

# HOW TO BE AN ALLY TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

## A GUIDE FOR BUILDING MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY AT QUEEN'S

### A WORD ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Although this guide has been informed by the various experiences and opinions of Indigenous students, staff, and faculty at Queen's, it is in no way reflective of **every** Indigenous individual in our community. Further, it cannot be applied to all Indigenous peoples, nations, or communities. This guide is intended to be a **first step** in developing genuine relationships based on equality and reciprocity with Indigenous peoples within the Queen's community.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lauren Winkler is a settler and Mohawk identified student who graduated her undergraduate degree from Queen's in Spring 2017 and her law degree at Queen's in Spring 2020.

Throughout her time at Queen's, Lauren has been active in the Indigenous community at Queen's, having been a member of Aboriginal Council of Queen's University, the Queen's Native Student Association, and the Indigenous Law Students' Alliance.

In 2018 Lauren developed a workshop called "How to be an Ally to Indigenous Peoples" on which this guide is based.

### ALLYSHIP

"An active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person in a position of privilege and power seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group."

**ALLY** - Being an ally is about disrupting oppressive spaces by educating others on the realities and histories of marginalized peoples.

**ACCOMPLICE** - An accomplice works within a system and "directly challenges institutionalized/systemic racism, colonization, and white supremacy by blocking or impeding racist people, policies, or structures.

**CO-RESISTOR** - Being a co-resistor is about standing together, as an ensemble, in resistance against oppressive forces and requires constant learning. It is combining theory and practice by establishing relationships and being deeply involved within a community that informs how one listens critically, understands an issue and influences the way they go about disrupting oppressive institutions and systemic systems.

*\*\*The above definitions come from The Anti-Oppression Network and the Montreal Urban Aboriginal Community Strategy Network.*

## **FIRST THING'S FIRST**

**“Being an ally isn’t a role you can claim for yourself, she cautioned; rather, it is a state achieved by an active, lifelong, and ever-changing commitment to relationship building with Indigenous individuals and communities.”**

-Allyship, Advocacy and the Legitimate Role of Non-Indigenous People

Ally is **not a self-proclaimed title**. Indigenous peoples may identify you as an ally. The goal is not to be labelled an ally, the goal is to develop meaningful relationships with Indigenous peoples.

## **DEFINITIONS**

**A major barrier for some people in getting involved in working with Indigenous peoples is not knowing what language is appropriate.**

**So what do I use?** The best strategy is to refer to someone as they refer to themselves. (i.e. I tell you I am Mohawk, you refer to me as Mohawk). If you do not know their specific Nation, then refer to them as Indigenous.

**Indigenous** is an umbrella term for First Nations (status and non-status), Métis and Inuit.

**Aboriginal** and Indigenous are terms that are used interchangeably. However, institutions are using the term "Indigenous" increasingly.

**First Nations:** First Nations are the descendants of the original inhabitants of Canada. Various nations, beliefs, & languages exist within this group.

**M(m)étis:** The Métis are post-contact Indigenous people. Métis refers to people with roots in the Red River community or other historic Métis communities. While métis refers to people with mixed Indigenous ancestry.

**Inuit:** Inuit is the term for Indigenous peoples from Arctic North regions of Canada, Greenland and Alaska. Inuit is the plural form, while Inuk is the singular form.

**In writing, it's best to capitalize these terms.**

## **WORDS YOU SHOULD AVOID USING:**

- Savage
- Half-Breed
- Injun
- Squaw
- Red Skins

- Eskimo

## **“SAVAGE”**

Although a popular slang meaning "ruthless" or "heartless", this term has deep historical meaning to Indigenous peoples. The term "savage" was used to justify the centuries of genocide against Indigenous peoples.

*\*\*Some of the above definitions come from the Montreal Urban Aboriginal Community Strategy Network. A link to their "Indigenous Ally Toolkit" can be found in the Resources section.*

## **“OUR NATIVE PEOPLE” AND OTHER PHRASES TO AVOID**

**Native Canadian and Indigenous Canadian:** Indigenous peoples have been on these lands for time immemorial, thousands of years before Canada became a nation. Indigenous peoples are NOT Indigenous or Native to Canada.

Many Indigenous peoples DO NOT consider themselves Canadians. They are part of their own sovereign nations and do not consider themselves part of one that has actively worked to assimilate their people.

### **Stop saying "our"**

Indigenous people do not belong to Canada. Canada is bound to Indigenous peoples through treaties that were made by early representatives of the Crown.

By saying "our" or "Canada's Indigenous peoples", you are reinforcing a false narrative that is paternalistic. This narrative is one that was created by the Canadian state and is **false**.

## **RECOGNIZING YOURSELF AS A SETTLER**

Another barrier that prevents peoples from being effective allies is their unwillingness to consider themselves as settlers. Many Canadians feel strongly about their family's history and struggle to build a life in these "new" lands. Where their pride is understandable, they need to ask themselves: "At whose expense did my family create a life here in [what we now call] Canada?" It also needs to be considered that Indigenous peoples have inhabited Turtle Island since time immemorial and anyone who has come since are seen as settlers in their eyes.

There is also discourse around what it means as a recent immigrant to Canada and to recognize yourself as a settler. I encourage you to seek out this discourse online.

## **IT'S NOT THE JOB OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE TO EDUCATE YOU**

Honestly, I could just leave this here... but I guess I will say a little more. Too often non-Indigenous peoples on campus become impatient with Indigenous staff, students, and faculty

because everyone is trying to push the Reconciliation agenda. This is frustrating as an Indigenous person because those Indigenous peoples don't even need to be helping you in the first place. Indigenous peoples understand that to move forward, we need to be involved but too often this comes with little given back in return.

**"I came here to get an education, not to give one" - Jason Mercredi (Law '18)**

### **Reciprocity is KEY!**

The key to meaningful relationships with Indigenous peoples is the same for any relationship: **reciprocity**. If you are asking an Indigenous person to relive their own trauma so that you can have a panelist, what are you giving them in return?

### **Tokenism: Alive and Well at Queen's**

Indigenous peoples at Queen's are asked to attend more events than most even know are taking place on campus. We are asked to do "Openings", land acknowledgements, drumming, to facilitate the KAIROS Blanket Exercise, etc.

- Reconciliation is more than just a buzzword
- We are not just another check on the equity list
- Give us a seat at the table

### **The "White Savior Complex"**

- can happen with any non-Indigenous group
- it is important to understand why Indigenous communities are hesitant to open their doors to representatives from institutions
- invitation-based advocacy – you cannot go in and assert your role as an ally
- there is a difference between "how can I help" and "here's what I think you need"

### **IN MEETINGS & THE CLASSROOM**

- watch how much space you take up when having conversations about Indigenous affairs
- remember: we know what is best for us
- balance: don't take up too much space, but know that sometimes Indigenous peoples are exhausted from having the same conversations over and over
- acknowledge your positionality: "I am speaking as a non-Indigenous person" or "I am speaking as a settler"

### **WHY AM I DOING THIS?**

Well, everyone else is doing it so I better...

Do I need to increase funding chances or meet a quota?

Honestly, to feed my ego...

You are not being an ally if you are doing it to fulfill your own self interest. Whether it be for a pat on the back, something to put on your resume, to get ahead in your career, etc.

Being an ally is about working with the people who experience systemic injustice to help them fight for equal rights. It is about using your privilege to uplift the voices of others, NOT to use your voice to steal the show.

Before you start to reach out, you need to ask yourself "why am I doing this" and you need to be honest with your answer.

## **HELPFUL RESOURCES**

### **BOOKS**

The Inconvenient Indian by Thomas King

Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21 Century Canada by Emma Battel Lowman and Adam J. Baker

23 Things Not to Say or Do by Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.

21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act by Bob Joseph

Canadian Justice, Indigenous Injustice by Kent Roach

The Reconciliation Manifesto: Recovering the Land, Rebuilding the Economy by Arthur Manuel

### **WEBSITES**

10 Ways to be a Genuine Ally to Indigenous Peoples - Amnesty International

"Allyship" - The Anti-Oppression Network \*\*\*\*

### **OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES**

Indigenous Allyship Toolkit - Montreal Urban Aboriginal Community Strategy Network \*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\* resources used to inform this guide

