

ALLYSHIP IN ACTIVISM

The following section contains some advice on allyship which was originally published by Climate Emergency Manchester as a two-page 'Novice's Guide to Practical Allyship' as part of its [Active Citizenship Toolkit](#). It's written as an imagined dialogue between someone sceptical about practical allyship, and someone who already gets it.

We really can't do this alone, or as some vanguard waiting for others to fall into 'line' under our 'leadership'. So, if you want others to help you, you have to help them. That requires understanding (while not necessarily always agreeing) with their view of the world and taking practical steps to help them in making their lives better, and help them with their campaigning. Failing to be an ally means you have no credibility, in your own eyes, or in other people's.

Wait, what has fixing climate change got to do with being an ally in struggles for justice around race, class, gender?

Most of the people on this planet are not white. So right there, if we're talking about our species, you're going to want to think about what is happening to those who are not white and living in "the West". Climate change is already affecting many people on this planet, thanks to changes to weather patterns (nastier heatwaves, droughts, sea level rise, changes to agriculture). Those on the sharp end of these changes tend to be poor People of Colour (though to be clear - money only offers some protection, and it will not do so forever). But from a purely "practical" point of view -

a) there is a wealth of knowledge in those communities about how to survive in horrible situations, and how to work together to change them. It makes sense to benefit from that.
b) if you want system change (and we really really need system change) you are going to have to work with many different kinds of people(s). They are not going to want to work with you if you are ignorant to and unwilling to learn of their struggles and worldview. Examining your own privileges by listening and in turn offering a helping hand will find you many allies in a broader network towards equitable system change. In this way, you will be able to provide effective allyship.

Well, for the sake of argument, let's say you have a point. What does that mean in practice, where I live? I mean, I can't do anything about President Trump or Boris Johnson. Is there a book I can read, a course I can take?

Note: this isn't about you, it's not about obtaining a "good climate activist badge". It takes hard work and constant effort to practice allyship. And no, there isn't a single comprehensive book or course that can educate you about allyship. It turns out the struggle for a better world is not easy and convenient (who knew?). But fortunately, there are lots of great guides - written by people of colour for the most part - about this very topic. if you want it boiled down into 10 tweets, then check this out.

Google "how to be an ally" and better "how to practice allyship" - there's loads of stuff. And CEM will be doing a much longer guide by the end of the year. For now, we have listed a number of steps you can take to practice allyship:

ALLYSHIP IN ACTIVISM (CONTINUED)

- Listen. Two ears, two eyes, one mouth. That's a 4:1 ratio right there.
- Amplify other voices that (weirdly) don't get amplified by the mainstream media and mainstream culture.
- Use your privilege. If you have the benefit of lots of education, if you have got lots of skills and knowledge, then you have to SHARE them, in humble ways (pro-tip: sharing does not mean telling people that you are the boss and they have to listen to you). Confront racism (not just your own), with firmness, diligence, compassion, knowledge etc
- Do the work yourself. Never demand/expect emotional or intellectual services from categories of people who you want to display allyship to. Do the hard, difficult work - the reading, the watching, the thinking yourself. Find other white people to do it with, consistently and regularly.
- Stay critical. There is no monolithic answer to the crises which beset us all. There is no "One Right Way." People of good intent and similar experiences will have different takes on what is going on and why, and what is to be done. You can't just abrogate your responsibility for your own behaviour.
- Don't expect good guy/girl tokens: You don't deserve an award for being decent.
- Share the skills you have.
- Initiate difficult conversations surrounding racial and climate justice, in both public and private spaces. It's (relatively) easier to talk about racism with friends and peers who share similar opinions, but to be an ally means to step out of this echo chamber and grapple with racism which is rampant in families and communities. It is a tiring process to raise these conversations at home, but allies have the responsibility to do this.
- Create time for self-reflection every single day. This involves confronting and reflecting on the ways in which white people have been complicit in sustaining unjust and unfair power structures.
- Understand that you will mess up and get things wrong - it's an inevitable part of the process. But dwelling on your faults will help nobody, and white tears can easily end up derailing other important conversations by re-centering on your worries.
- Support local businesses run by people of colour, and make regular donations to organisations that work towards the inclusion of marginalised communities. Make this a regular practice, not a one-off event.
- Make a plan for the long haul. That means assigning resources, creating a system to monitor what you are doing, how well you are doing it.

SOME KEY CONCEPTS

- Decentering - this isn't about you. See also white tears, white saviour complex.
- Optical Allyship – Latham Thomas defines this as “allyship that only serves at the surface level to platform the ‘ally’, it makes a statement but doesn't go beneath the surface and is not aimed at breaking away from systems of power that oppress.”
- White Fragility – (why white people freak out and can't talk or think clearly) Robin DiAngelo [newspaper interview](#) and [podcast interview](#)
- White Saviour Complex – [see here](#).
- White Saviour Industrial Complex – [see here](#).
- Whiteness Studies - [see here](#).
- White Tears – [see here](#).

SOME KEY READING

- Gay, R. 2015. [On Making Black lives Matter](#)
- Heglar, M. 2019, [Climate Change Isn't the First Existential Threat](#)
- Kendall, F. 2003 [How to Be an Ally if You Are a Person with Privilege](#)
- Lorde, A. 1981. [The Uses of Anger](#).
- Philips, H. 2020. [Performative Allyship Is Deadly \(Here's What to Do Instead\)](#)
- Wiseman, R. 2019. [Colonialism + capitalism = climate crisis](#).
- [Guide to Allyship](#)