

Practical Instructions for Practicing #IllGoWithYou Allyship

Let's say you have an #IllGoWithYou button on your bag or coat. You're out somewhere—school, a bar, a library, anywhere—and a person approaches you. They say “I see you have an ally button. Would you mind hitting the restroom with me?”

1. *Ask your buddy where they'd like you to be.* If you don't need to go, you can stand at the sink, or just outside the bathroom door – whichever is most comfortable for you and your buddy.
2. *Speak only when spoken to.* Don't start a conversation with your buddy; staying quiet has likely helped them avoid harassment in the past. This also goes for harassers; dirty or mean looks cannot hurt you or your buddy. Words can escalate a situation very quickly; use your voice only when absolutely necessary.
3. *Stay calm.* Your buddy might get called names or asked inappropriate questions. You might not have experienced this kind of behavior before, and it's okay to be nervous. Keep calm by breathing slowly and remembering the most important thing is to exit the bathroom safely.
4. *Answer questions in a quiet, respectful, and firm voice.* “My friend is in the correct bathroom, thank you.” “We're just leaving.” “My friend is here to use the bathroom.”

**#IllGoWithYou does not condone threats, harassment, or assault.
Your button is not a sheriff's badge.**

Special note on children: Kids will ask lots of questions like “Is that a boy or a girl?” If you and your buddy can consult ahead of time about who answers kid-questions, that's great. If your trans buddy wants you to answer the question, you can say “My friend is a girl/boy/both/neither/person. Are you a boy or a girl?” Keep it light. Smile.

5. *Have an exit strategy.* If anyone starts to badger, yell at, or touch your buddy, stick close to your buddy and move towards the exit immediately and decisively. Do not make eye contact with the perpetrator. Tell your friend “Come on, we're going to be late,” or “We're leaving now.” Follow it up with “Please move out of our way,” if the exit is blocked.

In Case of Active Harassment

We hope that the majority of the time, the presence of an ally will stop harassment before it begins. However, we recognize that by acting as active allies, we are potentially exposing ourselves to harassment or violence as well.

Your primary goal needs to always be keeping yourself safe. You cannot help if you are hurt.

In case of active harassment, begin by executing step 5 above: Move towards the exit, and speak clearly and firmly about your intent to leave. Keep your tone somewhere between no-nonsense kindergarten teacher and customer service person: a moderate-high pitch, speaking a touch slower than average, with the assumption that you will be listened to and respected.

If your exit is blocked and your buddy is being attacked, scream. Make as much noise as you can. Yell “Stop! No! Stop hitting my friend!” Do not get in the middle of any physical altercations. Film it on your phone, if you can. If you feel it is safe, call 911. If you can get out to run for help, do so.

Stay with your buddy after any harassment or assault. Ask your buddy if they wish to report the incident to the police. Stay with them whether they choose to involve police or not. Ask if they would like you to phone a friend or family member for support. If they do go to the police or hospital, give a statement.

If an incident occurs, get some support for yourself. Self-care is a vital piece of this work. Take some time to talk about the incident with trusted friends or family members.

If you feel comfortable, offer to keep in touch. If you’ve offered to be a buddy for someone you didn’t know, and an incident occurs, they may want to forget you along with the situation. Or they might not. That’s up to them.

Remember the rule of “Comfort In, Dump Out”. That means if you have Feelings about an incident, don’t dump those feelings on your buddy, or other trans* friends you may have. Talk with trusted friends and family for whom the anti-trans harassment is not so close to home.

Counseling, meditation, exercise, artistic expression and journaling are some good self-care tools. So is screaming and yelling at a tree, pillow, or a loved and trusted person who has agreed to hold space for yelling. However you handle it, make sure you do engage in some self-care. Even being a witness to harassment or violence carries weight, and even if you don’t immediately feel the impact, it is important to take those self care steps.