4 ways to be an ally to other women

Lean In Circle Discussion Guide for All Women
Meeting agenda  
approx 75 mins

**Member updates**
15 mins

**Watch video**
7 mins

**Icebreaker**
15 mins

**Activities**
- Activity 1: Be an advocate for other women
  15 mins
- Activity 2: Help make sure other women’s voices are heard
  10 mins
- Activity 3: Form an “advocacy alliance” with your women colleagues
  10 mins

**One Action**
3 mins

For Circles with only 60 mins, here are suggestions to shorten this agenda:
- Encourage members to watch the video in advance
- Spend 5 mins on member updates
Important note

Before using this guide, make sure Circle members have completed either “Activity 2: Identifying Your Privilege” in the Circle discussion guide 5 Ways to Intervene When Other Women Face Disrespect or “Unpack your Privilege” in LeanIn.Org’s Allyship at Work program. Understanding your privilege is a crucial foundation for becoming a good ally.

Member updates

Go around your Circle and share personal updates. As a general rule, personal updates should be brief and focus on big changes and important decisions in your life. (It’s okay not to have one every month!) If you have a One Action update, share that with your Circle.

Watch video 7 mins

Icebreaker 15 mins

Take a few minutes to think about the following questions. Then, go around the room and share one of your answers (less than 2 minutes each).

- Think of a time when another woman spoke up or advocated for you at work. What happened? How did her advocacy benefit you? Share your experience with the group.
Read as a group: As we just learned in the video, there’s tremendous power in women advocating for each other at work. It’s especially crucial for women with more privilege to advocate for those with less. It’s also important to advocate for other women when you hold any type of power at work. Anyone in a management role—or involved in hiring and performance reviews—holds power. But you also have power in situations where it’s less obvious—for example, if you schedule meetings or if you are able to influence more senior colleagues.

In this activity, you’ll make a plan to use your power to advocate for other women:

- **Write it down (5 minutes):**
  - Think about all the women you work with who are either at your level or more junior than you.
    - Whose work has impressed you? Who do you think should get more recognition? Write their names down.
    - Take into consideration their level of privilege and power, and make sure your list includes women who have less power and privilege than you do.
  - For each woman on your list, consider the most effective actions you can take to advocate for them.
    - Can you advocate directly for their promotion?
    - Can you speak about their work in a public or large group setting?
    - Can you influence whether they’re assigned high-profile work or stretch assignments?

- **Discuss as a group (10 minutes):** Share one of your advocacy plans with your Circle so you can all learn from one another’s ideas.
Research shows that women face more barriers than men when it comes to being heard and included in meetings. These issues are usually even more acute for women with traditionally marginalized identities, including women with disabilities and LGBTQ+ women.

In this activity, you’ll brainstorm ways to help ensure other women are heard and included in group conversations. Note that it’s especially important to take these steps to include women with less power or privilege than yourself.

 Discuss as a group:

- Which of the following steps do you consistently take?
  - Invite other women to speak
  - Distribute speaking time equally
  - Ask to hear from women who are being interrupted and spoken over
  - Amplify other women’s ideas by repeating them and giving credit
  - Praise and showcase other women’s work
  - Create systems to distribute “office housework,” such as note-taking, in meetings
  - Share public speaking opportunities with women who have less power or privilege
  - Share pronouns

- Are there any steps you’d like to make part of your regular workday?

- Do you have any strategies that are not listed here for supporting other women in meetings and group conversations?
Activity 3: Form an “advocacy alliance” with your women colleagues

Because of stereotypes that women should be giving and communal, we are often taken more seriously and have more bargaining power when we advocate for others, rather than ourselves. That means there can be huge payoffs to forming a group of women who pledge to advocate for one another and amplify one another’s ideas at work.

- Think for a moment—and make notes—about which of your women co-workers you could join up with and become mutual advocates for.
- Make some notes about how your group would work. Would you commit to advocating for each other at a certain frequency (e.g., weekly) or just acting on an ad hoc basis? Will you exchange notes via group text, on a call, or in person?
- Then, go around the room and have everyone share their plans with the Circle.

“Most of my career has been spent being the only in so many spaces, whether that was being the only woman or the only person of color, or maybe the only out LGBTQ person. I've been very lucky in my career to find allies. Many of my bosses have been white men or white women, and they've been incredibly formative and fierce advocates for me. They've been honest about things that they don't know about, or they'll acknowledge that they don't have the right words, but they are explicit in the fact that they want to do better and be an ally to me.”

Sarah Lands Ramrup, senior lead, consumer goods industry, Missouri, USA (she/her)
One Action 3 mins

Choose one of the following:

● choose one of the advocacy actions you planned in Activity 1 and commit to doing it this month or

● commit to starting an “advocacy alliance” among women you work with, as you planned in Activity 3

Plan to share what happened with your Circle the next time you meet.

“When I joined my Lean In community, it was inspiring because I had the opportunity to look at other women who were fighting the same battles I was. Being part of a network of women cheering for you is so inspiring. It matters even more when you are an immigrant and people question your education or where you’re coming from. In the Lean In community, I found not only inspiring women, but also mentors and sponsors who were willing to take a chance on me and give me an opportunity.”

Laura Espriu, director of HR, digital media company, Lean In Network Leader, Washington, USA (she/her/ella)

Congratulations on a great meeting!