

## So how do we go about changing the minds of people stricken by fear? Content in complacency? Or utterly indifferent?

These examples might seem inconceivable to someone who has not had to struggle with discrimination (or fear of discrimination) on a daily basis, if ever. Someone who takes their physical safety for granted, feels confident that the law is on their side, and is reasonably sure that their gender identity will not be misread would probably never have a reason to think that this might not be the case for everyone. This is what *privilege* feels like.

Each person most likely has some areas of their life in which they have privilege. We all have multiple and varied identities (such as race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc.), it stands to reason that each individual has aspects of their identities in which they hold privilege, and others in which they are marginalized. So what can we do with this privilege?

The Washington and Evans definition of an ally is, “a person who is a member of the dominant of majority group who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate with and for, the oppressed population” (Washington and Evans). The problems that we are facing run deeper than the individual. They are societal, collective issues that affect all people, whether directly or indirectly, and whether they realize it or not. So by taking an *active* stand for a marginalized group you are doing more than just trying to end discrimination against one small group of people- you are acting to create equality for all people, regardless of how they identify.

However, the key in being an effective ally is being visible. Remaining neutral in one’s actions (such as not engaging in homophobic behaviors) does not make one part of the solution. Doing nothing allows the problem to exist and makes one not just *part* of the problem, but a perpetrator as well.

Because the discrimination faced by LGBTIQ identified people is written into the very structure of our society we must act as the “wrenches in the machine” that stop the oppressive manner in which it functions. To make these changes we must step outside of our comfort zone. If you are afraid of being labeled as LGBTIQ, think of all those who are, and how they have faced discrimination because of who they are. If you find yourself complacent, consider the effects of neutrality. If indifference holds you back, think about some of the things you take for granted, and consider the ways in which your identities or perceived identities allow you fewer or greater freedoms than those around

you.

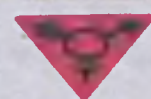
Being not only an ally, but a visible ally is what will make a difference and begin to create positive change within society. Safe Zone ally training is a good place to start. You will discuss language and definitions, strengthen your abilities and learn your limitations, and gain some useful resources. At the very least you will earn a “Safe Zone Ally” sign, which is a good way to be visible when placed on a door or laptop. The signs are a great place to start. Just having your sign posted where students, faculty, and staff can see it shows people right away that you are an ally for LGBTIQ individuals. The more of these signs there are around campus, the less likely there are to be instances of harassment, discrimination, and bullying: The more “safe zones” there are on campus, the less “unsafe zones” there will be room for.

According to the UNC mission statement, being a part of the UNC community means embracing diversity, committing to excellence, and fostering success and learning within all members of the community. However, this doesn’t just mean getting high grades and acing all of your classes. It also means taking our knowledge and applying it outside of UNC. We have come to this institute of higher learning because we have something to offer, but also much more to learn from those around us. This invaluable knowledge can be utilized to “help solve the world’s greatest problems”.

Going to a training, posting a sign, wearing an ally button...these might all seem like very small things in comparison with how much we would like to fix with the world. However, change starts small. The world won’t change in a day. But what if, maybe in a few years, the entire UNC community knew about Safe Zone, got Safe Zone trained, and began requiring new students to get trained as well? Other schools would soon catch on and follow our lead, maybe other organizations and businesses would as well...

Who knows where that would take us!

But in order for such a change to take place we must begin in our own small communities. Through slowly creating small changes in our daily lives and working to end injustices on a small social scale we can work to improve society within a broader community.



[Your Name Here]

has completed Safe Zone training and has pledged to affirm the identities of and provide resources to people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.