



# What Can I Do?

## IDEAS FOR ALLIES

*A starter list of things you can do to be supportive, confront discrimination, and resist complacency.*

1. Refuse to tolerate discriminatory comments, attitudes, remarks or jokes. Some ways to intervene include:
  - *Paraphrase and ask them to repeat and clarify* (“So what I hear you saying is that...”).
  - *Ask for more information* (“I’m wondering what led you to believe this about\_\_\_\_”).
  - *Play “dumb”* (“Why does this person’s social identity matter? Did I miss something? What do you mean by..?”).
  - *Challenge the stereotype* (“That’s interesting. From my experience I know that...”).
  - *Highlight commonalities between groups* (“Yes person x is part of group x. Did you also know such and such about this person?”).
  - *Express your feelings* (“When I heard you say\_\_\_ I was angry and hurt. A better way to make your point might be...”).
  - *Share your own process* (“I used to use that term, but then I learned more about...”).
  - Say “Ouch!” and discuss your response.
2. Ask others that any discriminatory humor displayed in common areas be removed completely or placed within private office or living spaces.
3. Report all harassment or discriminatory behavior using campus resources.
4. Display positive materials in support of people who are historically underrepresented. If possible, post flyers on activities, support groups, programs, and resources promoting inclusion.
5. Have available referral information for services which target the needs of underrepresented populations. Become familiar with resources, including literature, support groups, organizations, individuals, etc., in your area so you can refer people when appropriate.
6. Do not make assumptions about the identities of people you encounter.
7. Use inclusive, non-gender specific language that does not assume heterosexuality in others. Use inclusive language in conversation and also in written materials, policies, forms, etc.

8. Educate yourself on issues and concerns facing specific populations. Take the initiative to obtain accurate information.
9. Attend events, meetings, or programs sponsored by or for people who are from historically underrepresented cultural groups.
10. Gain insight by talking to people with different cultural backgrounds. Learn from their experiences, but do not expect them to serve as teachers.
11. Maintain a balanced perspective. Don't assume that a person's social identity is the most important aspect of that person. Remember that everyone is a multi-faceted individual with multiple identities.
12. Don't assume that being a member of a historically underrepresented group is so hard and presents so many problems that you should feel sorry for people. They have the same problems as anyone else, are just as likely to be well-adjusted, and just as likely to have difficulty coping with stresses in their lives.
13. Because of prejudice and discrimination, however, they have to deal with some unique stressors.
14. Don't assume that being part of a marginal group doesn't matter; for example, thinking that "They're the same as everyone else and I treat all people the same." While everyone deserves to be treated equally, that is different from treating everyone the same. The experience of being different culturally in a largely unaccepting society has a profound effect on how people view themselves and experience the world.
15. Respect the confidential nature of people's stories and experiences at all times. It is imperative that you can be trusted.
16. Examine your own biases and fears. You must explore your deepest feelings and beliefs concerning other cultures. If you are uncomfortable, this will be communicated to others. Your ability to be open and accepting will be limited by unexamined beliefs and attitudes. Be willing to look at the areas with which you are uncomfortable. Be willing to talk about your doubts, fears, and uncertainties with others, so that you can address them.

17. Know your own limits. There may be times when an individual's needs or concerns are beyond your ability to help them. Know when you have reached the extent of your knowledge or patience and be prepared to seek out others with additional knowledge or expertise for assistance.
18. Deal with feelings first. You can be helpful just by listening and providing someone a chance to talk about their feelings and their experience.
19. Provide positive reinforcement to people who are from historically underrepresented groups to help counter distorted or negative messages that are so prevalent in society.
20. Assume that in any setting (e.g. workplace, organization meeting, residence hall, etc.) there are people who are vulnerable socially and wondering how safe the environment is for them. Provide safety by making clear your support of people in your community.
21. Include a range of cultural issues and topics in training seminars, curricula, programming, professional development workshops, etc. when appropriate.
22. If people jump to the conclusions about your identity because you are an inclusive an empathic person (e.g. You are lesbian, gay, or bisexual because you talk about LGBT topics): resist your urge to deny it. Challenge yourself to resist seeing such an assumption as an accusation, or as something that must be denied. Challenge yourself not to immediately retreat into the security of your identity and privilege.
23. Remember that we all come from a widely diverse backgrounds with a wide range of experiences. Treat everyone as a unique individual.

**FOR MORE  
INFORMATION CONTACT**  
[psc@dickinson.edu](mailto:psc@dickinson.edu)