

How to Support Others During These Difficult Times:

Tools for Faculty, Managers, Supervisors, Residence Hall Directors, and Others in Leadership Roles

As details about the tragic deaths at the Northern Illinois campus unfold, you may find yourself shocked, scared or traumatized by this experience. For very public traumas, even those who haven't directly experienced the crisis may be affected. Most people will experience some emotional and/or physical after-effects. For those in a leadership role, there are unique things you can do to provide support during these difficult times.

- **Assume that different individuals will have different reactions to what's happening.** When there is a specific event, be as flexible as possible. For example, some people will want to continue with their routines while others 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.** Model that it's normal to share feelings and reactions.
- **Consider ways for people to stay informed.** People need to stay current with events, and to stay in touch with family and friends. If specific events are significantly impacting your group's regular routines, establish additional vehicles for communicating updates. Initially communicate in person if possible, and then use email and other tools after you've had the chance to discuss the need to use them.
- **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 event, 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 life, and how these events may be triggering personal concerns or memories of past traumas and losses. Trust people to know what they need most.

- **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. These difficult times may continue for months, and years to come, and it is important that you pace yourself.

For More Help

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

- **If you work with students**, Counseling Services for Students is available at (510)642-9494.
- **If you work with faculty and staff**, CARE Services for Faculty and Staff is available at (510)643-7754.

UC Berkeley, University Health Services, Tang Center
2222 Bancroft, Berkeley, CA 94720
(510) 642-6621
www.uhs.berkeley.edu