

HOW TO BE A FIRST NATIONS ALLY

SIMPLE AND PRACTICAL WAYS TO BE AN ALLY
TO FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO LEARN ABOUT FIRST NATIONS ALLYSHIP

We proudly acknowledge all Traditional Owners of the lands, waterways and skies throughout what is now called Australia. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (First Nations) People are the first peoples of Australia and the proud custodians of the land that we live on.

First Nations People are not one group but rather comprise of hundreds of groups with unique languages, histories and traditions that form the oldest continuous cultures on the planet.

Since colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have fought for their rights, including the right to make decisions for their families, community, and their Country.

The vast majority of Australians want to do something to help improve reconciliation and believe it's important for everyone to learn about the histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Allies like you play a vital role in challenging injustice, defending equality and celebrating diversity. We hope this guide is a stepping stone towards deepening your awareness of First Nations allyship.

This guide contains images or names of people who have passed away.

This guide discusses racism and includes examples that could be distressing. If you need resources or support go to beyondblue.org.au or ring Lifeline at 13 11 14 for 24/7 free counselling. You can also contact 13YARN at 13 92 76 and talk with an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander crisis supporter.

Your wellbeing matters. Please don't hesitate to reach out for help.

I WANT TO SEE OUR YOUNG ONES LIVING IN HAPPY, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES, COMING OUT OF SCHOOL EDUCATED AND GETTING GOOD JOBS.

RODNEY DILLON

Proud Palawa Elder and
Amnesty International Indigenous Rights Advisor



Rodney Dillon. © Renae Saxby

Rodney Dillon here. I'm a proud Palawa man from Lutruwita, Tasmania. I've worked at Amnesty for the past seventeen years.

My great-great Grandmother Smith was the daughter of Tanganooturra, from Cape Portland in Lutruwita. Tanganooturra was forcibly removed to Wybalenna on Flinders Island. She survived the invasion, but like the other Aboriginal children at Wybalenna, she was taken from her mother.

Grandmother Smith was a powerful woman who has always inspired me. She eventually managed to move to the southeast of Lutruwita. My family has lived down this way now for generations. This is where we belong now.

Fighting for justice for my people is something I just have to do until things change for the better.

In my lifetime I want to see our young ones living in happy, healthy communities, coming out of school educated and getting good jobs. I want to play a part in putting them on the road to becoming community leaders.

Non-Indigenous people's support and influence can be really, really important to make positive change. We need people who are willing to understand the past so these families have got a safer future. The people who put the wall up, I can understand why it's there, but the people who pull it down - they're the ones we need.

WHAT DOES BEING AN ALLY MEAN?

WHEN I THINK OF ALLYSHIP, I THINK IT'S ABOUT UNCOVERING UNCONSCIOUS BIASES, AMPLIFYING FIRST NATIONS VOICES, AND FINDING TANGIBLE WAYS TO SUPPORT FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES.

RACH MCPHAIL

Proud Gomeri woman and
Amnesty International Indigenous Rights Campaigner



Rach McPhail. © Sarah-Jane Edis

Decades of evidence from healthcare to justice reinvestment show that First Nations Peoples flourish when they're involved in the decisions made about their lives.

But we make up only 3% of the population, so we need allies like you to stand in solidarity with First Nations Peoples and call for change.

Someone who is an ally to First Nations communities finds opportunities to amplify our voices and actively seeks information to learn from.

They attend rallies, they repost content from First Nations accounts. They find ways to help without waiting for mob to ask.

Allies are willing to have tough

conversations with friends and family to challenge discriminatory views.

Allies walk the walk and they show up but never take the spotlight.

Above all, they are kind, compassionate, and caring.

There's no perfect beginning or end to allyship – you just have to be curious and willing to learn.

Some questions we can ask ourselves to start with are:

- How would I describe my understanding of First Nations histories?
- Do I know the First Nations place name and the Traditional Owners of the Country I'm on?
- Do I have any relationships with the local First Nations community?

OUR SHARED HISTORY

Learning from the past is how we reflect on who we are now and where we want to go.

Truth-telling is a real opportunity for all of us to understand the real history of this country and is a key step towards reconciliation and healing.

Was Australia settled or invaded? Does it matter?

Settled implies a peaceful movement of people and sanitises the true history of Australia – that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were subject to horrific violence by the British, whose goal was to eliminate the local population and take control of the land.

In Lutruwita (Tasmania), the British engaged in genocidal policies and practices – any settlers who killed Indigenous people had immunity from legal consequences. Solicitor-General Alfred Stephen declared “then I say boldly and broadly exterminate!” Thousands of children were forcibly removed from their families – what we now know as the Stolen Generations.

This history is sad but true and continues to affect lives today. The language we choose to use plays a big part in determining the overall narrative. Even without meaning to, avoiding words like ‘invasion’ contributes to the erasure of that history.



THE MYTH OF THE INDIGENOUS HUNTER-GATHERER

From First Fleet officer John Hunter:

Aboriginals around Sydney 'set the country on fire for several miles extent...to clear that part of the country through which they have frequent occasion to travel, of the brush or underwood'.

Terra nullius means 'land belonging to no one' and was the legal principle used by the British to justify the colonisation of the continent and the dispossession of First Nations People.

To claim terra nullius the British used racist myths of Indigenous People as 'uncivilised' and erased the complex legal, social and economic systems that existed well before invasion.

Knowledge of these systems have been preserved through many different types of histories.

Oral history is how First Nations People have passed on information from generation to generation. There are written accounts from people on the First Fleet describing the many ways Indigenous People practised land management, like controlled burnings, irrigation systems and grain harvest.

There are also archaeological sites across the continent – human-made fish traps, stone quarries, and 30,000-year-old grindstones – that showcase the incredible innovations of First Nations People.

WATCH > [THE DARK EMU STORY](#) TO SEE INCREDIBLE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE

Indigenous People fought and resisted colonisation from the very beginning to defend their lands and communities from massacres, kidnappings and thefts.

Pemulwuy, a Bijiagal man, was one of the earliest resistance leaders.



He led raids across areas now known as Toongabbie, Parramatta and the Hawkesbury River, attacking crop fields and livestock supplies to weaken the colony. Such was his impact, in 1801 Governor King issued an order for Pemulwuy's death or capture, and he was fatally shot the next year.

Truganini was a courageous mother, warrior and diplomat. Born in Lutruwita,



Truganini was a fierce defender of her culture and Indigenous resistance. In her lifetime, Truganini negotiated with white authorities to ensure the survival of her people after the Black War, eventually becoming a guerilla warrior, attacking huts and stations from Dandenong to Cape Paterson.

LEARN > UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE MAP OF FRONITER MASSACRES [C21CH.NEWCASTLE.EDU.AU/COLONIALMASSACRES](#)

FIRST NATIONS ACTIVISM

In 1933, First Nations activists in Melbourne founded the Australian Aborigines' League to advocate for Indigenous rights.

One of their first initiatives was to petition King George VI for Aboriginal representation in parliament.

1,184 signatures were collected but the government refused to forward the petition, so the League and the Aborigines Progressive Association in NSW organised a Day of Mourning on the 26th January in protest.

The call for justice also extended to other communities. In response to Kristallnacht, the League marched to deliver a letter to the German consulate, demanding an end to the prosecution of Jewish people.



EXPLORE > WILLIAMCOOPER.MONASH.EDU
TO SEE AN ARCHIVE OF THE LEAGUE'S LETTERS

THE HIDDEN ABORIGINAL STOCKWOMEN

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, Aboriginal stockwomen were instrumental in building the country's cattle industry, at a time where hiring women was illegal.

To get around the law, some disguised themselves as male riders or would be recorded in the paperwork as men. The stockwomen used their traditional knowledge of Country – the seasons, food and water sources – to participate in all aspects of station life and help frontiersmen navigate the country.

READ > **ABORIGINAL STOCKWOMEN: THEIR LEGACY IN THE AUSTRALIAN PASTORAL INDUSTRY** BY DR TAURI SIMONE

When people think of truth-telling, they think of atrocities – the Frontier Wars, Stolen Generations, massacres – which continue to have a significant effect on Indigenous People.

But to me, truth-telling isn't just about the sad things. There is so much positive history to celebrate. Indigenous People had trade routes, advanced farming techniques, and amazing inventions that were thousands of years ahead of their time.

This is our shared history.

KACEY TEERMAN, proud Gomeri woman and Amnesty International Indigenous Rights Campaigner



Kacey Teerman. © Rach McPhail

INDIGENOUS RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

Like us, you believe no one should ever be held back, targeted or disadvantaged in any way because of their background. We believe Australia can and should be a just and inclusive country that values equality for all.

Human rights are universal, but right now in Australia, they are not equally upheld.

For hundreds of years, systems brought here through colonisation have led to social and economic disadvantages for First Nations People.

Closing the Gap research has highlighted serious inequalities, like:

- Indigenous babies are twice as likely to die in the first 28 days since birth, compared to non-Indigenous babies
- Indigenous People have a significantly shorter life expectancy compared to non-Indigenous people
- The rate for suicide among Indigenous People is twice the rate of non-Indigenous People.

READ > [CLOSINGTHEGAP.GOV.AU/NATIONAL-AGREEMENT/TARGETS](https://closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets)

Kacey Teerman. © Pablo Barnes



MY WHOLE LIFE I HAVE SEEN THE CONSEQUENCES OF LAWS AND POLICIES THAT DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECT FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE. FOR MANY, IT IS ACROSS EVERY FACET OF OUR LIVES: EDUCATION, HEALTHCARE, HOUSING AND THROUGH THE LEGAL SYSTEM.

KACEY TEERMAN

Proud Gomerai woman and

Amnesty International Indigenous Rights Campaigner

CASE STUDY: RAISE THE AGE

In Australia, children as young as 10 can be put in prison. This mainly affects Indigenous kids who are locked up for offences for which non-Indigenous kids typically aren't.

It tears Indigenous kids away from their families, denies them a proper education and puts them at even more of a disadvantage compared to non-Indigenous kids.

These kids are so young they have baby teeth and still use booster seats in cars.

Overwhelming evidence from health experts, social workers and legal experts shows that sending young children to prison results in even worse outcomes.

Evidence shows that community-led justice reinvestment and diversion programs are much more effective. The Northern Territory government's own research shows that 76% of kids who complete diversion programs don't reoffend within 12 months.

Kids who participate in these programs are far more likely to remain out of jail and in their communities, and get back to school.

Despite this, there's a record amount of money being spent on prisons, and very little being spent on programs that actually work.

Australia has one of the lowest ages of criminal responsibility in the world – the global average is 14 years old. We've been repeatedly criticised by the United Nations for failing to reform the current minimum age.

Following a long campaign by activists and organisations, the ACT committed to raising the age to 14 in July 2025. **But every child deserves to be safe, no matter which state or territory they live in.**

Politicians have the power to change the laws to keep children safe from prison and instead invest in the solutions that work.

Learn more about how you can help pressure the government to Raise the Age:

- Sign the petition > action.amnesty.org.au/act-now/raise-the-age
- Follow our campaign page > amnesty.org.au/campaigns/indigenous-justice
- Subscribe to the Community Is Everything newsletter > action.amnesty.org.au/cie-newsletter-signup

WHAT CAN THE GOVERNMENT DO TO BETTER RESPECT INDIGENOUS RIGHTS?

Since colonisation, governments have imposed their idea of what is best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with devastating consequences:

- Starting in the 1800s, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were forcibly removed from their families by the Australian government to be assimilated into white society.
- The Native Welfare Act 1905 allowed the WA government to surveil Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and made it an offence to travel beyond designated limits, leave a job, or marry without the Commissioner's consent.
- The Northern Territory Intervention in 2007 imposed blanket policies regardless of need, like compulsory income management.

This isn't something that happened in the past. First Nations People to this day are still subject to discrimination and mistreatment and excluded from effectively participating in processes that affect their rights and their futures.

WHEN WE CAN HAVE A SAY IN WHAT AFFECTS US, THEN WE CAN GET OUTCOMES.

IT'S RESPECTFUL AND CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE.

RODNEY DILLON

Proud Palawa Elder and Amnesty International Indigenous Rights Advisor

Self-determination refers to an ongoing process of ensuring that peoples can make decisions and participate in matters that affect their lives.

The right to self-determination is key to the dignity and well-being of First Nations People and enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.



Rodney Dillon and Rach McPhail. © Renae Saxby

BETTER LAWS AND POLICIES

Information from communities means better quality laws and policies and targeted investment.

BETTER OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

This results in practical and realistic solutions that will close the gaps in areas like health, employment and education.

BETTER FUTURE FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS

All of us deserve to live in a country where all people, regardless of their background, have the same opportunities to thrive.

"I've seen really poor housing, I've seen inside of prisons where we've got 10-year-old kids. I see the empty classrooms and kids not going to school.

When the state government gets money for Aboriginal housing, they don't have to spend the money on housing. No one's held accountable because the Federal Government makes a decision about where it goes, and then the state governments do what they want with it.

We're not talking about spending any more money. We just need to keep people accountable for the money that is spent and that it goes to where they say it's going to go."

RODNEY DILLON

Proud Palawa Elder and
Amnesty International Indigenous Rights Advisor

IT ALL STARTS WITH YOU!

DECOLONISE YOUR MIND

Allyship starts with accepting that our country's history means that everything – what we are taught, the laws we follow, the media we consume – has been shaped by colonisation.

It means challenging our concepts and beliefs and the way we see the world. Sometimes it means even questioning things you've learned from friends and loved ones.

'Unlearning' is a lifelong process and requires self-reflection and listening.

You can ask questions like, growing up, what representations of First Nations People did you see around your community, your workplace, on TV?

In how many languages can you say 'hello'? Are any of them First Nations languages?

If this process makes you feel uncomfortable, know that's normal. It's part of the process and unavoidable. Take your time and be kind to yourself, but don't be discouraged. Being curious and willing is an amazing first step.

LEARN HOW TO SAY HELLO!

Dharug dhalang	warami
Gamilaraay	yaama
Yuggera	gurumba bigi
Woiwurrung	wominjeka
Noongar	kaya

LEARN >
50WORDS.ONLINE/LANGUAGES

Before colonisation, there were over 250 Indigenous languages in Australia, including 800 dialects. Today, at least 120 Indigenous languages are spoken, but the majority are considered endangered. First Nations People are working to revive and preserve their languages.

50 Words is a project by First Languages Australia and the University of Melbourne that teaches you 50 words in every Indigenous language.

PRIVILEGE: a right, advantage or benefit afforded to one group of people and not another.

Reflecting on and understanding our privileges allows us to question how the society around us and broader discriminatory structures *encourage* privilege and discrimination.

These are some examples of privileges people can hold:

- Never worrying about where your next meal is coming from
- Having people in leadership positions who look like you
- Living in cities with easier access to health services

Can you think of any privileges that may have affected your life?

It's also important to accept that all of us will make mistakes.

As a caring person, it's natural to feel bad if someone corrects you. Your first reaction might lean defensive. Remember, it's not criticism of who you are, but guidance so you can create a safe and inclusive environment.

The best thing you can do is listen, apologise, and reflect on the experience in your own time.

Mistakes happen - it's how we learn from them that matters.

- Avoid providing an excuse or explanation that defends what you said or did.
- Instead you can say, "I'm sorry and thanks for sharing that with me, it couldn't have been easy".

Do consider:

- What biases, stereotypes or previous experiences led me to do or say that?
- How might it feel to experience discrimination all the time?
- What did I learn and what would I do differently?



Rodney Dillon speaking to Amnesty staff © Kacey Teerman

UNDERSTANDING RACISM

Racism has shaped human history for thousands of years and it's shaping the world we live in now. It exists in different ways, embedded in our culture, our communities, and ourselves.

But the violent history of colonialism and dispossession, and the racist ideas that underpin it mean that First Nations People in Australia have unique experiences of racism.

Most of us are familiar with interpersonal racism which occurs in interactions between individuals. This is different to systemic racism, where people are treated unjustly by governments, policies and laws, in the media, in health, or in education.

RACISM ON THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL CAN LOOK LIKE:

- Racial slurs directed at First Nations People during sporting events
- A pub refusing entry to someone because they are Aboriginal
- Questioning an Indigenous person's credentials because of their background

RACISM ON THE SYSTEMIC LEVEL CAN LOOK LIKE:

- Indigenous children being arrested for offences non-Indigenous children are given warnings for
- Less representation of Indigenous people in leadership roles, including in politics and business

Most importantly, both forms of racism reinforce each other.

Repeated experiences of racism build up over time and have significant emotional, psychological and behavioural tolls. Systemic racism can be invisible, especially to those who aren't affected.

The ability to navigate society and life without being touched by racism is a form of privilege. Understanding types of racism and how privilege works to shape our ways of thinking can help us to challenge assumptions as allies to First Nations communities.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF EVERY DAY DISCRIMINATION?

IT MUST BE NICE GETTING ALL THOSE HANDOUTS.

There's no special welfare for First Nations People. Indigenous People receive support for the same reasons non-Indigenous People do, but are overrepresented in areas like poverty as a legacy of colonialism. Saying this also implies wrongly that First Nations People don't pay taxes, and therefore don't deserve civic rights.

YOU'RE REALLY PRETTY FOR AN ABORIGINAL.

Most people say this because they have a stereotypical idea of what an Indigenous person looks like but there's no one way to look Indigenous. This 'compliment' is actually deeply hurtful because it perpetuates racist beauty standards that idealise 'white' features.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL? GET OVER IT AND LET US CELEBRATE THE PUBLIC HOLIDAY.

For many First Nations People, January 26 is a day of mourning and a painful reminder of the ongoing oppression communities face on a daily basis. There's no 'getting over it' until these injustices are addressed. Often First Nations People receive racist comments just for pointing this out.

DIDN'T THE BRITISH MAKE LIFE BETTER ANYWAY?

There already was a 'way of life'. Colonisation tried to wipe out First Nations laws, kinship systems, technologies, traditions and languages. It led to massacres, genocidal policies, Stolen Generations, segregation, racist laws, health issues, and intergenerational trauma. Ignoring or downplaying these atrocities is incredibly insensitive.

MY INDIGENOUS FRIEND DISAGREES.

First Nations People are not a monolith and have different beliefs and views, just like any other group. There's no one spokesperson for Indigenous issues.

CELEBRATE CULTURE

First Nations cultures, languages and traditions have survived repeated attempts to erase and assimilate, because of the strength and resilience of First Nations People.

Too often, Indigenous cultures are sidelined despite being an undeniable part of the country. As allies, we can play a part in ending that exclusion by showing awareness of, and respect towards, Indigenous cultures.



Rach McPhail. © Sarah-Jane Edis

Rach McPhail: Place Names in Addresses

In 2020, I founded Place Names in Addresses, calling on Australia Post to include a spot for traditional place names. Now it's part of the official address guidelines.

At the time when First Nations kids started being forcibly removed from their families, my great great Grandmother moved with her white stockman husband and their son off her Country to a whole different area in NSW.

Today, I proudly add First Nations place names to my address to acknowledge and celebrate the fact that each area

had a former beautiful name prior to colonisation.

I'm working on getting a place names database project up and running, however in the meantime, it's really beautiful to see so many allies giving it a go and putting in the effort to find out the correct traditional name for where they live and work.

This is a small change that people can adopt that will make a big difference in educating the public and bringing more visibility to Indigenous histories and cultures.

How do I find out the traditional Country I am on?

Find community groups in your area, like a Local Aboriginal Land Council. Your local Council can also refer you to the relevant First Nations advisory group in your area.

READ > [AUSPOST.COM.AU/SENDING/GUIDELINES/ADDRESSING-GUIDELINES](https://auspost.com.au/sending/guidelines/addressing-guidelines)

Others ways to celebrate culture

An Acknowledgement of Country is something anyone can do.

By sharing an acknowledgement you are recognising the local community's ongoing connection to, and care for, Country and acknowledging the land on which a meeting is being held. You can also include them in email signatures, websites and other published materials.

NAME THE COUNTRY YOU ARE ON	USE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE INFORMATION	HIGHLIGHT IMPORTANT OBSERVANCES
I acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation and pay my respect to Elders past and present. This is and always will be Aboriginal land.	I'm on Dharug land, in the suburb of Parramatta, which derives its name from the Burramattagal, meaning 'place of the eels'.	I'd like to note that Sorry Day is next week. We all have a part to play in ending the ongoing impacts of colonisation and I encourage everyone to attend a local event.

Acknowledgement or Welcome?

A Welcome to Country is a ceremony that can only be performed by a local Elder or Traditional Custodian, where they wish people a safe passage as they travel across their Country. An Acknowledgement of Country is the reciprocal of this, to acknowledge the Country name and custodians, and that sovereignty has never been ceded.

Support First Nations-owned businesses

Whether it's a gift for yourself or a loved one, support First Nations-owned businesses. Add native ingredients to your cooking, decorate with beautiful homewares and wear clothes that show off your values!

HOMEWARES

Marara Designs

mararadesigns.com.au

Wurrumay Collective

wurrumaycollective.com

Kinya Lerrk

kinyalerrk.com.au

FOOD

Indigiearth

indigiearth.com.au

Mabu Mabu

mabumabu.com.au

Jalajala Treats

jalajalatreats.com.au

FASHION

Check out the 'Ally-friendly' categories!

Clothing the Gaps

clothingthegaps.com.au

Gammin Threads

gamminthreads.com

Haus of Dizzy

hausofdizzy.com

USE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Using inclusive language is a way of recognising and valuing the diversity of the many cultural groups belonging to Australia. It is also one way of recognising the contributions that both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and community groups have made and continue to make to our society.

To get started, these are some of the different terms that you may come across:

FIRST NATIONS

First Nations is a collective name for the original people of Australia and their descendants, and is used to emphasise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples lived on this continent before European invasion and colonisation.

INDIGENOUS

The term Indigenous is generally used when referring to both First Peoples of Australia – Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. However, because ‘Indigenous’ is not specific, sometimes it is preferred to use ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ instead. This is because the word ‘Indigenous’ lumps these communities together and doesn’t reflect their individuality, differences and uniqueness.

ABORIGINAL

‘Aboriginal’ is an adjective and widely used to describe ‘Aboriginal people’. ‘Aboriginal Peoples’ is a collective name for the original people of Australia and their descendants. A Torres Strait Islander person is a descendant of the Torres Strait Islands, which are located to the north of mainland Australia in Queensland. Importantly, the term ‘Aboriginal’ is not inclusive of Torres Strait Islander people.

DOWNLOAD > Inclusive Language Guide: [AMNESTY.ORG.AU/
INCLUSIVE-LANGUAGE-AND-EVENTS-GUIDE](https://www.amnesty.org.au/inclusive-language-and-events-guide)

ELDER

An Elder is an identified and respected member of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. They are someone who has gained recognition as a Custodian of knowledge and lore, and who has permission to disclose knowledge and beliefs. Elders generally hold key community knowledge and are expected to provide advice and support to community members.

MOB

Mob is a term identifying a group of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people associated with a particular place or country. The term 'Mob' is more generally used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Therefore, it may not be appropriate for non-Indigenous people to use this term.

How come it was okay to say in the past?

Whether it's used consciously or unconsciously, language that reflects prejudiced, stereotyped or discriminatory views of particular people or groups does real harm by keeping those harmful views alive.

As the world around us evolves, so does the language we use. The great thing about language is that it can change to reflect our values and help us build a safer and more compassionate society.

Can I say that?

Not all language is appropriate for people outside specific communities to use.

If you're not sure, it's always okay to ask. Listening to, and engaging with media from various sources can also help you keep up with language.

I'm scared I'll say the wrong thing!

That's okay, everyone starts somewhere. It can take a while to change the language you use. Try to think about it as a habit you can easily train.

If you slip up, remember to apologise. You can say: "Sorry and thanks for letting me know, I'll make sure I use the correct wording from now on".

READ > [NARRAGUNNAWALI.ORG.
AU/ABOUT/TERMINOLOGY-GUIDE](https://narragunnawali.org.au/about/terminology-guide)

CHALLENGE DISCRIMINATION

As an ally, one of the most powerful things you can do is have conversations with friends, family and your neighbours. By speaking out, you can give others an opportunity to learn and reflect. You're also standing up for what you believe in - empathy, compassion and fairness.

It's important to be open and understanding. Just like you, most people are seeking out difference sources of information because they care about the world they live in.

That's why sharing your knowledge and perspective with the people close to you can be so impactful.

Having these conversations can feel awkward and uncomfortable but there are different ways to respond depending on the situation and the people around you.

Here are some tips on how to have effective conversations:

TIP 1

Avoid questions that seem accusatory, like “Why would you think that?” These questions tend to make people feel defensive and they may treat the situation as a conflict rather than a discussion. Instead, try acknowledging their perspective before offering an alternative viewpoint. You could say: “There's some misinformation out there, I can see how you thought that”.

TIP 2

Appeal to shared values of respect, fairness and unity. Try saying: “I hear you, I also believe that we all deserve to be treated with respect and dignity, no matter our background”.

TIP 3

Lecturing someone or making them feel guilty can shut down the conversation. **Try using 'I' statements to gently correct them.** You could say: “I've realised it's pretty hurtful to say that” or “I've actually learnt that's not true”.



TIP 4

It can also help to appeal to empathy and shared experiences by talking about people, rather than numbers or statistics. Ask people to clarify their stance and ask them what they would do if they were in the same situation. Try saying: “Do you mind explaining what you mean by that? I know you care about making a practical difference in the lives of First Nations People, which is why I think you would support raising the age of criminal responsibility”.

TIP 5

Focus on the strengths of First Nations-led solutions. You can say: “We know that when First Nations People have steered the policies to address youth incarceration, such as community-led justice reinvestment programs, kids are far more likely to remain out of the criminal justice system, and instead connected to their community and attending school”.

TIP 6

You don't always have to respond in the moment. If you're in a group situation, consider if it would be more effective to talk to someone in a private setting. Later, you can say to them: “Hey, something you said earlier has been on my mind, can we have a chat about it?”

Every conversation and every effort has an impact.

Knowing how to respond to discriminatory or prejudiced remarks is hard, but even harder when it comes from friends and family. When it gets tough, remind yourself that every conversation you have, and every action you take are acts of kindness that make a meaningful difference. Speaking up is a skill you can practice, and the more you know about allyship, the more you can help.

By creating a space for others to ask questions and learn more about First Nations justice, you can help to bring more people along, towards a better future for the whole country.

If the conversation gets heated or keeps escalating to the point that it's no longer productive, it's okay to remove yourself from the situation. Your safety matters.

KEEP LEARNING!

It's vital to seek out a diverse range of voices and experiences. Conversations about First Nations issues are often dominated by non-Indigenous perspectives. Engage with, and share content from First Nations educators, activists, historians and artists to amplify their voices.

LISTEN



Frontier War Stories — Podcast dedicated to truth-telling about a side of Australian history left out of the history books.

SBS NITV Radio — News, events and issues that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Meet the Mob — Podcast hosted by Kristal Kinsela dedicated to showcasing Blak Excellence in Indigenous business.

READ



Growing up Aboriginal in Australia — A biographical anthology by Anita Heiss.

White Girl — Novel by Tony Birch set in the 1960s depicts the Stolen Generation.

Deaths Inside — Guardian article on Indigenous deaths in custody.

CONTENT WARNING: may contain distressing content, and/or images & names of people who have passed away.

TAKE ACTION



There are many ways we can take real and meaningful action part of our daily lives:

- Attend a rally
- Sign and share petitions
- Organise a fundraiser for a First Nations charity
- Send letters to your elected officials and demand they step up
- Arrange First Nations cultural awareness training in your school or workplace
- Share your resources, like a physical meeting space or networking opportunities

WATCH



In My Blood It Runs — Documentary film following 10-year-old Arrernte and Garawa Aboriginal boy, Dujan.

Incarceration Nation — Documentary on the systemic injustice and oppression of Indigenous People by the justice system.

The Point: Who Cares About Alice? — The youth of Mparntwe, Alice Springs, discuss their challenges.

FOLLOW



Dr Amy Thunig — Gomeroi writer and academic, [@amythunig](#) on Instagram.

Seed Mob — Australia's first Indigenous youth climate network, [seedmob.org.au](#)

Common Ground — First Nations not-for-profit, [commonground.org.au](#)

SAVE THE DATE



There are many days of observance, remembrance and celebration for First Nations People that you can support as an ally. These are some to help you get started:

- 26 January - Invasion Day
- 26 May - National Sorry Day
- 27 May - [Reconciliation Week](#)
- 3 June - Mabo Day
- Early July - [NAIDOC Week](#)

Be sure to research the history and significance of the date, find local events, and support First Nations Peoples and their calls to action.



LET'S BUILD A BETTER FUTURE TOGETHER

Being an ally is something you should take pride in doing but it does take practice. Keep challenging your beliefs and actively reflect on your privileges, biases, behaviour and language.

We hope this guide has been a helpful starting point in your allyship journey. There is so much richness and diversity to First Nations cultures, histories and perspectives — it would be impossible to fit in one guide, so we encourage you to seek out additional resources and continue educating yourself!

Understand that allyship is a support role. At work or in your community, take a look around the room. Notice who is present and who is missing. Whose voices are being heard? Turn up when needed but know when to step back — never take the spotlight, respect boundaries, and support First Nations communities to be empowered in their need to act alone.

Be there to celebrate the wins, but don't forget to show up and act in solidarity during the tough times. Call out discrimination when it's safe to do so. **Every effort matters.**

By working together, we can build a better, brighter future.

An activist stands in front of a crowd with their fist in the air and the Aboriginal flag flying above them. © Cameron Durbin



'CONNECTION' BY ASHLEIGH PENGELLY

'Connection' is an artwork designed to showcase our interconnectedness. Through the use of continuous lines, it illustrates how our paths, while individual and linear, run parallel to those of others. The radial segments represent our connections - our community, friends, and families - who shape our collective experience. These elements are intertwined with curvilinear lines and smaller circular motifs, symbolising the fluidity and motion of life.

The interplay of interconnected circles and lines evokes themes of unity and connectivity, emphasising the intricate web of relationships that bind us together daily.



Ashleigh Pengelly, a proud Aboriginal woman, is the creative force behind Little Black Duck, nestled on the picturesque Wiradjuri Country in Uranquinty, NSW.

Rooted in her matriarchal lineage and inspired by her grandmother, Eunice Higgins, Ashleigh draws strength from her ancestral connections to showcase the resilience and creativity of First Nations women.

You can shop Ashleigh's beautiful creations, including original artworks, candles, serving boards and teapots by visiting littleblackduckaus.com/home.

 [littleblackduckaus](https://www.facebook.com/littleblackduckaus)

 [littleblackduckaus](https://www.instagram.com/littleblackduckaus)



From all of us at Amnesty International Australia, thank you so much for taking the time to learn about First Nations allyship.

Thank you for showing how compassionate you are, and for caring about equality and justice, not just for some but for all.

Together we can create a more just society that recognise all people's rights, dignity and worth. We are proud to stand in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and support their calls for sovereignty and self-determination.

Keep up to date with our work at:

[amnesty.org.au/campaigns/indigenous-justice](https://www.amnesty.org.au/campaigns/indigenous-justice)

Thank you again for your kindness. Caring people like you are making the future brighter for everyone.

We'd like to hear from you as well. If you'd like to share any feedback on this guide, or tips and stories of your own, please get in touch with us at supporter@amnesty.org.au.

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