

### **How to Support Others during a Crisis** **Guidelines for Faculty, Managers, Supervisors, Residence Hall Directors, and Others in Leadership Roles**

The tragic events resulting from Hurricane Katrina have affected the whole country. A natural disaster of this magnitude touches all of us on some level. As a campus leader of students, staff, or administrators, there are unique things you can do to support people following a crisis.

**Assume that different individuals will have different reactions to the events.** In the first few hours and days, be as flexible as possible. For example, some people will want to continue with their routines while others who are more directly affected by the disaster will not be able to. Try to create a climate that appreciates and respects these differences, and that encourages support of one another in different ways.

**Be visible and available to people.** Walk around and check in with the staff or students.

**Allow people to talk.** Be a role model for others, showing that it is normal to share feelings and reactions during times of distress and disaster.

**Support the need to stay informed.** People who are more directly affected by the event, e.g., those who have loved ones in the devastated areas, may need to stay current with events, and to stay in touch with family and friends when possible. If the events are significantly affecting your group's regular routines, establish additional vehicles for communicating information.

**Consider organizing informal group activities.** Coordinate a brown bag lunch, for example, and invite people to come together without a formal agenda. These activities should be voluntary, because some people will want to come and others will not.

**Allow for emotions** – crying, frustration, verbal expressions of anger. Avoid potentially trite remarks like “everything will be OK.” Make room for people to have their feelings, even as you try to reassure them. Simply acknowledging feelings is important, as is being together.

**Allow for mistakes, emotional upset, etc.** In the midst of a traumatic situation, it is normal for people to experience difficulty concentrating, or to feel irritable and edgy. Try to normalize these reactions and frame potential conflicts in the context of normal reactions to abnormal events.

**If people need to leave work or miss a class or class assignment, support them if possible.** If you hesitate due to the understandable pressures of unit demands, deadlines, etc., there is a risk for “secondary injury” – people feeling primarily injured by the traumatic events, and then injured again if feeling neglected or unappreciated. Remember that you may not know everything about someone's past, and how these events may be triggering memories of past traumas and losses. Trust people to know what they need most.

**Consult University Health Services if you are particularly concerned about an individual or workgroup.**

**Counseling and Psychological Services** (for students) is available for assistance with students and students groups **(642-9494)**.

**CARE Services for Faculty and Staff** is available for employees and work groups **(643-7754)**.

**Take care of yourself!** Recognize that good leaders do not deny or minimize the potential impact on themselves. Give yourself permission to carve out support for yourself. Remember that there will be pulls to operate in crisis mode, but that you have to manage for the longer-term. This tragedy will have effects for weeks, months, and years to come, and it is important that you pace yourself.

For more information, check [www.uhs.berkeley.edu](http://www.uhs.berkeley.edu).