

How to be a good ally

An ally, also called an advisor or facilitator, is someone who helps your group in many ways. Different groups might call this person by different names, but we'll use all these terms. Often, groups have an ally who does not have a disability.



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A good ally works with a group. They don't tell the group what to do. Instead, they help the group achieve their own goals. The group decides what they want to do and how they plan to do it.

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A good ally helps groups make plans and handle different jobs. For example, if a group wants to make changes to public transportation, the advisor helps them figure out a plan. After the group decides on a plan, the advisor helps them put it into action. If the plan is tricky, the advisor makes sure everything gets done and nothing is forgotten.

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A good ally also makes sure meetings go the way the group wants. If not, the group can change how meetings are run.

A good ally helps the group understand new or hard information. They can make complex ideas simpler to understand.



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A good ally makes sure everyone gets a chance to speak and that everyone feels welcome and included.

A good ally doesn't pick sides. For example, if Bob and Joe have different ideas, the ally stays neutral and asks the group what they think.



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A good ally also manages the group's goals, online talks, and any disagreements. For instance, if group members aren't getting along, the ally steps in to solve the problem.

A good ally supports the group's projects. They offer help and serve as a resource

Who's in Charge?



The people who lead the group are the ones in charge, not the people who support the group. The ally or support person is not the boss or the leader of the group.

An ally doesn't run things; they're there to help the meeting go smoothly. Even though they're helping, they usually let the group members do most of the talking. Sometimes, if a group member asks for extra help, the ally might join in more.

Who's in Charge?



Allies and support staff don't get to vote on decisions, and they're not supposed to tell the group what they think should happen. This can be hard for many people. You might have to teach your supporters to keep their opinions to themselves. It might help to have a phrase ready for times when you need to remind them, like saying, "Let's just stick to the facts." This kind of reminder can make supporters more aware of when they're sharing their own thoughts instead of just the facts.

Examples of a Good Ally or Supporter

Marje helps out in a group where people speak up for themselves. When someone in the group has a problem, Marje helps them figure out how to solve it. She also makes sure everyone follows the agenda they made for the meeting.

Enrique is an ally. He makes sure everyone gets a turn to talk. Enrique helps the group reach the goals they set for themselves. He keeps everyone focused during their meetings.



Examples of a Good Helper or Guide

Olivia supports a local group. When the group talks about ideas for a project, Olivia writes down everything in a clear and easy-to-understand way so all the group members can see what's been discussed.



Picking Supportive Allies

Having a good interview process helps your group pick the right people to help or guide you. Everyone in the group should know exactly what kind of support they're looking for.



Picking Supportive Allies

When you're interviewing people, tell them about your group's main goals (like what you stand for, your important rules, and what you're trying to achieve) and the specific ways you need their help. Don't forget to explain your group's rules and the expectations for the person helping you.

If it's hard for your group to choose from the people who want to help, think about asking them to come to one of your meetings. This lets your group leaders see how they get along with everyone.



Sample Questions to Ask in an Interview



1. How will you make sure that all of the members have a chance to speak?
2. If a group member does not understand something, what will you do?
3. How will you make sure that everyone in the group has a say in how the group is run?

Sample Questions to Ask in an Interview

4. If the group has a problem with how you are facilitating the group, how will you react?
5. What will you do if you have an idea and the group doesn't want to do it?
6. What will you do if you think the group is making a bad choice?



Making Rules for Allies or Advisors

Your group should decide what allies can do and say to support you. Think about the ways to support individuals and the whole group. Next, make a list of rules for the person helping your group, so they know the best way to support you. Also, decide on a time, maybe once a year, to check in and talk about how the person helping you is doing.

Making Rules for Allies or Advisors



For example, some of your rules might be:

- Let the group and its members talk.
- Listen to members' thoughts. Ask for the group's opinions
- Make sure the group understands ideas.
- If the group has a problem, work with the group members to come up with a solution.

Examples of a Bad Facilitator or Advisor

Bucky is an advisor for a self-advocacy group. He brings a bill from the state legislature to share with the group. The bill uses legal language that the group members could not understand. When the group asks Bucky to bring in a plain language version of the bill, he does not bring it.

1. Why is this a problem?
2. How can the group fix this problem?
3. How can the group prevent this from happening in the future?

Examples of a Bad Facilitator or Advisor

Natasha is a facilitator for a self-advocacy group. She has an idea for the group. When Natasha talks about her idea at the next group meeting, she only calls on people who support her idea. She thinks only her idea should get attention and does not give all of the group members a chance to speak.

1. Why is this a problem?
2. How can the group fix this problem?
3. How can the group prevent this from happening in the future?

Recognizing Who is in Control

Dinah is the facilitator for a self-advocacy group. At the new officer retreat, the officers work on a plan for a community give back project. At their next group meeting, Dinah tells the group they need to start the brainstorming process and come up with ideas even though the group already made a decision. After both ideas are mapped out she encourages the group to talk about and vote on which project they want to commit to.

1. Who has the power here?
2. How can the group fix this problem?
3. How can the group prevent this from happening in the future?