

Bitesized Belonging: Can we use our passions and interests to support and advocate for others?

Working in advocacy, allyship, or volunteerism is exhausting! It consumes not only the time we put into actually working with communities and issues but a large part of our emotional and mental energy otherwise. It's okay to admit that sometimes we just feel burnt out. It's hard work to constantly challenge our own perceptions of the world and to approach life and people with empathy and understanding. And sometimes, despite all our desires, we might feel as if we have little left to offer.

When that happens, it's important to take a step back and recharge. We'll discuss in the future some effective strategies for how to do this but, in the meantime, I highly recommend taking a look at the materials and events that the Mental Health Alliance (MHA) consistently puts out.

Instead, I'd like to examine what we can do AFTER we've recharged, to help reignite our love for this work.

There are many techniques for managing burnout of all sorts. But the strategy that I've found most effective for advocacy and allyship work, is intermingling our passions with our work. For example, Bitesized Belonging was born out of my love for engaging with these ideas and concepts through written mediums; where folks can examine, pick apart, consider, research, and engage at their leisure. Where our thoughts can be preserved and constantly reassessed. (It certainly didn't hurt that research was telling us to move in this direction, regardless!)

I've heard of straight-cisgender parents who attend Pride events and pass out hugs because they acknowledge the loss of parenting as deep and profound. For them, their passion for parenting allows them to connect with folks who may have lost all positive connections to their own family. I've heard of DEIB professionals with acting backgrounds who love creating skits and improvised scenarios to keep learning engaging and fun (I'm a terrible actor; please, I beg of you, don't ask me to do this!). And I've seen, here at Cengage, talented artists submitting their work for auction to support the Black community during Black History Month.

So what are you passionate about? Are you an artist? Writer? Comedian? Parent? How can you take what you love to do—your hobbies, work, side-hustles, passions, and interests—and use that love and skill to advocate and support underrepresented communities?

Exercise:

Consider your top three passions. They can be ANYTHING; sports, television, gaming, books, boating, drinking with friends, coffee, etc. What brings you joy and keeps you interested and engaged? What do you feel antsy without?

Now, examine that interest through the lens of a community you want to advocate for.

Perhaps if you're into gaming you might discover the issues of gender equality and treatment that exist in this space. How can you be an ally to women? Perhaps you're an avid reader and want to support the queer community; have you read books about/by queer people recently?

Whatever it may be, consider how you can connect your passion with a historically resilient community!