

Being A Strong Ally in the Immigrant Rights Movement: Basic Tactics

Many non-immigrants want to know how they can support immigrant rights, and their contributions are important. Most immigrants consistently in describe the kinds of support they need from citizen allies. Here we focus on the commitments and attitudes needed to be as respectful and effective as possible, while we offer that support. We always respect the leadership of immigrants, because successful organizing is constituency led. The communities most affected by an issue will lead the best fight against it. Immigrants are the most equipped to understand the nuances of their oppression, have the most to lose and the most to gain. Every situation is different and calls for critical thinking, but here are some general guidelines.

1. **Learn to identify the role of race and citizenship privilege in your relationships with immigrants.** Racism and citizenship privilege are pervasive in our society. One of the privileges of being citizens is not having to see or deal with this fact all of the time. When you interact with immigrant friends or acquaintances, learn to ask yourself how your citizenship status, as well as your racial/ethnic identity may be affecting the relationship.
2. **Notice who is at the center of attention and power.** Notice who speaks, what is said, how things are done and described. Notice who isn't present. Be aware of code words for race and status, and the implications of the policies, patterns and comments that are being expressed.
3. **Notice how racism in the anti-immigrant debate is denied, minimized and justified.** Resist the argument that anti-immigrant sentiment is not about race. Learn to recognize and articulate how coded racism is at the core of the anti-immigrant debate. Notice how images and symbols are used, what fears are activated, what stereotypes are exploited and what cultural groups are assumed to be inferior.
4. **Understand and learn from this country's history of racism and anti-immigrant sentiment.** Notice how anti-immigrant sentiment has changed over time and how it has subverted or resisted challenges. Study the tactics that have worked effectively against it.
5. **Understand the connections between anti-immigrant stances, racism, economic issues, sexism and other forms of injustice.** The more we know about other social justice issues, the more we can find our common goals and will be able to work together in coalition, thus sharing more victories.
6. **Take a stand against injustice.** Take risks. It is scary, difficult, and may bring up feelings of inadequacy, indecision or fear of making mistakes, but ultimately it is the right thing to do. Intervene when you see or hear racism and anti-immigrant sentiments. You will never get it right 100% of the time, but the more you try the better you will get. Try to take criticism, feedback and suggestions with grace.
7. **Be strategic.** Decide what is important to challenge and what's not. Look for the source of power and larger patterns. Don't confuse a battle with the war. Racism and anti-immigrant sentiment is flexible and adaptable. There will be gains and losses in the struggle for justice and equality.
8. **Refrain from calling names or be personally abusive.** Since power is often defined as power over others - the ability to abuse or control people - it is easy to become abusive ourselves. However, we usually end up abusing people who have less power than we do because it is less dangerous. Attacking people doesn't address the systemic nature of injustice and inequality.
9. **Learn something about the history of people who have worked for justice.** There is a long history of allies who have fought for justice. Their stories can inspire and sustain us. We can end injustice if we work together. Build support, establish networks and work with already established groups.
10. **Support the leadership of immigrants in the movement.** Do this consistently, but not uncritically, because no one needs to deal with paternalism when they are busy organizing. Don't assume that organizing isn't going on just because you don't know about it. Use the privilege you have as a citizen to work beside immigrants on common goals, but watch out for any savior mentality. Never speak on behalf of immigrants; immigrants are perfectly capable of speaking for themselves. You can look for opportunities to lift up the voices of immigrants and expose anti-immigrant sentiment for what it is. This can help remove barriers to the success of the immigrant rights movement.