

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FACULTY AND STAFF WHEN DEALING WITH A TRAGEDY**

*The Counseling Center staff is available for you to consult with on any of these steps. We have found it particularly helpful to be involved with the initial debriefing time, and are available to assist with any follow up that seems necessary.*

**Take time to talk as a group or class.** Acknowledge the loss. Make sure everyone knows and has useful information. It is important to know how others are doing, how they are reacting to the situation. Going on with business as usual can in the long run hinder the recovery process. Sometimes an outside facilitator (such as Counseling Center staff) can help with this process.

**Give yourself time to reflect.** Remember that you too have feelings and thoughts about what has occurred, and these thoughts and feelings should be taken seriously, not only for yourself, but also for the sake of the students you may be trying to work with. Some find it helpful to write out or talk out their feelings and thoughts.

**Acquaint yourself with resources you can provide students.** These resources may include the Counseling Center (231-6557), Dean of Students Office (231-3787) or resources within your own department.

**Make accommodations as needed, for you and for the students.** Many who are directly affected by the tragedy may need temporary accommodations in their workload, in their living arrangements, in their own self-expectations. It is normal for people not to be able to function at their full capacity when trying to deal with an emotional situation. This is a time to be flexible.

**Respect each person's way of dealing with the loss.** Some will be more vocal or expressive than others with their feelings and thoughts. Grief is not a disease, but it does take time to recover. Everyone is affected differently and reacts differently.

**Make contact with those who appear to be reacting in unhealthy ways** (e.g. isolating themselves too much, using alcohol excessively, throwing themselves into academics or busy work in ways not characteristic of them, etc.).

**Find ways of memorializing the loss if appropriate.** After the initial shock has worn off, it may be helpful to find a way of honoring and remembering the person in a way that is tangible and meaningful to the group.

**Come back to the feelings as a group at a later time.** It is important to acknowledge the adjustments people have made. Just because everything seems to be back to normal does not mean that everyone has finished having feelings about the loss.

**Cook Counseling Center  
240 McComas Hall  
540-231-6557  
<http://www.ucc.vt.edu/>**