

10 ways to be a genuine ally to Indigenous communities

by Gary Radler

When working with Indigenous communities there isn't one way to be an ally – because every community and individual is different. Every relationship you build needs a different approach. But here are some suggestions that will help you to get started.

1. Listen to and follow the community

Find out who the traditional owners and Elders are of the land you are on. When doing long-term work on Indigenous rights, build strong relationships within the community and make sure everything is Indigenous-led.

2. Centre the stories around community

A big part of your involvement is to amplify the voices of Indigenous communities, don't make it about yourself. You should directly share these messages with your networks in their words without alteration.

3. Know the historical and cultural context

Knowing the history and being culturally competent is vital. The issues the community face come from hundreds of years of ongoing trauma and discrimination. It is not the responsibility of the community to educate you.

4. Never show up empty-handed

Showing up in support is great but offer to lend a hand as well. Use your labour, resources and skills to help out. What additional value can you bring the community?

5. Always seek consent and permission

Consent is a continuous process, not a one-time request. Seek permission before taking part in community events, particularly around cultural and spiritual events. They'll usually be labeled something like 'all community and allies welcome'.

6. Be responsible for yourself

Be aware of what resources you're taking away from communities through your presence. Ensure you've given back to the community more than you've taken away.

7. Know when to step back

Be aware of what space you are taking up. Always remember that you are there as a guest in a supportive role. There will be times when the community need to act alone, respect their boundaries.

8. Saviours are not needed, solidarity is

Solidarity is only meaningful if it is substantive and not merely performative. This means showing up to support the community with your presence alone should be the baseline, not the end game.

9. Be mindful of others' time and energy

Indigenous people often have to be advocates on a wide range of issues that affect them and their community first-hand. They don't have the choice to switch off from being involved and can be spread thin in many directions.

10. Do no harm to the community

The community should be better off, or the same, because of your presence, not worse. Follow all of these suggestions and keep reflecting on your behaviour and you're on your way to doing your part in bringing down an unjust system.

(Inspired by a similar resource created at Amnesty International USA by Kalaya'an Mendoza)