

YSU Student Counseling Services

Faculty and Staff: Dealing with the Aftermath of a Difficult Campus Event

How to Help You and Your Students Cope

On the first day back

Take time to talk as a group.

Provide a brief opportunity at the beginning of a class to acknowledge the tragic event and suggest that it might be helpful to share personal reactions.

Have students discuss “facts” first, and then shift to emotions.

People are more comfortable discussing “facts” and the details of the event than feelings. After facts have been discussed, you can shift the discussion toward sharing personal and emotional reactions.

Invite students to share emotional, personal responses.

You might lead off by saying something like: “Often it is helpful to share your own emotional responses and hear how others are responding. It doesn’t change the reality, but it takes away the sense of loneliness that sometimes comes with stressful events. I would be grateful for whatever you are willing to share.”

Respect the way each person copes with the loss.

Some will be more vocal or expressive than others with their feelings and thoughts. Everyone is affected differently and reacts differently.

Be prepared for blaming.

When people are angry or upset, they often look for someone to blame. If the discussion gets “stuck” with blaming, it might be useful to say: “We have been focusing on our sense of anger and blame, and that’s not unusual. It might be useful to talk about our fears.”

Remember that you have feelings and thoughts about what occurred, too. They should be taken seriously, not only for yourself, but also for the sake of your students. Some find it helpful to write down or talk out their thoughts and feelings.

Come back to the feelings as a group at a later time.

It is important to acknowledge the adjustments people have made. Just because everything seems to be back to normal does not mean that everyone has finished having feelings about the loss.

Understand that it is normal to seek an “explanation.”

We often believe if we can explain an event we can prevent it from happening again. We want to comfort ourselves that a similar event could be prevented in the future, if only we could explain it. However, tragedies are difficult to explain. Uncertainty is very upsetting, but sometimes inevitable.

Thank students for sharing and remind them of resources on campus.

When ending the discussion, you can remind them that people cope in a variety of ways. Campus re-sources that might help include residence life staff, Student Counseling Services, Office of the Dean of Students, among others.

In the following weeks:

Make contact with students who appear to be coping in unhealthy ways.

Examples of unhealthy coping include too much isolation, excessive alcohol use, or uncharacteristically throwing themselves into work. We can assist in getting help for the student.

Find ways of memorializing the loss, if appropriate.

It can be especially difficult if someone known to your student was a victim. After the initial shock has worn off, it may be helpful to find a way of honoring and remembering the person in a way that is tangible and meaningful to the group.

Be flexible.

Many who are directly affected by the tragedy may need temporary changes in their workload, living arrangements, and expectations of themselves. People usually have a hard time functioning as well when dealing with an emotional situation.

Give yourself time to reflect.

**For additional help, you can contact
the Counseling Center 330-941-3737
Kilcawley Center, 2110**

See how to help a ysu student in distress at <https://ysu.edu/student-counseling-services/how-to-help-student>

Please seek immediate help if you or someone you know is feeling that life isn't worth living or if you are having thoughts of harming yourself or others. After business hours please call 330-941-3737 and press 1 after the message to be connected to a mental health professional.

You can also contact the National Suicide Prevention Life-line at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or SuicidePreventionLifeline.org.

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