

Responding to or Preventing a Crisis

Questions and Answers for Durham Tech Faculty and Staff

I've noticed that some students are having a difficult time as a result of this incident. How can I support these students?

The American Psychological Association recently published a great summary of ideas for students after this type of crisis. Here is that list:

Encourage students to talk about it — Invite students to ask for support from people who care about them and who will listen to their concerns. Receiving support and care can be comforting and reassuring. If they would like to talk with someone, ask them to visit the Counseling Office in the Wynn Center. It also often helps students to speak with others who have shared their experience so they do not feel so different or alone. If parents, partners, or other significant others seem particularly distressed, it may be because they are reacting to their own sense of not being able to control the college environment to keep their students as safe as they would like.

Strive for balance — When a tragedy occurs, it's easy to become overwhelmed and have a negative or pessimistic outlook. Balance that viewpoint by reminding students of people and events which are meaningful and comforting, even encouraging. Striving for balance empowers people and allows for a healthier perspective on internal feelings and the world around us.

Ask students to turn it off and take a break — People may want to keep informed, but it's sometimes healthy to try to limit the amount of news we take in whether it's from the internet, television, newspapers or magazines. While getting the news informs us, being overexposed to it can actually increase our stress. The images can be very powerful in reawakening a student's feeling of distress. Also, encourage students to schedule some breaks to take a break from thinking about the incident and focus instead on something enjoyable. Get students to do something that will lift their spirits.

Honor their feelings — Remember that it is common to have a range of emotions after a traumatic incident. Remind students to take it easy on themselves and on their friends. Students may experience intense stress similar to the effects of a physical injury. For example, they may feel exhausted, sore, or off balance.

Remind students to be healthy — Healthy behaviors enhance students' ability to cope with excessive stress. Remind them to eat well-balanced meals, get plenty of rest, and build physical activity into their day. Avoid alcohol and drugs because they can suppress feelings rather than help them manage and lessen distress. In addition, alcohol and drugs may intensify students' emotional or physical pain. Help students establish or reestablish routines such as eating meals at regular times and following an exercise program. If students are having trouble sleeping, encourage some relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, meditation, or yoga.

Help others or do something productive — Suggest students find out how they can help people who have been affected by this incident, or have other needs. Helping someone else often has the benefit of making students feel better, too. Encourage volunteerism.

Remember that grief is a long process. If students have recently lost friends in this or other tragedies — Give them time to experience their feelings and to recover. For some, this might involve staying at home; for others it may mean getting back to school or work. Dealing with the shock and trauma of such an event will take time. It is typical to expect many ups and downs, including "survivor guilt"—feeling bad that they escaped the tragedy while others did not.

For many people, using the tips and strategies mentioned above may be sufficient to get through the current crisis. At times, however an individual can get stuck or have difficulty managing intense reactions. A licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist can assist a student in developing an appropriate strategy for moving forward. It is important to get professional help if the student feels unable to function or perform basic activities of daily living. If the student would like some help finding a mental health professional, our counseling center is a good place to start.

Recovering from such a tragic event may seem difficult to imagine. Students often persevere and develop an innate trust in their ability to get through the challenging days ahead. Taking the steps in this guide can help them cope.

Visit the [American Psychological Association Help Center](#) for more information.

I'm concerned about one of my students. What might I do?

Talk with the student about the concern. If you have a concern about the student's academic performance or behavior, talk with the student about this concern. If the student brings an academic or personal concern to your attention, listen to the concern.

Tell the student about Counseling Services. If you or the student feels that counseling intervention is appropriate, inform the student about Counseling Services. Should the student desire to contact a counselor independently, provide the student with a counselor's name and telephone number. Some students will seek assistance independently. However, most students will not. Should you feel it important to be more proactive, inform the student that you would like to help by providing a connection with a counselor.

Contact a counselor. Contact the Counseling Office at 686-3652. All counselors are available to discuss personal or academic concerns with students. Establish a convenient time and location that the counselor can meet briefly with you and the student to help facilitate the referral.

Meet with the counselor and the student. The purpose of this brief meeting is to provide the student with a personal connection to a counselor. Introduce the counselor to the student and discuss your concerns with all present. After talking briefly, the counselor will invite the student to talk more in-depth about the concern. At this point, allow the student to meet with the counselor in private.

Follow up. If you are concerned for any reason about your response to the student's concerns, document the actions you took to refer the student to a counselor. You should be aware that due to confidentiality laws, it is not possible for the counselor to provide you with information that was discussed in private with the student. However, if you would like some information about the resolution of the student's concerns, ask the student directly.

What if a student becomes inappropriate or disruptive?

Know the Student Code of Conduct. Familiarize yourself with the student code of conduct found online in the Durham Tech Catalog and Student Handbook. If you are an instructor include a statement in your syllabus that outlines your expectations for classroom etiquette. At the beginning of the class, take a minute to discuss your expectations for how students should appropriately conduct the business of the classroom.

Talk with your supervisor. Talk with your supervisor about any potential student disruption issues prior to talking with a student. Learn about the specific, suggested guidelines for managing inappropriate and disruptive behavior. Get some support and ideas for how to best proceed, then you'll be well prepared.

Schedule a meeting with you, the student, and a counselor. If you suspect that personal concerns are contributing to a student's inappropriate behavior, consider scheduling a meeting with the student, you, and a counselor present to discuss your concerns.

Avoid confronting a student. Confrontation, especially in a public setting will only escalate the behavior. Whenever possible, schedule a time to meet with the student to discuss your concerns in private and make specific requests for changes in the student's behavior. If appropriate or necessary, ask your supervisor to be present with you at this meeting.

Have a plan of action. If a classroom situation becomes unmanageable due to the disruptive behavior of a student, be aware that an instructor may request that a student leave the classroom. If the student complies, finish the class, but talk with your supervisor about this situation immediately afterwards so that the supervisor can seek appropriate action prior to the student returning to class. If you ask a student to leave the classroom, but the student refuses, discontinue the class, request that all other students leave, go to the nearest office, and contact security for assistance. Then, immediately talk with your supervisor about the situation. Individual instructors do have the right to ask a student to leave the classroom, but do not have the authority to permanently remove or withdraw a student from the class. Student discipline must be reported and referred to the Vice President for Student Support Services for any other action.

What if I suspect that the cause of an inappropriate behavior is due to a mental health concern or psychological disability?

Talk to a disability counselor. Students with disabilities are subject to the same standards for behavior as all other students. Of course, instructors will want to consult the disability services counselor for strategies to address behaviors that may be linked to a disability. However, it is a common misperception that faculty or staff must allow disruptive behavior that is disability-related. Call the Counseling Office at 686-3652 to talk with a disability counselor.

Please review the [Health and Safety Manual](#)