and bigotry**.  Whether we are conscious of it or not, we all have bias. Confront the stereotypes that you have.  Acknowledge them.  Work on them.  **Don’t** look at this statement and say  “But I’m not racist” – STOP – LOOK deeply and honestly within yourself and your interaction with others -  LISTEN – to any criticism that you may receive by people in marginalized communities.

6.  **Actively listen, but don’t derail.**  Listen to the concerns of those around you.  If someone explains their struggle, don’t compare it with yours – validate what a person is going through – acknowledge it and ask how you can help.

7.  **Respect independence.**  There are ways to help without suffocating individuals and without positioning yourself as a “savior.”.  No one wants to feel that way, and no one wants help from people who makes them feel like they are helpless.  No one wants to feel like a charity case.  Allow people their space.

8.  **Don’t brag.**  As an ally, you serve others, not your own sense of self.  Step back and take a big hard look at why you want to be an ally – is it to truly be there for individuals or is it for your own conscious?  If you are blessed with the opportunity to be there for someone – cherish it and hold it in your heart.

9.  **Don’t repeat the same exact rhetoric that is used to criminalize and marginalize people.**  Who would ever want to reach out to someone who repeats the same harmful rhetoric that has been systematically used  to justify the mistreatment of many people in marginalized communities? Language is important, and if marginalized people ask you to change it, do so. Proper grammar, legal terms and common use are not excuses for using language that hurts marginalized people.

10.  **Stop treating people like exotic cultural artifacts**.  No one is your personal cultural experience.  Talk to us as human beings, not as something to be studied.  No one wants to be a teachable moment.  We all learn from each other and with each other - but we notice the curiosity and it can be uncomfortable.

11.  **If someone has an accent, please speak regularly.**  Don’t yell or speak slowly or use baby words.  Just speak.  Having an accent doesn’t mean that someone won’t understand you.  Begin the conversation as you would with anyone else.

12.  **Don’t expect us to be what you want us to be.**  Every single person is an individual.  Not everyone wants to socialize, while others do.  Respect that.  Respect everyone's space, respect everyone's individuality.  Don’t expect us to be characters from books or stories on social media.

13.  **No one is the same.**  No one has all the answers, and not every answer solves every problem.  We don’t all have the same struggles – we don’t all feel the same way.  Don’t assume that something you read somewhere will apply to every person you meet.  Learn about who is around you.  Get to know personalities – work with each person as an individual. One marginalized person’s experience is not universal for all.

14.  **Know the people around you.**  Seek out the opinions and voices of people in marginalized communities.  Don’t assume that you know everyone because you met one person – again – everyone is different.

15.  **Use your privilege in the right way**.  Use it to speak against intolerance.  Use it to have conversations with people who will not hear us.  Use it to have hard and uncomfortable conversations with people who are intolerant of us.  Use your privilege to speak in support of those in marginalized communities and NOT to speak FOR people in marginalized communities.

16.  **Make your space more inclusive.**  Wherever you are – think of ways to make it more diverse and intersectional.  At your job, seek out ways to ensure that underrepresented people find employment there.  Within your community group, allow space and time for marginalized people to participate. Ensure that the places you like to go to are inclusive and welcoming to all people in marginalized communities.  Again, this is where using your privilege the right way can have a huge impact.

17.  **Keep learning.** Don’t stop learning.  Don’t think that you know all of the issues – there is always more to learn.  Don’t assume that your experience makes you an authority on all people.

18. **Acknowledge mistakes.**  Everyone makes mistakes.  At some point everyone has been misinformed - understanding each other is a lifelong process.  If you make a mistake, handle yourself appropriately.  How you handle yourself after misstepping is everything.  It says a lot to people.  Honor your intentions of doing good for others.  Don’t defer, deflect, blame, excuse or ignore your mistakes.  Own them, learn from them and make a commitment to change.