



# TALKING TO STUDENTS ABOUT A TRAUMATIC EVENT

There are varying emotions after a traumatic event, so how do we address a room full of people whose experiences are all different? Below are some ideas and resources about how to talk to students who are experiencing different symptoms of distress, grief, and loss.

The first step to feel prepared is to review this packet in its entirety to learn:

- What grief is and how long it lasts
- Reactions you may see in yourself and in your students
- Ideas of what may help someone experiencing grief
- Tips for relaxation

## Debriefing with Students

### PRIOR TO THE DEBRIEF, PREPARE YOURSELF WITH

<b>Facts of the situation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gather information from reliable sources such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Local and/or reputable news sources</li><li>◦ Chancellor's emails</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>Copies of pages 3-9 of this handout</b>
<b>Tissues</b>





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## Debriefing with Students

### DURING THE DEBRIEF

#### **Stick to the facts**

- Share only the information that you know as fact
- Do not speculate
- Steer the conversation towards emotional responses to avoid rumors

#### **Normalize Reactions**

- Allow students to share their initial reactions and feelings to the situation
- Normalize their feelings by using reflective listening. "I hear how scared you are and that is a totally normal response to this situation".
- Explain how there is a range of emotional responses and what they feel now may change over time

#### **Share Resources**

- Encourage students to take care of themselves (see "what helps" and "breathing exercises" below)
- Discuss services on campus and in the community
  - Counseling Center offers Urgent Care appointments daily if emotional responses become overwhelming and students need support
  - 988 crisis number to call or text

#### **Offer to Meet Privately to Discuss Further**





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## What Is Grief?

Grief is the normal response of sorrow, emotion, and confusion that comes from loss. It is a natural part of life. Grief is a typical reaction to death, relationship break-up, failure to get into a coveted graduate school, job loss, a move away from friends and family, or loss of good health due to illness. The more significant the loss, and the more sudden, the more intense the grief. However, even subtle losses can lead to grief. For example, you might experience grief after moving away from home, graduating from college, changing jobs, selling your family home, having your best friends graduate and move away, or suffering an injury and not being able to play your sport.

## How Long Does Grief Last?

Grief lasts as long as it takes you to accept and learn to live with your loss. For some people, grief lasts a few months. For others, grieving may take years. The length of time spent grieving is different for each person. There are many reasons for the differences, including personality, health, coping style, culture, family background, and life experiences – including past losses. The time spent grieving also depends on your relationship with the person lost and how prepared you were for the loss.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve — but there are healthy ways to cope with the pain. You can get through it! Grief that is expressed and experienced has a potential for healing that eventually can strengthen and enrich life, help you re-order your priorities, and improve your existing relationships. Use of drugs, including marijuana, and alcohol may numb your feelings temporarily but this only prolongs your grief and intense feelings. You may also find you do not have any strong responses and that is OK too.





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## WHAT YOU MAY EXPERIENCE

### Immediate Reactions

Confusion & disorientation
Worry or self-blame
Shock, fear and/or anger
Sorrow, grief & sadness
Guilt or shame
Desire to withdraw from others
Fatigue, headache or muscle tension
Difficulty sleeping or eating
Stomach problems or racing heart
Feeling numb; restricted emotions
Loss of interest in usually pleasurable activities
Feeling detached/estranged from others
Avoiding reminders of the event (people, places)

### Possible Ongoing Reactions

Depressing thoughts or images of the event, including flashbacks
Feeling guilty for surviving the event
Upsetting emotional and/or physical reactions to reminders of the experience
Desire to withdraw from others or avoid talking, thinking and having feelings about the event
Feeling numb or detached
Loss of interest in usually pleasurable activities
Being “on the lookout” for danger; startling easily
Irritability or outbursts of anger
Difficulty with sleep, concentration & attention
Enhanced appreciation for life, family & friends; may include changing priorities
Using humor & acceptance to address challenges each day





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## What Helps

Talking to another person for support
Engaging in positive distracting activities
Using relaxation methods (breathing exercises, meditation, soothing music)
Participating in a support group
Getting adequate rest and eating healthy meals
Trying to maintain a normal schedule
Focusing on something practical you can do right now
Exercising in moderation
Scheduling pleasant activities
Taking breaks
Reminiscing about a loved one who has just died
Keeping a journal
Seeking counseling

## What Doesn't Help

Using alcohol or drugs to cope
Extreme avoidance of thinking or talking about the event
Violence or conflict
Overeating or failing to eat
Excessive TV, social media, or video games
Withdrawing from pleasant activities
Blaming others
Working too much
Extreme withdrawal from friends and/or family
Not taking care of yourself
Doing risky things (driving recklessly, substance abuse)





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## Do...

Carefully decide who to talk to	Decide ahead of time what you want to discuss
Let others know you need to talk or just be with them	Start by talking about practical things
Talk about the painful thoughts and feelings when you are ready	Choose the right time and place to talk
Ask others if it's a good time to talk	Tell others you appreciate them listening
Tell others what you need or how they can help right now	

## Don't...

Keep quiet because you don't want to upset others
Keep quiet because you're worried about being a burden
Assume that others don't want to listen
Wait until you're so stress or exhausted that you can't benefit from help
Excessive TV, social media, or video games

## Social Support Options

Spouse/partner	Clergy	Support group
Parents or other family	Doctor or nurse	Teacher/Coach
Close friend	Counselor	Pet





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## Tips for Relaxation

Tension and anxiety are common after traumatic events. Unfortunately, they can make it more difficult to cope with life after something traumatic. There is no easy solution to coping with these events, but taking time during the day to calm yourself through relaxation exercises may make it easier to sleep, concentrate, and have energy for coping with life.

Consider: muscle relaxation exercises, breathing exercises, meditation, swimming, stretching, yoga, prayer, exercise, listening to quiet music, spending time in nature.

## Breathing Exercise

Inhale slowly (one thousand one, one thousand two, etc.) through your nose and comfortably fill your lungs all the way down to your belly
Silently and gently say to yourself, "my body is filled with calmness." Exhale slowly through your mouth and comfortable empty your lungs all the way to your stomach
Silently and gently say to yourself, "my body is releasing the tension"
Repeat five times slowly and comfortable
Do this as many times a day as needed





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## Campus Resources

NAME	PHONE NUMBER	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION
Counseling Center	207-581-1392	5721 Cutler Health	Team of social workers and psychologists who can provide mental health services including counseling.
UMPD	911 or 207-581-4040	81 Rangeley Rd.	University police department available 24/7, 365 days a year.
Residence Life	207-581-1406	315 Memorial Union	Support for students living on campus. Available to answer questions about policies, housing, etc.
UVAC (Ambulance Corps)	911 for emergencies 207-581-4037 for business	5721 Cutler Health Center	Student volunteer organization delivering emergency medical services
Title IX	207-581-1406 Student Life	5748 Memorial Union rm. 315	Support around areas of sexual violence, relationship abuse, and stalking



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## Community, State, and National Resources

NAME	PHONE NUMBER	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION
Adult & Youth Suicide and Crisis Lifeline	(Maine) 1-888-568-1112 (National) 988	24/7 crisis/support	Support for self or others experiencing a mental health crisis
Trevor Project (LGBTQ+) Trevor Text (LGBTQ+)	1-866-488-7386 Text START to 678-678	24/7 crisis/support	Mental health support for the LGBTQ+ population
Trans Lifeline	1-877-565-8860	24/7 crisis/support	Hotline for emotional and financial support to trans people in crisis
Crisis Text Line	Text 741741	24/7 crisis/support	Live, trained counselor to text with from a secure online platform
Maine Warm Line	1-866-771-9276	24/7 crisis/support	Peer-to-peer support line for adults in crisis