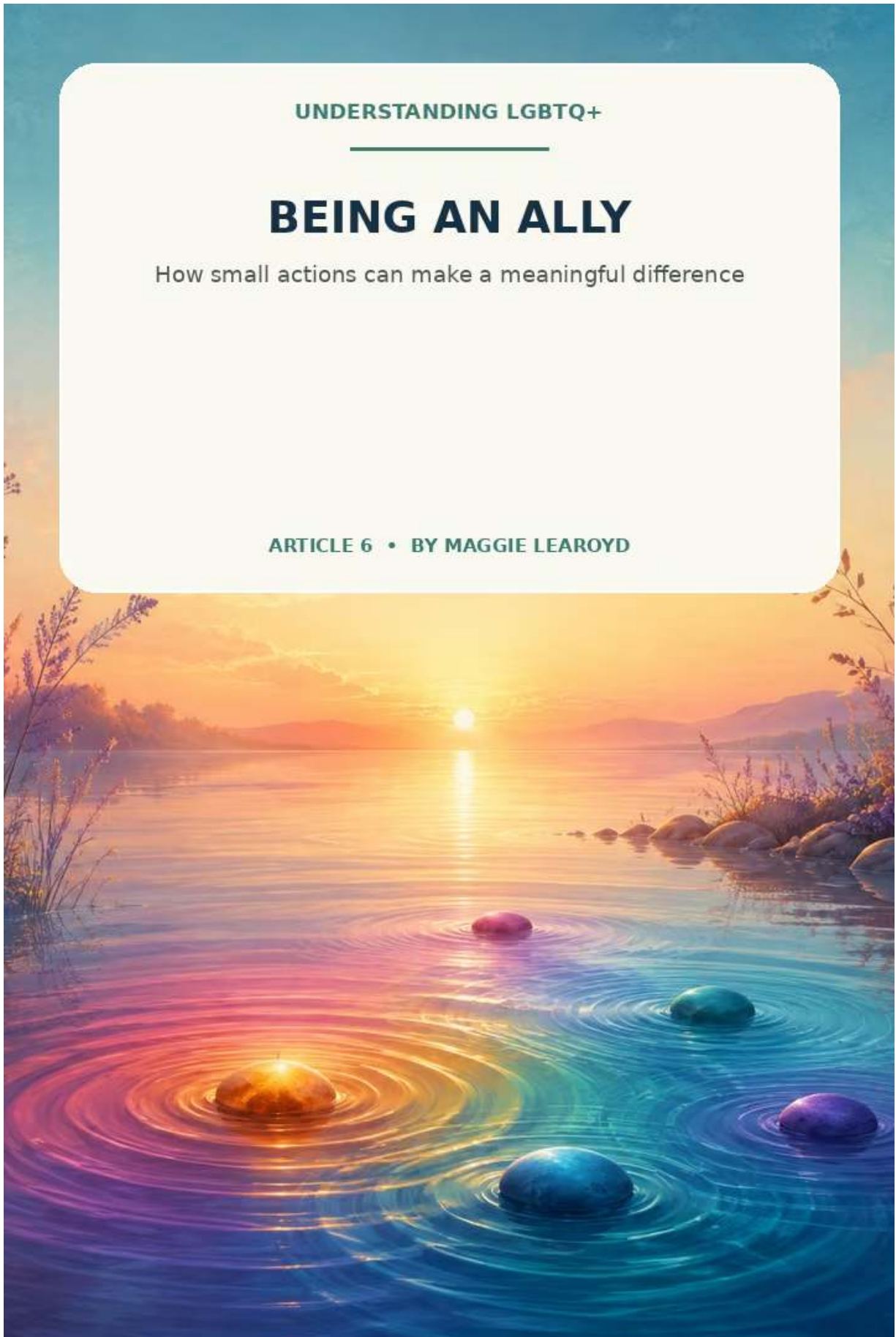


UNDERSTANDING LGBTQ+

BEING AN ALLY

How small actions can make a meaningful difference

ARTICLE 6 • BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



Being an Ally

How small actions can make a meaningful difference

"When we know better, we do better." — Maya Angelou

Introduction

When people hear the word ally, they often imagine someone leading campaigns, attending marches or speaking publicly about equality.

While these actions can be valuable, being an ally is often much simpler.

An ally is someone who chooses to treat others with dignity, respect and compassion, even when they do not share the same lived experience.

You do not need to identify as LGBTQ+ to help create safer and more inclusive environments.

You do not need to have all the answers.

You simply need to be willing to listen, learn and support others.

Being an ally is not about speaking for LGBTQ+ people.

It is about standing alongside them.

Sometimes the smallest actions—a respectful conversation, using someone's chosen name, challenging an unfair comment or creating an inclusive workplace—can have a profound impact on someone's sense of safety and belonging.

What Is an Ally?

An ally is someone who actively supports the rights, dignity and inclusion of people from a group they are not part of.

Being an ally involves recognising that different people may experience barriers or discrimination and choosing to contribute to environments where everyone feels valued.

An ally is not expected to be perfect.

Everyone makes mistakes.

What matters is a willingness to learn, reflect and grow.

Why Allies Matter

Research consistently shows that feeling accepted and supported has a positive influence on wellbeing.

For LGBTQ+ people, knowing that someone is safe to talk to can reduce feelings of isolation and increase confidence in seeking support when needed.

Allies help create environments where people feel able to be themselves without fear of judgement.

Whether in families, schools, workplaces or communities, inclusive relationships contribute to stronger mental wellbeing for everyone.

What Being an Ally Looks Like

Being an ally is demonstrated through everyday behaviour.

It might include:

- Listening without judgement.

Respecting how people describe themselves.

Using a person's chosen name and pronouns.

Avoiding assumptions about relationships or identity.

Challenging discrimination respectfully.

Continuing to learn about inclusion.

Supporting policies that promote equality.

Creating spaces where people feel heard and valued.

These actions may seem small, but they often communicate one powerful message:

- "You are safe with me."

Listening Before Speaking

One of the most valuable things an ally can do is listen.

When someone shares something personal about their identity, they are often placing trust in the person they are speaking to.

Rather than immediately offering advice or comparing experiences, it can be helpful to simply listen.

You do not need to solve the situation.

Often, people simply want to know they have been heard and accepted.

Listening with curiosity rather than judgement builds trust and strengthens relationships.

Respecting Language

Language evolves over time.

New words emerge, and people may use different terms to describe themselves.

If someone tells you the language they prefer, respecting that choice demonstrates consideration and respect.

If you are unsure which words to use, it is okay to ask politely.

Most people appreciate genuine curiosity expressed with kindness.

What If You Make a Mistake?

Many people worry about saying the wrong thing.

This fear can sometimes prevent conversations altogether.

The reality is that everyone makes mistakes.

If you accidentally use the wrong name, pronoun or terminology:

- Acknowledge it briefly.

Correct yourself.

Continue the conversation.

Avoid making the moment about your own embarrassment.

Most people value sincerity far more than perfection.

Allyship in Everyday Settings

At Home

Families can create an environment where everyone feels accepted by encouraging open conversations, avoiding assumptions and showing unconditional care.

In Schools

Teachers and school staff can foster inclusion by using respectful language, challenging bullying and ensuring all pupils feel represented and valued.

In the Workplace

Managers and colleagues can support inclusion by promoting respectful communication, addressing discrimination and creating cultures where people feel psychologically safe.

In Healthcare

Healthcare professionals can improve patient experiences by listening without assumptions, respecting identities and recognising that every person's circumstances are unique.

Small Actions That Matter

Many acts of allyship are quiet and consistent rather than dramatic.

Examples include:

- Introducing yourself with your own pronouns if appropriate.

Correcting misinformation respectfully.

Including LGBTQ+ families when discussing relationships.

Reading reliable educational resources.

Supporting inclusive workplace policies.

Checking that forms and documents use inclusive language.

Speaking up when someone is treated unfairly.

Continuing to learn rather than assuming you already know enough.

These actions contribute to cultures where inclusion becomes part of everyday life.

Common Misconceptions

"I have to understand everything before I can be supportive."

No.

Learning is an ongoing process.

Kindness can begin long before complete understanding.

"If I make one mistake, I'll offend someone forever."

Most people recognise that mistakes happen.

A sincere apology and willingness to learn usually matter far more than getting everything right immediately.

"Being an ally means speaking for LGBTQ+ people."

Effective allies create opportunities for LGBTQ+ voices to be heard rather than replacing them.

"One person can't make a difference."

Communities change because individuals choose to act with compassion every day.

Small actions often have lasting effects.

Did You Know?

Studies consistently suggest that inclusive workplaces and schools are associated with greater wellbeing, stronger engagement and a greater sense of belonging for many people—not only those who identify as LGBTQ+.

Creating inclusive environments benefits everyone.

Real-Life Example

Emma worked in a busy office where one of her colleagues recently shared that they were transgender.

She worried about saying the wrong thing and felt anxious that she might make a mistake.

Instead of avoiding conversations, Emma politely asked which name and pronouns they preferred.

She apologised once when she slipped up, corrected herself and carried on.

Months later, her colleague told her,

"You never made me feel like I was a problem to solve. You simply treated me like everyone else."

Emma realised that allyship wasn't about having perfect knowledge.

It was about showing consistent respect.

Reflection Questions

Take a few moments to consider:

- What does being an ally mean to you?

How comfortable are you asking respectful questions when you are unsure?

What small action could you take this week to create a more inclusive environment?

How can listening with curiosity strengthen your relationships?

Practical Ways to Be an Ally

Listen before offering advice.

Respect names and pronouns.

Avoid assumptions about identity or relationships.

Continue learning from reliable sources.

Challenge discrimination respectfully.

Support inclusive policies and practices.

Encourage environments where everyone feels safe to be themselves.

Accept that learning is lifelong and mistakes are opportunities to grow.

Key Takeaways

Allyship is about consistent respect rather than perfection.

Listening is one of the most powerful ways to support others.

Small everyday actions can make a significant difference.

Inclusive environments benefit everyone.

Curiosity, humility and compassion strengthen relationships.

Every person has the opportunity to contribute to a more inclusive society.

Final Thoughts

Being an ally is not defined by grand gestures.

It is reflected in the everyday choices we make—the conversations we have, the assumptions we challenge and the respect we show to the people around us.

You do not need to be an expert to make someone feel welcome.

You simply need to approach others with openness, empathy and a willingness to learn.

When people feel accepted for who they are, they are more likely to experience a sense of belonging, confidence and psychological safety.

These are the foundations of healthy communities.

As Maya Angelou wisely said,

"When we know better, we do better."

Each of us has the opportunity to contribute to a world where differences are met not with fear or judgement, but with curiosity, respect and compassion. By choosing kindness in our everyday interactions, we help create spaces where everyone has the freedom to live authentically and be valued for who they are.