

Ally Skills Workshop handout

Terminology

If you're unsure what terms to use in order to avoid being offensive, just ask!

- Privilege: an unearned advantage given to some people but not all
- Oppression: systemic, pervasive inequality present throughout society that benefits people with more privilege and harms those with fewer privileges
- Target: someone who suffers from oppression
- Ally: a member of a social group that enjoys some privilege that is working to end oppression and understand their own privilege
- Cis: your gender is the same as the gender that was assigned to you at birth
- Trans: your gender is different than the gender that was assigned to you at birth
- Non-binary or genderqueer: "male" or "female" doesn't describe your gender accurately
- Terms to use to refer to groups of people of particular genders: men, women, non-binary people/folks, cis men/women, trans men/women, people of all genders, folks, people, everyone, all, y'all, all y'all, yinz...
- Terms for sexuality: straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual/pansexual (attracted to people of all genders), asexual (little or no sexual attraction to anyone)
- Queer: catch-all term for anyone who is not a straight cis woman or man
- Use Wikipedia to find preferred terms for racial or ethnic groups
- Avoid abbreviated forms of names of racial or ethnic groups
- Use "abled person," "disabled," or "person with disabilities"
- Only use respectfully in cases of self-disclosure: ADD/ADHD, autism spectrum, schizophrenic, bipolar, etc.
- Describe body size using neutral descriptions: "higher weight," "lower weight," "larger body," "smaller build," "medium size," "person of size," "fat" (with caution)
- Use "undocumented immigrant"

Terms not to use in this workshop

- "Girls" for women 18 years of age and over
- "Females" for humans - used for animals and plants too
- "Guys" for groups that are not all men
- "Ladies" - associated with "proper" (i.e., subservient) behavior
- "Transsexual" - not inclusive of all trans people
- "People with [BODY PART or CHROMOSOME]" instead of "men" or "women"
- "Ethnic" or "urban" or "from the banlieues" to mean people of a particular race
- "Lame," "dumb," "retard," "stupid," "crazy," etc., instead use "foolish," "wild," or a specific adjective like "crowded" or "disorganized"

- Don't use names of specific disabilities as metaphors or similes to indicate badness (deaf, blind, etc.) - it's fine to use figures of speech like "see what I mean" or "I hear you"
- Don't use medicalized or value-judgement terms for body size like "healthy weight," "obese," "struggles with his weight", "normal weight," "overweight," "heavy," "curvy," "big-boned," etc.
- Don't use "illegal immigrant," "illegal alien," or "illegals"
- Don't use "politically correct" in a serious or literal way - it is a derogatory label created to criticize and deride the concept of "treating people with respect"

Workshop discussion guidelines

- You may leave or return at any time, for any reason, without explanation
- Please don't repeat sensitive things, or anonymize them if you do
- Focus on what an ally can do in this situation, not the target
- Avoid rules-lawyering - there are no trick questions
- Speak respectfully about religious or spiritual beliefs
- Don't use stereotypes about people with lower class jobs (e.g. janitor)
- Don't use stereotypes based on adults of particular ages
- Don't use stereotypes based on family role (mother, grandparent, etc.)
- Treat caregivers of all sorts respectfully, especially mothers

Guidelines for responding to oppression

- Be short, simple, and firm
- Humor usually backfires, avoid it
- Pick your battles
- Play for the audience
- Practice simple responses
- Don't be sexist, homophobic, transphobic, racist, ableist, classist, ageist, body-shaming, or make fun of people for being sexually undesirable, unattractive, etc.

Guidelines for future ally work

- Don't expect praise and credit for fighting inequality
- Follow and support leaders from target groups
- Assume people from target groups have more knowledge about their oppression and wait for invitation to help or explain
- Follow your discomfort - if something makes you feel bad, find out more and understand why before reacting
- When you make a mistake, apologize and move on

Resources

Part of supporting marginalized groups is making a continuous, on-going effort to educate yourself and change your behavior. Here are some resources to help get you started:

<http://www.suffolk.edu/campuslife/27883.php> A dictionary of social justice terms.

<http://itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2015/03/the-genderbread-person-v3/> A reference for understanding variations in gender and sexuality.

<http://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender> A guide to writing or speaking about transgender people or issues.

The Wikipedia pages on names for racial and ethnic groups are remarkably thorough and reliable.

<https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/08/size-discrimination-facts/> Information on body size discrimination

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradox_of_tolerance Useful explanation of why a tolerant culture must be intolerant of intolerance (a favorite troll argument).

<http://geekfeminism.wikia.com> The Geek Feminism Wiki is an intersectional feminist resource for questions related to women in geek fields.

<http://adainitiative.org/> The Ada Initiative has specific advice in the areas of running conferences, codes of conduct, and areas relevant to women in open technology & culture.

<http://captainawkward.com/> The Captain Awkward advice blog has great tips for how to say uncomfortable things to people, enforce boundaries, and similar skills.

<https://danceswithfat.wordpress.com/blog/> The Dances with Fat blog explains what's wrong with how our culture talks about body size and includes specific advice for allies.

http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Charles%27_Rules_of_Argument Charles' Rules of Argument are useful to avoid wasting your time and energy.

http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Tone_argument Resources for identifying and responding to the tone argument (hint: usually involves the word "tone").

<https://frameshiftconsulting.com/speaking/#meeting> Effective and just meetings have people filling four specific meeting roles: gatekeeper, facilitator, note-taker, and timekeeper.

<http://nyupress.org/books/9781479835454/> What Works for Women at Work: Four Patterns Working Women Need to Know by Joan C. Williams and Rachel Dempsey

<http://www.sirc.org/publik/drinking4.html> How societal attitudes affect response to alcohol.

Relevant papers and articles

"Does valuing diversity result in worse performance ratings for minority and female leaders?" by David Hekman, Stefanie Johnson, Wei Yang, Maw Der Foo

<http://amj.aom.org/content/early/2016/03/03/amj.2014.0538.abstract>

"Research: Vague Feedback Is Holding Women Back" by Shelley Correll and Caroline Simard

<https://hbr.org/2016/04/research-vague-feedback-is-holding-women-back>

"The one word men never see in their performance reviews" by Kathleen Davis

<http://www.fastcompany.com/3034895/strong-female-lead/the-one-word-men-never-see-in-their-performance-reviews>

"Assessing the Attack Threat Due to IRC Channels" by Robert Meyer and Michel Cukier
(gendered nature of harassment on IRC)

<http://cdm16064.contentdm.oclc.org/utls/getfile/collection/p266901coll4/id/655/filename/617.pdf>

"Alcohol and Inclusivity: Planning Tech Events with Non-Alcoholic Options" by Kara Sowles

<https://modelviewculture.com/pieces/alcohol-and-inclusivity-planning-tech-events-with-non-alcoholic-options>

"Inclusive offsites" by Sara Smollett, et al.

http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Inclusive_offsites

"What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team" by Charles Duhigg
(psychological safety)

<http://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/magazine/what-google-learned-from-its-quest-to-build-the-perfect-team.html>

"No more rock stars: how to stop abuse in tech communities" by Leigh Honeywell, Valerie Aurora, and Mary Gardiner <https://hypatia.ca/2016/06/21/no-more-rock-stars/>

"When is naming abuse itself abusive?" by Valerie Aurora

<https://blog.valerieaurora.org/2016/10/24/when-is-naming-abuse-itself-abusive/>

"A post-election guide to changing hearts and minds" by Valerie Aurora

<https://captainawkwad.com/2016/11/21/guest-post-a-post-election-guide-to-changing-hearts-and-minds/>

"How to Respond to an Offensive Comment at Work" by Amy Gallo

<https://hbr.org/2017/02/how-to-respond-to-an-offensive-comment-at-work>

Slides and handout

The slides and handout are available at: <http://frameshiftconsulting.com/ally-skills-workshop>

License and attribution

This handout is licensed Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 Unported (CC BY-SA 4.0) <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

© 2016 Dr. Sheila Addison <http://www.drsheilaaddison.com/>

© 2016 Frame Shift Consulting <http://frameshiftconsulting.com>

© 2011 - 2015 The Ada Initiative <http://adainitiative.org>