

Tool 10: Intersectional reflection on boots and sandals metaphor

This tool helps you to consider allyship as a mode of practice.

Imagine you are wearing a heavy boot (representing privilege) and you are stepping on someone's foot, who is wearing only sandals (representing oppression). If someone says:

'Ouch, you are stepping on my toes!'

How do you react?

Refresh your understanding of the ways that opportunities for allyship are missed:

- > Centering the mistake around yourself: 'I can't believe you think I'm a toe-stepper! I'm a good person!'
- > Denial that others' experiences are different from your own: 'I don't mind when people step on my toes.'
- > Derailing: 'Some people don't even have toes, why aren't we talking about them instead?'
- > Refusal to centre the impacted: 'All toes matter!'
- > Tone policing: 'I'd move my foot if you'd ask me more nicely.'
- > Denial that the problem is fixable: 'Toes getting stepped on is a fact of life. You'll be better off when you accept that.'
- > Victim blaming: 'You shouldn't have been walking around people with boots!'
- > Withdrawing: 'I thought you wanted my help, but I guess not. I'll just go home.'

(Based on work by Presley Pizzo)



Reflective questions:

- > Have you noticed where your service may act in these ways?
- > In these situations, what does the opposite look like?
- > How can you implement this in your practice?
- > What are you going to find uncomfortable about putting allyship into action and why?
- > How will you act as an ally?

Reference:

Pizzo, P. (n-d). Understanding privilege: "Boots and sandals". In *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team, How to be an ally*. Queen Mary University of London.

<https://hr.qmul.ac.uk/equality/protected-characteristics/race/how-to-be-an-ally>

You may find these thoughts from those who took part in the Change Project helpful:

- > *'It means to me that there should be a tailored thinking approach with individuation to each different person we work with.'*
- > *'It is vital that we take an intersectional view of everything around us, and that we act to change that.'*
- > *'White people have a responsibility to act against racism as that is where the power lies.'*
- > *'We need to focus on understanding the experiences of people and show them that we notice these experiences.'*
- > *'Change will not come without allyship.'*