

Counseling & Psychological Services

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Jesuit Education Since 1855

Following a Crisis

Unfortunately, tragic events occur on college campuses. These events often leave members of the college or university community severely traumatized. When this happens, providing some time in a class setting for emotional debriefing can aid and accelerate the healing process.

• Provide time during class to discuss the incident and the students’ feelings about it. Allow students the opportunity to express feelings in a supportive atmosphere as soon as possible if they are open to doing so.

• Students may need a little time to gain the courage to speak. If students do not speak, remind them of your office hours, your e-mail address, and/or your willingness to meet one-on-one. Emphasize that talking about the trauma is a good and healing thing to do. If you share some of your feelings, it will likely encourage them to talk.

• Remember that everyone’s story is valid and not everyone has to speak. Emotional debriefing is not about establishing facts; it is about expression of feelings. Make reflective comments that validate students’ experiences.

• Try and remain calm and relaxed, but don’t worry if you show emotion.

• When the students finish talking, offer them a moment of silence. Suggest that they close their eyes and breathe

slowly and deeply three or four times.

• If you are worried about a particular student, approach her/him privately. If you are concerned about your own reactions to the situation, consider seeking help. You can contact the Employee Assistance Program, CONCERN, at 1

-800-344-4222.

• Some students who have had close involvement with the crisis may have vivid perceptions regarding the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of the event. You can reassure them that such feelings are not uncommon after a tragedy.

• Some students feel guilty. They may believe that they should have been there to help the victims. Help assure them that it’s a normal feeling to want to help others, but it may not reflect what was really possible.

• Many people find that talking with others, spending time with family, connecting with ministers, rabbis, or priests can hasten the healing process. Help students determine what would work best for them.

These suggestions were adapted from: Poland, S., & McCormick, J.S. (1999), Coping witha crisis: A resources for schools, parents, and communities. Longmont, CO: Sopris West. <http://www.counseling.txstate.edu/parfacstaf/fac/crisis.html>