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Montréal

PRACTICING YOUTH ALLYSHIP THROUGH HUMAN RIGHTS

Being an **ally to youth** means listening, offering support, and helping young people build confidence, take the lead, and thrive. It involves standing in solidarity with youth as they take charge of their own lives.

A **human rights-based approach** to youth allyship respects, upholds, and promotes young people's rights. It involves challenging systemic barriers, addressing power imbalances, and speaking out against injustice to advance equity. **Rights-based allyship** goes beyond tokenism by requiring allies to take risks, create space for youth, and act with purpose. It also calls for continuous self-reflection on their strengths, areas for growth, and hidden biases.

This tool outlines **7 key actions for practicing rights-based allyship.** Adult allies are encouraged to use it to deepen self-awareness and set goals to strengthen their support for young people.

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HOW CAN ADULT ALLIES SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE'S RIGHTS?

1 BY HELPING THEM LEARN ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Enabling young people to understand their rights and responsibilities so they can protect and uphold their own rights and those of others.

ADULT ALLIES:

- Support young people's *Right* to *know their rights* by sharing information, starting conversations, and creating opportunities for youth to learn about their rights. A good starting point is the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, along with provincial human rights codes.

- Create spaces where youth feel safe asking questions about their rights; where youth can share their thoughts on how rights are (or aren't) respected in their school, home, or community.
- Make time to exchange with youth on local or global current events and how these connect to human rights.
- Encourage youth to create or join clubs, campaigns, and initiatives that promote rights, inclusion, and social justice. Help youth build their knowledge by accessing legal education resources, such as those offered by organizations like **Éducaloi.**

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2

BY STANDING UP FOR INCLUSION

Speaking out against unfair treatment and making sure all young people are included, respected, and treated equally.

ADULT ALLIES:

- Design activities and interactions with young people in mind, using clear, accessible language and creating a space where they feel welcome and included.

- **Learn from youth facing barriers and make a conscious effort to understand their diverse experiences - especially when designing programs or planning initiatives that affect them.**

- Confront all forms of discrimination - including racism, homophobia, sexism, ableism and ageism. Help youth speak out against exclusion and stand up for them, especially when they are misunderstood or shamed.

- Centre the lived experiences of racialized and marginalized youth, ensuring they are not overlooked.

- Reflect on personal biases and stay open to being influenced by youth perspectives, moving away from traditional power dynamics that place adults above young people.

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3

BY AMPLIFYING YOUTH VOICES

Supporting young people in speaking up and ensuring their ideas and opinions are heard and respected.

ADULT ALLIES:

- Use their position or their influence to ensure that youth concerns are heard and taken seriously, particularly in adult spaces.
- Create space for youth from diverse backgrounds to share their experiences, ensuring marginalized voices are meaningfully included in discussions and decisions.
- Involve youth advisory groups in decision-making spaces to ensure young people's needs and perspectives are meaningfully included, especially on issues that affect them.
- Facilitate meaningful exchanges and help bridge power imbalances between youth and adults, such as community members and decision-makers.
- Consider young people's age and maturity to ensure participation happens in ways that matter to them, are respectful, and reflect their wishes.

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4

BY ENABLING YOUTH ACCESS

Supporting young people in accessing the information, services, and opportunities they need to grow and thrive.

ADULT ALLIES:

- **Take time to learn what young people need and care about, ask what support would help them feel confident in new spaces or roles, and follow through on providing it.**
- Share information about resources, programs, or services in ways that are youth-friendly, clear, and accessible.
- Connect youth with networks, mentorship, or internship opportunities that align with their interests, open doors, and support their growth.
- Respect and support youth who choose non-traditional learning or career pathways.

5

BY CREATING SAFE AND RESPONSIBLE SPACES FOR YOUTH

Helping to create secure and supportive environments where young people can thrive.

ADULT ALLIES:

- Check in on young people's well-being and respond with care when they seem withdrawn, overwhelmed, or uncomfortable.
- Offer consistent emotional support without requiring youth to “earn” this through good behavior or achievement.
- Reflect on how power dynamics, trauma, or exclusion might be playing out in shared spaces, and act to address them.
- Prioritize youth needs over competing interests by asking youth what makes them feel safe, respected, and valued, adapting spaces accordingly, and staying open to their feedback.
- Stay open to having their views challenged by youth, responding with humility, curiosity, and reflection - not defensiveness.

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6 BY CHAMPIONING YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Ensuring young people have meaningful power to influence decisions, shape initiatives, and lead efforts that impact their lives and communities.

ADULT ALLIES:

- **Support youth to get involved in spaces that reflect their interests, providing guidance without directing their choices.**
- Encourage youth to create positive change in their communities by creating opportunities for them to share their perspectives, envision the future, and shape their collective environment.
- Challenge tokenism by making sure youth roles are meaningful, not symbolic.
- Create opportunities for feedback where youth can reflect on the process, evaluate adult allyship, and offer suggestions for improvement.

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7 BY UPHOLDING YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIGNITY

Making sure young people are treated with respect and that their rights are always recognized and protected.

ADULT ALLIES:

- Engage with young people as equals by truly listening to them and offering them the same respect and consideration they give adults.
- Recognize young people as capable, insightful, and resourceful - not as passive dependents or future adults, but as active participants who meaningfully contribute to their communities today.
- Speak about young people with respect, even when they're not present, avoiding dismissive or condescending language.
- **Ensure solutions reflect young people's actual needs and rights, not adult assumptions, by modeling self-reflection rather than authority.**
- Show up for young people - not to take up space, but to witness their activities, support their efforts, and demonstrate that their development and their work truly matter.

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