

# How to be an Effective and True Ally

*by Trinity Hunter*

As the news continues to be flooded with videos of protests sweeping the nation, many people throughout the country have, for the first time in their lives, been exposed to injustice. In the day of social media, there is no way to escape from the camera and what it captures. People no longer have the option of not seeing the injustice around them; they can no longer deny what marginalized communities (in this specific case Black people) have been screaming about for centuries.

Listed below are important points to keep in mind when it comes to you becoming an effective ally. This process is not meant to be easy, and more importantly, it is not meant to be for you. You are supporting your friends who have been silenced; use your privilege accordingly and amplify their voices.

## **1. Call out racism when you see it.**

Do not falter. Do not question it. Whether this is the n-word, a sentiment, or even a subtle remark, call it out and make the person uncomfortable. That is the only way that they will understand what they are saying/thinking is unacceptable and offensive. We should not be the only ones telling people that we are human beings deserving of respect. You should be right there with us and speaking up when we are not there to do it ourselves.

## **2. Take the time to engage in self-reflection into personal biases that you might hold (and now realize are harmful).**

One of the hardest parts of growth is the fact that we have to shed old versions of ourselves to make room for the new. Again, this process is not meant to be easy. It is not meant to be comfortable. Recognize that even actions with the best intentions still have the potential to be damaging to the community you are wishing to help. There is no such thing as a perfect ally, and a continued push for honest self-reflection is an imperative portion of the journey.

To take it a step further, it is important to realize at the beginning of your ally journey, that the path is not linear. Allyship is a lifetime of learning and unlearning; it is a constant commitment to education and action. Unlearn the notion of reaching a final destination or receiving some sort of award once you reach “the end”. Commit to the work, not for the sake of seeking the end but because you are fully invested in the course.

## **3. Commit to being a safe space for your friends in the affected communities.**

This is arguably one of the most difficult points for people to understand and grasp. Your marginalized friends (in this case Black friends) deserve to have the agency to express their frustration,

anger, hurt, fear, etc. Their emotions are valid during this time and even more so when it comes to issues in their own communities. There will be things that you inevitably disagree with and those disagreements will stem from different upbringings, and thus different walks of life. That being said, marginalized people deserve the space to be able to say what they deem as necessary without having to worry about minimizing their personal emotions to preserve your feelings. Again, it's important to note that we are talking about Black people right now but please know these instructions stretch to all future events.

#### **4. When reaching out, no part of your message should compel us to have to shoulder your feelings.**

Before people become confused or upset with this statement, I will explain it. There have been multiple people who have come to me saying: "I haven't been able to stop crying", "This is just so draining for me to deal with every day.", or "I am so heartbroken about all of this." By saying these things to a person in the community most affected by a tragedy, you are placing the burden on them to still make you feel better. You are effectively coming to them and saying "What is going on has upset me and I don't want to feel this way anymore so I need for you to make me feel better about how this issue has now made me upset." Instead, listed below are questions you can ask your friends with the intention of checking in on them:

- *How are you doing during this time, mentally and emotionally?*
- *How can I be there for you right now as a friend?*
- *What can I do to be an ally to you and your community?*

This is not the time for those most affected to be providing a service to you in order to make you feel more comfortable. Remember that it is a privilege to only have to learn about injustice, it is completely different to live through it and experience it. Nothing about this is comfortable. Be outraged; speak up. Don't shy away.

#### **5. Know that it is not the responsibility of those in the marginalized communities to educate you.**

Obviously this point is ironic considering that this entire document was created by a Black woman and is focused on helping new members of the ally community understand their place in movements. That being said, there is too much literature, social media presence, and easily accessible current events for you to chiefly rely on the marginalized in question to hold your hand through the entire process. Similar to the aforementioned point, you should not expect the people you are trying to help to have to shoulder your burden.

That being said there is a difference between you relying on those in a marginalized group to hold your hand through the process v. asking them for advice. That boundary is different for everyone; you should be able to adjust based on who you're talking to.

## **6. People in a marginalized group are not all the same. As mentioned before, you should be able to adjust based on who you're talking to.**

As a Black woman, I have seen people incessantly parading around MLK as their response to these protests. Martin Luther King, Jr. is historically known as advocating for peaceful protests and favoring ways to navigate without violence. There are a couple of issues with this tactic.

- You do not get to weaponize his approach when it fits your argument. Dr. King also stated that riots are the voices of the unheard. If you want to use him in an argument in order to silence a Black individual that you do not agree with, then you need to be able to accept all parts of his teachings. Not just those that make you feel good inside.
- Marginalized people are not a one-trick pony. We are not all the same, we do not all have the same ideals. We are allowed the same agency that those in non-marginalized communities are allowed to have; each of us has a voice and none of those voices should be silenced just because they don't make you feel comfortable.

If your first instinct after hearing the outrage of an oppressed group is to search for the few members that have beliefs aligned with your own, then you are consciously refusing allyship. As an ally, you are in no position to give an opinion on how a community should grieve, how they should process their collective trauma, and how they wish to advocate for changes in their community's treatment. By combing through an entire group in order to find the one member who might hold the same opinion as you, you are admitting to seeking confirmation of your own bias.

## **7. You do not get a pat on the back for observing that people are marginalized and they deserve equal human rights.**

If you are upset by this statement, then you are proving the point. Activism and allyship do not come with a gold medal, they do not require a member of the marginalized community greeting you and saying "Thank YOU for recognizing ME as a worthy human being." Remember that at all times, your allyship is aimed towards amplifying the voices of those most silenced. It is not an award for you to post or a trend for you to hop on. Which leads me to the next point...

## **8. Always keep mind that your voice should NEVER outshine the voices of those you are allying with.**

By being an ally, you are already a member of a community that has the greatest, least censored presence in society concerning the specific issue at hand. Because of this, you hold the privilege of people not silencing you. Your purpose as an ally is to MAGNIFY our voices. It is to defend us when we are not there to defend ourselves or unable to do so. It is to aid our voice reaching more and more people regardless if they were wanting to hear it or not.

## **9. Your activism does not end when the latest tragedy leaves front-page news.**

Whether you are being an ally to the Black community after the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, or applying these principles to another social justice movement later in life, know that being an ally is not a trend. It is not simply an aesthetic Instagram story that you get to share for clout or fear that people will judge you if you don't. This is a lifelong commitment to fighting against oppressive factors every single day and with every step that you take. It means having difficult conversations and living your life in a way that is aimed at helping another to equality.

If you are able to, donate to these causes. Continue to speak to us and learn. Take the initiative to learn yourself. What are you doing after sharing your Instagram story? Are you confronting your friends and family? Are you changing the way that you think? Or are you content to pat yourself on the back for what you deem as a "job well done"?

You will grow tired. You will grow frustrated. You will grow weary. *But it is so, unquestionably, worth it.*

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**I am a 19-year-old Black woman attending the University of Alabama. I was born on Oct 11, 2000, in Montgomery, Alabama on a Wednesday at 12:38 PM. From the moment I entered the world, every breath I took was a fight against racism, a fight to be fully realized as a human being deserving of all the rights that the world has to offer. This is the reality for every single Black person living in this country. Our fight begins the moment we come into the world. We are drafted into a war that has been raging for centuries and the only qualifier we needed was the color of our skin. Understand this and continue on with us.**