



BECOMING A BETTER EMOTIONAL ALLY

To people of color in your community
and work

Being an emotional ally to your black colleagues, friends, and community members is one way to be of service.

We created this guide for you and your colleagues, family, and friends to read, practice, discuss, improve, and most importantly, take and encourage positive and meaningful action.

What is an ally?

From Amelie Lamont's open-source [Guide to Allyship](#):

Being an ally doesn't necessarily mean you fully understand what it feels like to be oppressed. It means you are taking on the struggle as your own.

Anyone has the potential to be an ally. Allies recognize that though they are not a member of the oppressed group(s) they support, they make a concerted effort to better understand the struggle, every single day.

There is much to unlearn and learn—mistakes are expected. As an ally, you need to be willing to own your mistakes and be proactive in your education.

What is an emotional ally?

Someone who openly and actively listens to and meaningfully supports the emotional health of people who have been oppressed and are struggling.

As an emotional ally, you are taking a risk — that you may say the wrong thing, do the wrong thing, not do enough, offend someone, and more. Your responsibility is to do the inner work to move through your fear, guilt, shame, and more so that they don't block you from being a meaningful source of support and powerful ally. Often, this is the greatest barrier and we want to offer you several skills and practices to help you move through it and so you can take meaningful action.

How to be a better emotional ally by practicing Acceptance and connecting to your Bigger Why

Your inner work

Accept your feelings — including the difficult and uncomfortable ones

Being an emotional ally begins with being open and practicing acceptance with yourself by fully acknowledging your feelings with clarity vs. harsh judgement.

Feel and witness your feelings about being an emotional ally, racism, oppression, and everything going on around you. You may feel fear of saying or doing the wrong thing. You may feel guilty about not doing enough or not knowing enough. You may feel stuck and not know what to do.

Acknowledge your feelings as a kind witness instead of a harsh judge. Do it with self-compassion, which means you recognize you're a human being, you're imperfect, and you want to treat yourself in a way that reduces struggle and suffering.

Accepting your own feelings doesn't mean that you don't have to work through them. It means you see them clearly and without judgement and give yourself an opportunity to move forward.

Connect to your Bigger Why

Connect to your Bigger Why, your sense of meaning and purpose in this situation, to help you move forward.

Ask yourself: *Why is it meaningful to me to support my black colleagues and friends?*

The more personal, authentic, and honest your Bigger Why, the more powerful it will be.

Once you identify your Bigger Why, use it as a bridge to act through the fear, guilt, shame, or other difficult emotions you might be experiencing. They won't disappear, but your Bigger Why is more powerful than they are.

Accept that you will make mistakes and do it with self-compassion

The goal of being an emotional ally isn't to get it perfect — it's to be a meaningful source of support to your black friends, colleagues, and community members.

You have to recognize that you will make mistakes and when you do make them, listen, acknowledge without being defensive, learn from each one, and move forward.

It's not possible to get it right every time and by practicing acceptance of that fact and reacting to your mistakes with self-compassion, you allow yourself to learn, improve, and keep taking meaningful action.

Accept your responsibility to educate yourself

As an emotional ally, it is your responsibility to educate yourself, uncover your biases, and learn as you go. It is not the responsibility of your black friends and colleagues to guide you or do this for you.

Do not add to their burden of pain by asking them to give you context about what's going on, screen your social media posts, or edit your corporate or team communications.

Educate yourself and do your best.

Your emotional ally work

Accept that things aren't normal for anyone around you

To be an emotional ally, you must have full awareness that your black friends and colleagues are struggling with so much pain, sadness, and exhaustion — even though they may not show it.

This means you need to adjust your expectations of them, especially in the context of work. This isn't the time to push for extra productivity or talk about sales goals. It's the time to prioritize the emotional health and well-being of your black colleagues first and foremost. For example, if you're a leader, consider giving them a few paid mental health days, no questions asked (without waiting for them to ask).

It's also important to acknowledge that everyone is being affected by what's going on, including the ongoing stress and uncertainty of the Coronavirus pandemic, sense of loss of normalcy, social isolation, grief, and more.

Tell your team and colleagues that you want their main focus to be on their emotional health and well-being and that you're committed to making this a priority too. Lead by example.

Initiate dialogue and accept others' feelings openly and whole-heartedly

As an emotional ally, you actively create a safe space for people who are struggling to share their feelings. You do this without expecting them to feel a certain way or bringing your own agenda to the conversation — you meet them where they are.

This starts with creating opportunities to listen. For example: When talking to someone who is black or a person of color on your team, let them know you want to be of support and listen to whatever they want to share, and if now is not the right time, you're there whenever they are ready.

When you listen, bring your full attention and focus to the other person. This is about them, not you. Don't bring up your own stories, guilt, or feelings. Don't jump in with solutions or ways to feel better. Listen to help the other person feel heard, accepted, and validated.

Whether in a 1:1 conversation, or talking with your team or family, if you listen and are fully present, you will know the best next steps.

This Chinese symbol for listening is a wonderful reminder of how to practice it, as a skill:



Accept any feedback you get about your words or actions with openness and self-compassion

When you get feedback about something you said or did, practice accepting it with clarity (“this is how it is”) vs. judgement or reactivity (“this isn’t what I meant!”).

Don't beat yourself up or get trapped in guilt. Guilt is about you and it's a trap. Remind yourself of your Bigger Why, recognize that as a human being you make mistakes, and approach the feedback with a lens of learning and opportunity to grow.

Accepting that making mistakes and learning from them is a natural part of being an emotional ally will help you fear them less and take more meaningful action.

Becoming a better emotional ally to your black colleagues and friends isn't a one-time event, but an ongoing process of taking action, learning, getting better, and showing up. These practices are just some of the tools to help you support them in a meaningful way — they offer you a place to begin.



Watch our Webinar on [Becoming an Emotional Ally](#)

Input and feedback on this handout: team@happier.com

More about Acceptance, the Bigger Why, and other emotional health skills:
<https://www.happier.com/the-happier-method/>