



Tips for Faculty/Staff Following the Death of Someone in the Campus Community

It can be hard to know what to say following the death of a person who is part of the campus community. Some think it's not their job to address issues of grief; others worry their words would be inadequate, still others may want to address the loss but may not know what to say or do. However, acknowledging the loss allows others to see that the deceased person mattered to the students, as well as, faculty and staff. Additionally, students will be more likely to let the professional know if they are struggling in the class/at work due to grief if there is an acknowledgment of how difficult these issues can be.

Should I dedicate an entire class period to processing the loss?

Unless you are extremely comfortable with grief; students being emotional; and providing referrals to distressed students, in most cases, this is not a recommended plan of action. Students who were very close to the deceased person might find this level of interaction upsetting if others in the room aren't equally affected. Other students who don't have a strong reaction to the loss might find this level of interaction uncomfortable.

What if I am uncomfortable with grief and don't say anything?

Not addressing the loss isn't the best approach. Not addressing can be perceived that you feel like the grief of those impacted by this death is not important. Students can interpret the lack of acknowledgement as uncaring or cold, and some students take away the message that the deceased person wasn't valued. Most professionals would strongly disagree with these perceptions, which is why addressing the loss is important. Unfortunately, not addressing the death might also be perceived as a lack of compassion on the part of the entire institution (not just a single faculty/staff/administrator).

What if the person was not in my class or department?

Most people would still be appreciative if there was an acknowledgment of the loss since the entire community was impacted to some degree.

What should I say?

You do not have to turn a class session into a grief group to effectively address a campus community death. At minimum, consider acknowledging the loss and offer campus resources to students who may be grieving. You could say something like: "As you might be aware, our campus suffered a tragic loss of a student. Please remember there are resources on campus to help with your grief: These resources can be found on the [URI Mental Health Resources Page](#). It's a shock and a terrible loss. If you need to step out of the class/office today, that's ok."

If you are willing to engage students further and offer additional support, you may continue by saying: “If you need to talk to me about this in more depth, please let me know. Does anyone want to say anything before we move forward with today’s topic/work assignment?”

What if a student gets really upset in my class or while working in my office?

Most students are able to continue with work or lessons after an acknowledgment of the loss. For the rare student who gets very upset at work or in class, it would be recommended to take a break, check in with the student, and refer to appropriate resources.

How much should I be a resource for students in distress after a loss?

Generally speaking, people should not feel an obligation to be available for grief counseling after a student passes away. If a student continues to struggle (e.g., always tearful at work or in class; missing multiple days of work/classes; changes in quality of work), please refer them to the Counseling Center or make a Starfish report so someone can check in with them.

How do I take care of myself?

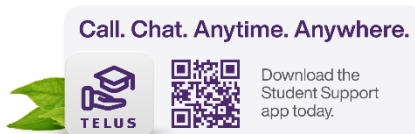
The death of a student can bring-up difficult memories or experiences for faculty, staff, and administrators as well as students. Make sure you:

- 1) know your personal limits about what you can take on regarding grief and
- 2) know your campus resources including the Employee Assistance Program.

If necessary, it is ok to get additional help for yourself too.

Please consider the following as you move forward.

1. Keep an ear open for the students not connected with the death of the student that died but have had recent losses. If you are aware of students who have had those experiences and feel comfortable, check in with them and encourage them to come see the [Counseling Center](#) when needed. [Telus Health](#) is also available.
2. We want to encourage continued compassion toward students and patience. Grief will extend longer than two weeks and will be trying for some. It may manifest in different ways for each person. If you are concerned about a student, please refer them over to the Counseling Center or remind them of Telus Health services available.



Questions? Contact the [URI Counseling Center](#) at 401-874-2288, Located at 217 Roosevelt Hall