

HOW CAN MEN BE ALLIES FOR WOMEN?

A Quick Guide from GWN & AGWN

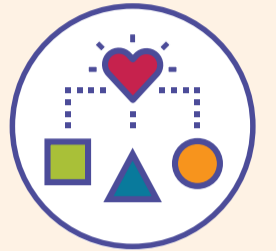


What does 'being an ally' mean?

Men who are allies for women colleagues are crucial partners in achieving gender equality. Without that partnership, it's much harder to address the barriers and inequalities that women face. There are many men in the public service workforce who are already acting as allies and we can learn from them. A good definition for men who are allies is: **men who will advocate for women whether they are in the room or not.**

Understanding diversity and inclusion

Diversity refers to the traits and characteristics that make people unique. This can include (but isn't limited to) gender, ethnicity, faith, disability, sexual orientation, age and other identifiers that reflect the full spectrum of the society in which we live and work. Inclusion is being committed to behaviors and social norms that ensure people of all diversities can actively participate.



What are the benefits of gender equality?

There are many benefits – for men and women – to having equal representation for women in the workplace. From business success to better personal relationships, respect, improved workplace culture and sense of community responsibility, research shows that men's lives are improved in many ways when they actively engage in making progress for women.

6 KEY SKILLS FOR BEING AN ALLY

If you're keen to begin working alongside women as an ally, here are some key skills to help guide you to success.

Listen

Listening is the foundation of trust and respect. It requires focus, sincerity, and empathy. It acknowledges the value of someone's experience and their generosity and courage in sharing it. Interrupting is not listening.

Be open

Humility and open-mindedness are crucial for making progress and being part of the solution. Avoid seeking centre stage or rushing to action-focussed solutions. Look for ways you can amplify (not replace or reword) the positive voices in the room. Give credit where it's due and recognise that a successful outcome is shared by all.

Be visible and vocal

You don't have to be a top-tier executive or an 'expert' to stand up for women. You can acknowledge and actively promote accomplishments and successes at every level (organisational initiatives, team meetings, group chats). Put your hand up for support tasks like taking meeting notes, setting up morning teas, and clearing the kitchen, which are often tacitly left to women. When you see inequalities, speak out. Even small interventions have big impacts.

Be respectful

If you've been invited to engage in conversations of diversity and inclusion, recognise that this dialogue can include experiences of exclusion, marginalisation, discrimination and active aggression. Before you speak, take these possibilities into respectful consideration and give thought to how you can contribute constructively.

Do the easy stuff and the hard stuff

Eliminating any sexist behaviours and speech you may have can be the easy part. The hard things may be uncomfortable or expose emotional responses like guilt or anxiety for yourself or others, but the best way to address this is with more honest interaction, conversation and learning, not less. Once you feel better informed, take action where you can. As you expand your understanding and experience, take a bold step to be a champion for gender justice, even if it upsets the status quo.

Develop and promote supportive partnerships

Successful allies find their experiences are mutually beneficial. Offer your 'social capital' – influence, information, connections, resources – to women and women's groups but don't make assumptions. Ask questions and learn how you can best support their objectives. Advocate for more gender-equal leadership and opportunities in your workplace – research shows that organisations thrive when they have women leaders. Volunteer to be a mentor or coach for women colleagues or become a persuasive expert on the benefits of women leaders.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

If you feel like you want more insight into issues women face in the workplace and some practical ways you can help address them, talk to women you know about their experiences. You can also visit gwn.govt.nz/men-as-allies to find links to helpful research, videos, podcasts and more.

