



Guidelines for Being Strong White Allies

Adapted from *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Social Justice*

by **Paul Kivel**

WHAT KIND OF ACTIVE SUPPORT does a strong white ally provide to a person of color? Over the years, people of color that I have talked with have been remarkably consistent in describing the kinds of support they need from white allies.

What People of Color Want from White Allies

“Respect us”	“Listen to us”
“Find out about us”	“Don’t make assumptions”
“Don’t take over”	“Stand by my side”
“Provide information”	“Don’t assume you know what’s best for me”
“Resources”	“Money”
“Take risks”	“Make mistakes”
“Don’t take it personally”	“Honesty”
“Understanding”	“Talk to other white people”
“Teach your children about racism”	“Interrupt jokes and comments”
“Speak up”	“Don’t ask me to speak for my people”
“Your body on the line”	“Persevere daily”

Basic Tactics

Every situation is different and calls for critical thinking about how to make a difference. Taking the statements above into account, I have compiled some general guidelines.

1. **Assume racism is everywhere, every day.** Just as economics influences everything we do, just as gender and gender politics influence everything we do, assume that racism is affecting



your daily life. We assume this because it's true, and because a privilege of being white is the freedom to not deal with racism all the time. We have to learn to see the effect that racism has. Notice who speaks, what is said, how things are done and described. Notice who isn't present when racist talk occurs. Notice code words for race, and the implications of the policies, patterns, and comments that are being expressed. You already notice the skin color of everyone you meet—now notice what difference it makes.

2. **Notice who is the center of attention and who is the center of power.** Racism works by directing violence and blame toward people of color and consolidating power and privilege for white people.
3. **Notice how racism is denied, minimized, and justified.**
4. **Understand and learn from the history of whiteness and racism.** Notice how racism 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 racism, economic issues, sexism, and other forms of injustice.**
6. **Take a stand against injustice.** Take risks. It is scary, difficult, and may bring up feelings of inadequacy, lack of self-confidence, indecision, or fear of making mistakes, but ultimately it is the only healthy and moral human thing to do. Intervene in situations where racism is being passed on.
7. **Be strategic.** Decide what is important to challenge and what's not. Think about strategy in particular situations. Attack the source of power.
8. **Don't confuse a battle with the war.** Behind particular incidents and interactions are larger patterns. Racism is flexible and adaptable. There will be gains and losses in the struggle for justice and equality.
9. **Don't call 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 racism and inequality.
10. **Support the leadership of people of color.** Do this consistently, but not uncritically.
11. **Learn something about the history of white people who have worked for racial justice.** There is a long history of



white people who have fought for racial justice. Their stories can inspire and sustain you.

12. **Don't do it alone.** You will not end racism by yourself. We can do it if we work together. Build support, establish networks, and work with already established groups.
13. **Talk with your children and other young people about racism.**

Please send comments, feedback, resources, and suggestions for distribution to paul@paulkivel.com. Further resources are available at www.paulkivel.com.