

How Faculty Can Help: Providing Support in the Aftermath of the Campus Shooting

While we always hope and strive for a safe and positive learning environment for our students at UNC Charlotte, feelings of safety were significantly disrupted recently due to the on-campus shooting. Below we offer some suggestions as you consider how you can support your students both currently and in the months to come.

Considerations in understanding the impact of the on-campus shooting on student functioning:

- **Variety of reactions will be experienced.** See below for common responses.

- Shock	- Panic
- Numbness	- Fatigue
- Sadness	- Sleep difficulties / nightmares
- Guilt	- Memory problems
- Irritability/anger	- Difficulty concentration
- Self-blame	- Re-experiencing of events
- Fear	- Easily overwhelmed
- Hopelessness	- Isolation / withdrawn behavior

- **Academic performance may be impacted.** We know that when students are emotionally overwhelmed their ability to take in and process information is compromised.
- **It is often about more than this one incident.** Threats to safety have a compounding impact over time. Prior traumatic experiences, combined with the impact of the recent shooting, can affect a student's current sense of safety on and off campus.
- **Do not underestimate the collective impact of violence on a community.** Given the fact that there can be a radiating effect throughout the community, students do not need to be directly connected to the people involved in the incident to be impacted.

Considerations in engaging and supporting students following the on-campus shooting:

- **Reach out to your students initially.** Acknowledging the recent events and possible impact on students and the community at large through an introductory email or on the first day of class can help validate students' feelings. If you can, invite students to meet with you privately if they have concerns about how they continue to be impacted. It is suggested that you do not have students discuss their experiences or reactions as a group in the classroom as this has the potential to be retraumatizing.
- **Anticipate that there may be some changes in student functioning.** Please see above for examples of impact on student emotional, physical, and academic functioning. Recognize that being on-campus may be a trigger for some students, as well as being in a specific building or classroom. The impact of this tragedy will occur not only shortly after it, but also will continue to have lingering effects for many in our campus community.

- **Check in directly with your students,** especially if you notice that they seem distressed, distracted, or withdrawn. You might say something like, “I know the tragedy on our campus is impacting everyone differently. How have you been doing?” It is advised that you do this in a private space (e.g. office hours, after class) and respect if a student does not wish to talk.
- **Find a balance between routine and flexibility.** In some cases, the continued impact of this tragedy on a student may call for flexibility in due dates and exam times, if you are able to provide that. However, it can also be very helpful to balance this with helping students maintain a sense of routine by continuing with the planned curriculum.
- **You are not expected to have all the answers.** None of us do. Instead students may look to you as someone who can offer a space to talk and as someone who can simply sit with their complex questions, concerns, and emotions.
- **Use your resources.** Remember that you are not alone in supporting students. Offices such as Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS; 704-687-0311; caps.uncc.edu) and the Dean of Students Office (704-687-0345; unccdso.uncc.edu) are here to provide support to you and your students. CAPS is also available to provide departmental trainings on approaching this topic with your students or to provide one-on-one consultation with individual instructors.
- **Refer if concerned about a student.** If you have concerns about a student’s well-being, especially if they are still experiencing significant distress a month or two after the event, considering making a referral to CAPS. You may contact us about your concerns related to a student or call while you are with the student and we will assist in scheduling an appointment.

Some examples of symptoms a student might be experiencing that might warrant a referral include reliving the event, disconnecting with others, feeling irritable or numb, having difficulty sleeping, and coping negatively through the use of alcohol and drugs. For a more comprehensive description of these symptoms and other helpful tips, see https://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Helping_Give_Away_Psychological_Science/Coping_with_shooting

- **Take care of yourself.** Faculty and staff are, of course, impacted themselves by a campus shooting. It is normal that this tragedy may bring about similar reactions in you that you see in your students. We encourage you to find support from other faculty members and your supervisor or department chair. Additionally, some faculty and staff may find it helpful to engage in their own counseling support. The Employee Assistance Program offers resources through ComPsych, including confidential counseling. Compsych can be reached by calling 1-877-603-8259 or going to www.guidanceresources.com.

Please see the following link for more information:

<https://hr.uncc.edu/employee-relations/compsych-guidance-resources-employee-assistance-program>