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Subject Helping people today

Dear Colleagues,

You may encounter today members of the university community (students, staff and faculty) who need help with their reactions to yesterday's events. Here are some thoughts from Ann Byrnes, the Director of the University Counseling Center, to help you respond.

A sense of anxiety or even panic is normal in the face of tragedy. In a psychological crisis a person's usual coping responses don't work or may be less effective than usual. Each of us responds in our own unique way and we need to be careful not to judge another person's response, especially if it is different from our own.

Thoughts and feelings may arise, not only in response to yesterday's violence, but also to past events yet unresolved. You can best help by listening, not judging, and allowing people to identify what they are feeling. It is important to validate feelings, to say feelings make sense, rather than try to convince someone to feel otherwise. Professors, especially, have been trained all their lives to respond with logic and argumentation which may not be helpful to an individual in times such as these.

You can help by listening for the entire conversation. If the person responds positively, you can help by helping to identify what the person can or cannot control today, and referring them to the Counseling Center, 2nd Floor, Infirmary Bldg.

Counseling Center staff will be available into the evening as long as people come in. There is no need to make an appointment, although calling 2-6720 to say someone is coming would be helpful to the Counseling Center staff.

It is often helpful for people to be with one another during a crisis. Saying the right thing is far less important than the feeling that people are available and willing to talk.

Thank you,

Robert McGrath, Provost and Exec. VP for Academic Affairs