



Belong To LGBTQ+  
Youth Ireland



# Allyship



Allyship involves supporting and advocating for LGBTQ+ people to ensure that they feel safe and supported. It is connected to one of our key campaign objectives: **Increasing friendship and support of LGBTQ+ students by other students.**

## What is an Ally?

An ally can be defined as ‘a person who is a member of the dominant or majority group who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate with and for, the oppressed population.’<sup>1</sup>

LGBTQ+ allies play an active role in supporting LGBTQ+ people who are facing discrimination or exclusion because of who they are, despite not identifying as members of the LGBTQ+ community themselves.

## Why are Allies Important?

Young people often depend on their peers for social support.<sup>2</sup> Research shows that LGBTQ+ young people who have friendships with allies have less internalised stigma about their identity.<sup>3</sup> As LGBTQ+ youth may have more difficulty accessing support from family members, support from their peers may be even more important to them.<sup>4</sup> There may not be many, if any, other openly LGBTQ+ young people in their school, youth service or local community, so it may be challenging for them without the friendship and support of allies.

As well as their importance at an individual level, allies are a crucial part of any movement that is seeking to secure rights or protections for a minority group. When there are more people who do not identify as members of a group, we need to build support from outside of it.

Think of the Black Lives Matters protests against racism in 2020. Thousands of people in Ireland participated in marches across the country, and most of them were not from a minority ethnic background. However, they felt compelled to take action to show their support for communities who are impacted by racism.

Ireland already has great examples of LGBTQ+ allyship, most notably during the Marriage Equality referendum in 2015. If it had only been LGBTQ+ people who voted in favour of LGBTQ+ marriage equality, the result of the referendum would not have been a resounding yes! However, thanks to the support of LGBTQ+ allies, the referendum passed, with the final result showing 62% of voters had supported the introduction of marriage equality.



## What Do Allies Do?

The answer is in the question – allies act! Allies are not just people who are tolerant of LGBTQ+ people, or don't discriminate against them. Instead, they take action to show solidarity, challenge prejudice, and make the world fairer and more equal.

While the word ally is of course a noun, some people like to think of being an ally as a verb, to emphasise that taking action is a fundamental component of the role.

The types of actions that LGBTQ+ allies take can vary. Providing a supportive ear to someone in distress, intervening when overhearing a homophobic remark, or attending a Pride protest march are all examples of allyship.

Within a school community, Youthreach centre or youth service, allies in different roles have the power to carry out different actions. For example, an ally teacher or youth worker might be able to show solidarity by delivering a lesson that is LGBTQ+ inclusive, while a youth ally could make an impact by sticking up for an LGBTQ+ young person who is having a hard time.

## What Motivates Someone to Become an Ally?

There are a number of factors that can affect a young person's decision to act as an ally. Research shows that personal relationships with LGBTQ+ people help develop empathy and commitment to an equal society.<sup>5</sup> Other factors include developing critical thinking and self-reflection, and having the opportunity for informal discussions on LGBTQ+ topics with peers.<sup>6</sup>

Crucially, allies need to be given the opportunity to take part in concrete actions – to be asked for help and given meaningful ways to get involved.<sup>7</sup>

## What are the Barriers to Becoming an Ally?

Actively working to tackle discrimination against LGBTQ+ people can be challenging, especially for young people. You can't tell that someone is LGBTQ+ just by looking at them. It is also not obvious in any group which people identify as LGBTQ+ and which are there as allies. This can lead some young people to worry that by acting as an ally, they may be perceived to be LGBTQ+ themselves, and experience some of the same stigma or discrimination as their LGBTQ+ peers.<sup>8</sup> Research found that straight allies found it challenging to be asked to intervene with LGBTQ+phobic language, due to the risk of them being harassed as a result.<sup>9</sup>

For this reason, young allies in education settings or youth services need strong support from staff to reduce these worries. By creating a climate of zero-tolerance to any type of bullying or harassment, you can help give allies the confidence to take action to support their LGBTQ+ peers.

# How to Become an LGBTQ+ Ally

So we know that being an ally is an action – but what is involved in becoming an ally to the LGBTQ+ community? There are four levels of development that people go through in becoming allies.<sup>10</sup>

## 1. Awareness

The first step is becoming aware of who you are and the ways in which you are similar to and different from LGBTQ+ people. As an educator, you could achieve this through class discussions, conversations with LGBTQ+ people, and reflecting on your own identities and experiences.

## 2. Knowledge

The next step as an ally is educating others about LGBTQ+ people and the topics that affect them as a community. This could include exploring laws and policies that affect LGBTQ+ people both in Ireland and elsewhere.

## 3. Skills

Helping young people develop the skills they need to act as an ally can be challenging but is very important. Think about the kinds of actions your allies might be taking – intervening with homophobic language, or helping out with an awareness campaign. What kind of skills will they need to do this effectively?

## 4. Action

This is the final and most important step. Young people putting their learnings into practice and taking action to support their LGBTQ+ peers will have a transformative impact on our schools, youth services and society! Allies need to have meaningful work to take part in, and they have to be invited to participate.

Class discussions should always be framed with respect as a grounding principle. No individual or group's rights – whether they are LGBTQ+ or otherwise – should be up for 'debate'. Everyone is entitled to a personal belief and viewpoint, but in a school or youth service setting everyone should be treated with respect.



# Allyship Actions

## Education

Facilitate reflections with the young people in your setting on their own identities, and the role they can play in creating a more equal society.

## Stand Up Awareness Week

Stand Up Awareness Week is a brilliant opportunity to give the allies in your setting meaningful ways to take action. Encourage students who are both LGBTQ+ and allies to get involved in preparations for your Stand Up Awareness Week.

## Connect with the LGBTQ+ Community

You could invite a speaker from the LGBTQ+ community to your school, Youthreach or youth service for a talk during Stand Up Awareness Week. If you can't get a speaker in-person, you could use YouTube videos or podcasts to hear from LGBTQ+ people themselves about their experiences, and how they think allies can get involved.

## Set Up an LGBTQ+ and Allies Group

These groups are a powerful way to create a safe space for LGBTQ+ young people and their allies to form friendships and discuss issues that are important to them. They are a great way for allies to develop the awareness, knowledge and skills that they need to take meaningful actions to support the LGBTQ+ community.



**Awareness is good, but action is better.”<sup>11</sup>**

# References:

1. Washington, J. and Evans, N. (1991) 'Becoming an ally'. In N. Evans and V. Wall (eds.) *Beyond tolerance: Gays, lesbians and bisexuals on campus*. Alexandria, VA: American College Personnel Association.
2. Blum, R. W., McNeely, C., and Nonnemaker, J. (2002) 'Vulnerability, risk, and protection', *Journal of Adolescent Health*, (31).
3. Baiocco, R., Laghi, F., DiPomponio, L., and Nigito, C. S. (2012) 'Self-disclosure to the best friend: Friendship quality and internalized sexual stigma in Italian lesbian and gay adolescents', *Journal of Adolescence*, 35(2).
4. Needham, B. L. and Austin, E. L. (2010) 'Sexual orientation, parental support, and health during the transition to young adulthood', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, (39).
5. Duhigg, J. M., Rostosky, S. S., Gray, B. E. and Wimsatt, M. K. (2010) 'Development of Heterosexuals into Sexual-Minority Allies: A Qualitative Exploration',
6. Poteat, V. P. (2015) 'Individual Psychological Factors and Complex Interpersonal Conditions that Predict LGBT-Affirming Behavior', *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, (44).
7. Duhigg, J. M., Rostosky, S. S., Gray, B. E. and Wimsatt, M. K. (2010) 'Development of Heterosexuals into Sexual-Minority Allies: A Qualitative Exploration', *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, (7).
8. Goldstein, S. B. (2017) 'Stigma and stigma by association in perceptions of straight allies', *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 14(4).
9. Lapointe, A. A. (2015) 'Standing "Straight" Up to Homophobia: Straight Allies' Involvement in GSAs', *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 12(2).
10. Evans, N. J. and Washington, J. (2010) 'Becoming an ally: A new examination'. In M. Adams, W. J. Blumenfeld, C. Castaneda, H. W. Hackman, M. L. Peters and X. Zuniga (eds.) *Readings for diversity and social justice*. New York: Routledge.
11. Fox, D. R. (2003) 'Awareness is good, but action is better', *The Counseling Psychologist*, (31).

# Lesson Plan

This lesson plan and the accompanying Powerpoint (available to download at the link to the right) can be used to bring the theme of 'allyship' to life in the classroom.

<https://www.belongto.org/app/uploads/2023/11/Stand-Up-Awareness-Week-2023-Allyship-Lesson-Powerpoint.pptx>

## Title: Allies

**Duration of lesson:** 60 minutes

**Learning objectives:** What does it mean to be an ally?  
What actions might an LGBTQ+ ally take?

**Resources:** Diamond 9 card sort  
You tube videos (2)  
Supplies for making posters (colouring pencils, blank paper, etc.)

### Starter: (10 mins)

**Draw a picture of a stick person and write around it as many parts of your identity that you can think of. (Footballer, student, musician, part of your family, Catholic, Irish, etc.)**

**Highlight those that are the most important to you.**

**Imagine that someone told you that you weren't allowed to be that or that you were wrong for being that or caring about that thing. What would you do? How would you feel?**

**Challenge: What would you want other people to do if you found yourself in that situation?**

### Teacher Notes:

Discuss personal identities being dominant and non-dominant. Ask students what that means in your school, town, in Ireland and in the world. (We all have elements of our identity which are part of either a dominant or non-dominant group – for example, a student might be a Christian (dominant) or a Muslim (non-dominant), a white person (dominant) or a person of colour (non-dominant), a GAA player (dominant) or a table tennis player (non-dominant), etc. The identity exercise should involve an element of students considering whether the groups they belong to are dominant or non-dominant. Rather than having to “imagine” being in the non-dominant group, they might realise that in some areas of their lives they already are. This won't apply to all students (“guitar player” for example, although maybe something like being a “gamer” might be seen as non-dominant), but if and where it does, it might help provoke reflections on similarities with fellow students who are in the non-dominant group regarding their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Left-handedness is a nice example to use, because it is clearly non-dominant in terms of proportion and how the world is designed on an assumption of right-handedness being ‘the norm’. The teacher could ask a left-handed student to share what it feels like when they've had to use a desk or pair of scissors that weren't designed for left-handed people – “it felt awkward, a little embarrassing”. This can be used to open the discussion about how people in other types of non-dominant groups can feel this way too.

## Direct teaching: (15 mins)

Explain why Stand Up Awareness Week is for everyone.

Introduce the idea of allyship and its importance for the LGBTQ+ community.

Students write definition for ally in their copy.

### Teacher Notes:

Discuss the importance of allies for any minority group. You might use examples like the Marriage Equality referendum, Black Lives Matters protests or the Dunnes Stores protests.

Look at the infographic on slide 7 to consider why the LGBTQ+ community need allies.

**Challenge: Why might someone choose to be an LGBTQ+ ally if they are cisgender or heterosexual?**

You may want to print the infographic for students to see better or give them the link to view it online: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/infographics/eu-lgbt-survey>

Watch the video on slide 9 and list any ways to be a good ally.

**Challenge: What other actions, not listed, could people take to be allies?**

Let students watch the video first. They can come up with further ideas on their own or with a partner.

When you are going through slide 10, be sure to stress that allies take action. They are not silent or invisible.

## Independent task: (20 mins)

**Diamond 9: Complete the Diamond 9 activity with your partner. Put the actions on the top which are the best examples of allyship and the worst examples of allyship on the bottom.**

**Think Pair Share: write down some reasons a person might not act as an ally.**

**How could these situations be overcome?**

Watch the video of James' story.

Answer these questions:

1. Who was an ally in his life? How do you know they were allies?
2. How might James' story have been different if he had had allies in school?

### Teacher Notes:

Print off the diamond nine activity on slide 12 and cut out the boxes (or you could have students number them instead.)

Students should then come up with barriers to being an ally (fear, don't want negative attention etc.). Have students share ideas with a partner and then discuss as a class. Focus on the importance of overcoming these challenges.

These questions could be a class discussion or students could write them in their copy.

## Plenary: (15 mins)

Design a poster, video or blog post.

In it, you will:

- Explain what an LGBTQ+ ally is
- Give examples of how to be a good ally

**Hint: Make sure to think about how to be an ally on the one-to-one level, in school and nationally/internationally.**

### Teacher Notes:

Students could work independently, with a partner or in a small group.

Encourage them to demonstrate what they have learned and challenge them to think of further ways people could be good allies.

You could make this into a competition for Stand Up Awareness Week and make a display of the work produced in the canteen or corridor.

Students could also complete their work for homework.



Belong To  
13 Parliament St  
Dublin 2, D02 P658

[info@belongto.org](mailto:info@belongto.org)  
[www.belongto.org](http://www.belongto.org)  
01 670 6223

Belong To is a registered charity in the Republic of Ireland  
Registered Charity Number: 20059798. ©Belong To, 2024