

# ALLYSHIP

## TOPIC OVERVIEW

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## AWARENESS

### What is allyship?

The Anti-Oppression Network states that allyship is a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with historically marginalized individuals and/or groups of people.

## UNDERSTANDING

### Key take-home messages.

- 1 Allyship is the ongoing practice of supporting and advocating with individuals who belong to historically marginalized groups, especially those that are different from your own.
- 2 Allyship is not limited to big, public actions. It can be demonstrated through small, private interpersonal connections, which can be very impactful.
- 3 Allies know that they might make mistakes unintentionally. They welcome feedback, learn from their experiences, and make changes based on what they learned.

## TRANSFORMATION

### Specific actions you can take to generate positive DEI change with your team, workplace, clients, and community.

- 1 Print out the attached poster outlining various kinds of allyship (sponsorship, champion, advocate, amplifier, scholar, upstander, and confidant) and post it in your break room for people to consider adopting one or more roles.
- 2 Take action to support historically marginalized groups. This could include volunteering or monthly donations to local nonprofits and organizations whose work directly supports communities/causes you care about as a team.
- 3 Commit as a team to interrupt conversations and actions that perpetuate stereotypes or harm historically marginalized communities.
- 4 Educate yourself on the past and present struggles of the groups you want to support. Seek out information created by the voices you want to ally with through books, blogs, and documentaries.

## TOPIC ESSAY

### Allyship

It's likely that you have heard the term ally or allyship countless times during your career. You may even consider yourself an ally to some individuals in your personal and professional lives. While this commitment is a good first step, there is an opportunity to peel back the layers to understand more deeply what it means to be an ally and engage in allyship.

The Anti-Oppression Network fully defines allyship as “an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person in a position of privilege and power seeks to operate in solidarity with a historically marginalized group” (The Anti-Oppression Network, 2018). Allyship may require effort, but it is essential to approach it with an open mind, empathy, and a willingness to learn and grow. By viewing allyship as a meaningful position, it can expand one's perspective and understanding of the world and foster positive change. True allyship is about showing up for historically marginalized people in ways that offer solace, protection, and, most of all, a willingness to stand up for them during the most challenging times.

Allyship is an important component of creating inclusive environments where individuals feel as though they belong. Although people who are members of historically marginalized communities continue to self-advocate, making the necessary changes to reduce barriers to inclusion cannot be achieved without the presence of allies. Allies are typically members of dominant groups and thus have more “social capital” within that community or society. Because of this, allies play an important role in amplifying the voices of the unheard, in leveraging their own voices when advocating for policy changes and creating and sustaining spaces where people experiencing discrimination and historical marginalization can expect to be free from such conflict.

Being an ally requires a fair amount of personal work and inquiry. Allies must be culturally humble, meaning that they understand that their lived experience may be privileged enough to not have experienced discrimination or historical marginalization based on a personal characteristic such as being queer or being Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color (BIPOC). Humility, empathy, and a willingness to listen and learn about both the experience and what can be done to pursue more diversity and inclusion are core characteristics. Self-study and self-awareness are essential, and it is important to understand that it is not the job of the historically marginalized to educate allies on discrimination, historical marginalization, or exploitation.

Allies must also demonstrate a desire to learn and willingness to study the historical contexts of exclusion and how they themselves may unknowingly and inadvertently contribute to the milieu that can be challenging for others. In other words, allies not only speak out against discrimination and historical marginalization generally, but they also call it out when they see it; they step into the gap between those who would tear down others and their victims. Being an ally is authentically demonstrating long-term consistency

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and reliability. An ally is someone who consistently shows up and supports historically marginalized communities, prioritizing their needs and experiences over their own comfort.

That consistency can be difficult to achieve because of the numerous barriers to success. Interestingly, all those barriers must be resolved by the ally's personal work. Barriers to success include a belief that discrimination must be overt to be harmful and focusing on your own feelings when discussing others' historical marginalization. Centering your own emotions might manifest as projecting a strong emotional reaction upon hearing your colleague with a disability share their recent experience of discrimination. In this scenario, the person who experienced the discrimination becomes placed in a position where they are expected to provide comfort and consolation to you instead of you offering support to them. This form of centering yourself can lead to a breakdown of trust and cause the individual you are in a position to assist to withdraw. By recognizing the importance of centering the experiences and needs of historically marginalized individuals, allies can build trust and create an environment where they can truly be helpful.

So how might allyship be seen in veterinary medicine? Allyship can be demonstrated as easily as wearing a name tag with your pronouns even if your pronouns match your gender identity. Participation in simply wearing the tag helps to normalize the wider use of pronouns. Other examples include stepping into and redirecting collegial conversations that demean low-income pet owners; these discussions are rarely solution-oriented and only serve to stigmatize these pet owners in your practice. Finally, your allyship can also be shown during discussions about the increases in BIPOC individuals in veterinary medical schools. The most common pushback suggests that admitting these young professionals threatens the quality of the profession; this is deeply problematic because suggestions infer that these students are not academically qualified and by default White students are the preferred veterinary school students. Your voice weighing in and defending these students and professionals is essential in these moments; help others examine their biases and the conclusions they draw.

Allyship is about your behavior and no one else's. It happens at the local level and is not generally about structural change, but rather standing up and in for those whose identities are more historically marginalized than yours.

Although being an ally necessitates continuous self-renewal and personal education, it does not have to be daunting. It can be as straightforward as the saying, "see something, say something." Allyship can be practiced both in the presence of colleagues, friends, or family and when they are not around. The crucial aspect is that remaining silent or failing to provide support is not a neutral position. When one chooses not to be an ally, they are choosing not to stand in solidarity with individuals whose lived experiences differ significantly from their own. Remember you might make mistakes, and the important thing is to be intentional in your words and behaviors. Each day presents a new opportunity to opt for allyship and make a positive difference. ■

#### References

The Anti-Oppression Network. (2018, March 12). Retrieved May 8, 2023, from <https://theantioppressionnetwork.com/allyship/>

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I am the chief diversity officer of the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC). I have more than 20 years of experience researching, lecturing, and advancing programming related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. During my time with AAVMC, my work has focused on increasing racial/ethnic diversity, guiding efforts to increase DEI content in the DVM curriculum, and ensuring that campus climates support the whole student and their identities.

## RESOURCES

The Anti-Oppression Network. (2018, March 12). Retrieved May 8, 2023, from <https://theantioppressionnetwork.com/allyship/>

Catlin, K. (2019). *Better allies: Everyday actions to create inclusive, engaging workplaces*. Better Allies Press.

Greenhill, L., & Craig, L. (2019). *Diversity and inclusion on air: From bystander to ally* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved May 8, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/live/PoAUqgggRk0?feature=share>

Hughes, C. *The 7 types of allies - which one are you?* Retrieved October 12, 2023, from <https://inclusiveleadersgroup.com/the-7-types-of-allies-which-one-are-you/>

Lamont, A. (n.d.). *The guide to allyship*. Retrieved May 8, 2023, from <https://guidetoallyship.com/>

Salter, N. P., & Migliaccio, L. (2019). Allyship as a diversity and inclusion tool in the workplace. In *Diversity within diversity management* (pp. 131-152). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Wong, A. (2020). *Disability visibility*. Crown Books for Young Readers.

The inclusion of resources by this author does not imply or constitute an endorsement by the American Veterinary Medical Association or the Veterinary Medical Association Executives.

## The SPONSOR



A sponsor is an ally that vocally supports and boosts a person from an underrepresented group, especially when that person is being dismissed or ignored.

*Example*  
If there are opportunities in your organization, recommend individuals from historically marginalized groups.



## The AMPLIFIER

An amplifier is an ally that works to make underrepresented voices heard and respected.

*Example*  
When someone has a great idea, make sure that others in the workplace hear it and give credit to that person. Whenever possible, position that person to be the one who shares the idea.

## The CHAMPION



A champion is an ally who champions underrepresented groups, especially in public situations such as media and industry events, conferences, and social media to give them greater visibility to large audiences.

*Example*  
If you notice that individuals from underrepresented groups have been excluded from certain activities, you can be a champion by advocating for their inclusion.

## The ADVOCATE



An advocate is an ally who uses their power and influence to invite people from historically marginalized communities into discussions where decisions are made.

*Example*  
An advocate will hold their peers accountable and ensure that all individuals are included.

# 7 TYPES OF ALLIES

You can be more than one!

Based on Karen Catlin's guide from *Better Allies: Everyday Actions to Create Inclusive, Engaging Workplaces*

## The CONFIDANT



A confidant is an ally who creates an environment where people from underrepresented groups feel comfortable sharing their frustrations, needs, and challenges.

*Example*  
When a person is having an experience you haven't had, listen and ask questions. Don't try to add a personal story of your own.

## The SCHOLAR

When an ally is a scholar, they do their own learning to seek out information about the discrimination that historically marginalized communities face.

*Example*  
A scholar will look for information from credible sources to continue to grow their knowledge of diversity, equity, and inclusion topics.



## The UPSTANDER



An upstander is an ally who will act when they see something that they deem wrong. They will not sit back and watch if someone from a historically marginalized community is harassed or disrespected.

*Example*  
If you witness a microaggression, when appropriate, insert yourself in the conversation and end the aggression. Check in with the victim privately to see if you can help further.