**11 Ways to Be a Respectful LGBTQ2S+ Ally**



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As the seasons change and summer starts to take shape, we are reminded of the impending events that help celebrate and strengthen our LGBTQ2S+ communities. With that comes the rise of straight-identifying individuals who choose to stand up as allies for the community. But what does being an ally really mean? How does one show up in a respectful way? And why is it important that an ally take the time to understand the responsibilities of their role?

We connected with [The 519](https://www.the519.org/)‘s senior consultant and special projects spokesperson, Jacq Hixson-Vulpe, to gain a better understanding of how to be a respectful LGBTQ2S+ ally beyond the typical month of celebration. Because standing up for those in the community is a commitment you should make all year long.

**Understand that it’s not about you**

You may approach being an ally as a way of empowering yourself or the community. But that’s not what allyship is about: “Allies don’t empower people — they support change and space for people and communities to empower themselves. None of this work is about the ally, it is about decentering those who are allies and understanding that communities and individuals have power and a voice — [allies and more people](https://www.slice.ca/health/photos/ways-to-be-a-respectful-lgbtq2s-ally/) just need to start listening, caring, and acting on what those voices are saying.” Hixson-Vulpe explains.  
  
It may also help to ask yourself *why* you want to be an ally in the first place. “Many of us want to prove that we are good allies, to demonstrate how woke we are, and how safe people can feel around us — this is most often achieved through small continuous action that may feel unnoticed, but trust me, they are noticed.”

*Related:*[*LGBTQ+ terms you keep hearing and what they mean*](https://www.slice.ca/lgbtq-terms-you-keep-hearing-and-what-they-mean/)*.*

**Neutralize your language and your responses**

Like any conversation you engage in, using the proper language and responding with genuine understanding and care is an essential step in successful communication. But this becomes especially true as an ally.  
  
Hixson-Vulpe further explains, “a great starting point is to think about how to neutralize our language and our responses. Both our language and how we physically respond to things, like raising our voice with surprise or shock, tell people what we expect of them — it tells them that we have already assumed something about them. Neutralizing our language to avoid gendered assumptions is a small but incredibly meaningful step. It shows the people around us that we are open to understanding people’s experiences without assuming anything, and it is a great way to quietly show people who might be homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic that we aren’t going to participate.”

*See also:*[*Celebrity coming out stories that will make you cry tears of Pride*](https://www.slice.ca/celebrity-coming-out-stories-that-will-make-you-cry-tears-of-pride/)*.*

**Apply the correct neutral language**

Being mindful of your language when speaking to people should be top of mind regardless of being an ally. Hixson-Vulpe points out some examples of neutral language that impacts the LGBTQ2S community.  
  
“Use the terms 'partner' or 'sibling' or 'nibling' (instead of nephew or niece) or 'parent' or 'family member' or 'colleague' or 'coworker' or 'student' or 'people/folks' instead of their gendered variants.”  
  
They also recommend, “introducing your pronouns and using neutral pronouns such as they/them/theirs while talking about someone until you learn their pronouns. And don’t shy away from asking someone their [pronouns](https://www.the519.org/education-training/training-resources/our-resources/creating-authentic-spaces/gender-specific-and-gender-neutral-pronouns) rather than assuming them.” The general rule of thumb they suggest is to not automatically believe that you know someone’s gender.

*You may also like:*[*10 transgender celebrities providing positive representation in the film and TV industries.*](https://www.slice.ca/transgender-celebrities-providing-positive-representation-in-the-film-industries/)

**Research to learn about adversity**

You may be tempted to ask LGBTQ2S+ folks questions about the adversity the community has faced, but it’s best to do your own research instead. “There are many online resources where folks can go and educate themselves about statistics around LGBTQ2S communities and the discrimination we face," Hixson-Vulpe says.  
  
"You can also book education and training experts to come into your organization to work through how to make a difference and create an affirming and authentic workplace."  
  
They also point out something so obvious, you may not consider it at first: “In most cases in daily life, when you are chatting with a coworker or waiting for the bus with someone or have met someone new, people do not want to have invasive questions asked about their lives — they just want to be.”

*See also:*[*YouTuber Rowan Ellis on LGBTQ+ advocacy and authoring a book for queer girls*](https://www.slice.ca/rowan-ellis-youtuber-lgbtq-advocacy/)*.*

**Attend specific LGBTQ2S+ events**

Pride celebrations across the world are filled with a variety of events to participate in, but that doesn’t mean you should attend them all. In fact, your general presence at an event in the community may not be the best fit.  
  
“If you attend an event — look around. If you only see people with privilege represented on stage or in the audience — only white people, only able-bodied people, only cis people, only straight people — you probably don’t want to be there," Hixson-Vulpe says. "This must be tempered with the understanding that we can’t read people’s identities by just looking at them. But if you look around and see a very homogenous and privileged crowd, it might be time to do some research to understand the event you are attending.”

*Related:*[*Interview: Queens of Cosplay star Kyne on beauty tips and confidence*](https://www.slice.ca/queens-of-cosplay-star-kyne-on-beauty-tips-and-confidence/)*.*

**Know which behaviours to avoid**

As an ally, you may feel that you need to prove your ability to show up to the community. But oftentimes, these attempts are more offensive than they are helpful. “Some folks tend to make allyship more performative, but really, it is the folks who are on the sidelines who are actually listening and doing the work that few want to do,” says Hixson-Vulpe. They also suggest some key behaviours you should definitely avoid, including making yourself the centre of attention, asking questions about people’s bodies, lives, or experiences (unless you know them well or they have said they are open to these types of questions) and acting or thinking that you know better or that you can lead the charge at making change. This is an opportunity for you to follow instead of lead.

*Related:*[*LGBTQ+ Canadian-owned businesses to support during Pride (and beyond)*](https://www.slice.ca/lgbtq-canadian-owned-businesses-to-support/)*.*

**Be open to unlearning and relearning**

Get comfortable with the fact that you aren’t going to know and understand everything right away. Hixson-Vulpe suggests, “embrace unlearning and relearning, which involves gracefully accepting when you are wrong, and showing humility — you are going to make many mistakes, and that is okay. It is actually great as it means you are relearning and beginning to understand how the world works for other people.”  
  
And when you make a mistake, Hixson-Vulpe reminds us that “...in many ways this is not about you, the ally. We should be considering how our actions have impacted other people. When we stop making it about us and recognize that mistakes are an important part of life and prove that we are learning, it will help us move past those moments of feeling defeated.”

*Related:*[*10 of the most misunderstood things about bisexual women*](https://www.slice.ca/10-of-the-most-misunderstood-things-about-bisexual-women/)*.*

**Interpret the correct way to show up**

It’s easy to toss around the term “show up,” but understanding what it means and how to embody it will make a difference in your presence. Hixson-Vulpe highlights that “showing up means being there in the first place, and being there in the first place means thinking about if you don’t have friends who are LGBTQ2S-identified, why is that… and maybe assessing whether something in your life needs to change.” Additionally, they suggest, “…think through how you want to react and what you feel most comfortable doing in situations where someone is being verbally and/or physically harassed. It means learning how to deescalate unsafe situations. It can look like connecting with someone and introducing yourself and asking them about their day.”

*See also:*[*LGBTQ+ celebs leading the way for for positive representation*](https://www.slice.ca/lgbtq-celebs-leading-the-way-for-positive-representation/)*.*

**Change old behaviours**

Recognize that there are likely behaviours, language or thoughts from your past that you will need to change or improve. “Being there in the first place also means that you have done your own work to recognize and think about the ways in which you perpetuate homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia — we all do it, we just have to unlearn it,” Hixson-Vulpe says. So while you may not use the same language now or think or feel the same way you may have previously, acknowledging that it did exist will help you to do the work necessary when you move forward as an ally.

*You may also like:*[*11 celebrities who are owning their pansexual identity*](https://www.slice.ca/celebrities-who-are-owning-their-pansexual-identity/)*.*

**Educate yourself before you show up**

Being eager to support the community is great, but setting yourself up for the right frame of mind and direction is essential. Hixson-Vulpe suggests doing your own research, explaining, “lots of online blogs and video blogs exist where people talk about their experiences, which can be helpful learning tools." And when it comes to your place of employment: “For resources around how to think about structural change in a workplace, with lots of tidbits that are helpful in everyday life, The 519 has published [Authentic Spaces: A Gender Identity and Gender Expression Toolkit to Support the Implementation of Institutional and Social Change](https://www.the519.org/education-training/training-resources/our-resources/creating-authentic-spaces). Additionally, there is a specific resource on [Being an Effective Trans Ally](https://www.the519.org/education-training/training-resources/our-resources/creating-authentic-spaces/being-an-effective-trans-ally).

**Rely on other other allies to learn and grow**

If you’re curious about how your role impacts the LGBTQ2S community, lean on other allies you know to gain a better understanding. Hixson-Vulpe suggests, “Find people who are doing this work and talk to them.” It’s also worth reading work by individuals whose audience is allies. They explain, “…there are lots of folks who write about their experiences as LGBTQ2S in order to support the education of allies — find their work, read it, and engage with it. If you have questions and can’t talk to any of your friends about these questions, consider going outside your friend circle and finding other folks who do this important work and who care about it.”