

How to Support Each Other During Community Mourning: Loss, Grief, Helping Each Other, Resources

These suggestions are intended to help us all be better friends and colleagues as our community mourns tragic deaths among us. The University and the Chapel Hill community provide a [number of resources](#), noted at the bottom of this guide. In addition to those, we all can help each other during this period of mourning, we all can be there for each other. The following suggestions are intended to facilitate this community support among us.

What We May Face:

- Loss of someone we knew and cared for
- Shock that someone on our hall, in our classes, in our groups is suddenly gone
- Anger that such losses occur
- Distress that some among us hurt so bad and that our community could not help them
- Rekindling of feelings and pain from our own previous contacts or experience with such losses
- Diffuse feelings of sadness, stress, uncertainty
- Wanting to find an explanation, something to take away the deep sense that life can be so hard and that tragic losses can “come out of nowhere.”
- Wanting to find some individual or situation or organization to blame

Key Concept:

Suicide is always complicated.

It has many causes, many things that contribute to it but not a single thing or event that made it happen

What We Can Do:

- ***Reach out to each other!!!!***
- Until you ask, you have no way of knowing how those around you are experiencing the loss, so ask
- Just a simple “How are you doing?” is fine – as we are all in shock, none of us will mind being asked this question
- If an individual is struggling with the loss, give them lots of opportunity to talk about their feelings, the experiences they have had, the fears or revived loss and sadness they may be experiencing
- Be explicit: “I’ve got lots of time and am fine talking with you about this” – again, as we are in shock, none of us will mind this
- Be careful not to cut off talking about feelings too soon, before the individual is ready to talk about how they might handle or cope with their grief or other feelings
- If the individual seems ready, ask if you can do anything to be helpful – from going for a walk together to helping them access professional or other resources
- Stay connected, keep in touch with the individual, ask them how they are doing, offer again to listen or to be helpful

Strategies – For Ourselves and Those Around Us

- Allow ourselves time and “space” to experience whatever feelings may emerge
- We often try just to push through distress and pretend we aren’t feeling it so be careful to avoid this mistake
- Cut ourselves some slack – ease up on the demands we place on ourselves or on others
- Connect with others – whether down the hall or friends and family by text or phone

- Reduce the stress on yourself and those around you by communicating commitment to flexibility in getting through this time

Community:

- Many of us will need to talk about this and would find it helpful to do so with others
- You might work with others to organize a group discussion for those around you, a time to share feelings and concerns
- If you do that, the suggestions above for talking to each other apply as well – lots of time for expressing feelings, no judgment and discourage blaming, slow to jump to action. Only if the group is ready, talk about what we all can do in the future
- Think about who in your group may be suffering or may need someone to contact them – reach out

Faculty:

- Be flexible – excuse students from assignments if appropriate, give extensions, change class routines, etc. These are all not only permissible but encouraged to help all our students in these difficult times
- Be explicit – in email or during class, make clear your concern for your students and your availability to talk or meet with them, e.g., “please feel free to contact me personally or by email or to respond to all if you have thoughts or feelings you would like to share. This is a hard time and we need to be there for each other.”

Department Chairs, Deans, Directors, other Administrators and Leaders:

- Make clear your endorsement of key strategies: flexibility, sensitivity to concerns of all, faculty being flexible with their students, etc.
- Consider encouraging group discussions within your unit to give an opportunity for sharing feelings and concerns for those who would like this. See guidelines for such group discussion on pp. 19-20 of [POSTVENTION: A Guide for Response to Suicide on College Campuses](#), described below.
- If you would like assistance or back-up for such groups, feel free to contact Wendy Kadens, L.C.S.W., Outreach Coordinator in CAPS (<https://caps.unc.edu/services/outreach>), or Ed Fisher, Ph.D., in the UNC Peer Support Core (edfisher@unc.edu).

General Suggestions for Being Supportive:

- Role is to be a friend, not to have all the answers to all the questions.
- Focus on how people are feeling
- Ask open ended questions instead of closed questions – “What” “How” rather than “Did you”
- “What” gives an opening; “Why” tends to feel like being called to explain
- Small gestures can mean a lot – voicemails, “hello” texts
- Don’t be afraid to talk about the obvious – how other friends or family are doing, previous related experiences, concerns
- Don’t make it “about me,” but share some of your own experiences so others feel comfortable sharing theirs
 - Including anxieties and uncertainties – normalize feelings of stress
 - Also feelings of happiness
- Team up
- Think about whom you haven’t heard from in a while and reach out to them

Guidelines:

[POSTVENTION: A Guide for Response to Suicide on College Campuses](#) is an excellent compendium of background information and suggestions for campus response. It was developed by the Higher

Education Mental Health Alliance with representatives from a number of organizations, including the American College Health Association, American Psychological Association, and American Psychiatric Association.

Resources – Adapted from [The Daily Tar Heel](#), October 11

- If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-8255, is available 24/7. It is free and confidential.
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741-741 (open 24/7)
- UNC students who need assistance during this time may contact [Counseling and Psychological Services](#), the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) or [Student Wellness](#). CAPS can be reached 24/7 by phone at 919-966-3658.
- University employees can reach out to the [Employee Assistance Program](#).
- Peer supporters from student-run organization Peer2Peer, which offers mental health resources for graduate and undergraduate students, can be reached through [their online form](#). Students can remain anonymous.
- Students can identify colleagues for whom they have concern through the [UNC Care Team](#) operated out of the office of the Dean of Students
- Survivors of Suicide Loss Support Group is for those who have experienced the loss of a loved one to suicide. Attendance is not required each month and you can attend as needed. There are no fees required. The group meets on the second Thursday of each month at 6 p.m. at the United Church of Chapel Hill in the Parlor Room, 1321 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd, Chapel Hill. For more information about the group, please email Jodi Flick joflick@email.unc.edu prior to attending.
- Additional UNC mental health resources can be found [here](#), courtesy of UNC School of Social Work.
- Psychology Today and Good Therapy has a list of licensed therapists and can be filtered by location, insurance network and specialty area.
- [Faith Connections on Mental Illness](#) is a Triangle-area group working with all faith communities to welcome, include, support, educate and advocate for individuals and families who are living with mental illness. It provides support, education and forum, and helps create connections between individuals with mental illness or those caring for them.
- [Family Advocacy Network](#) provides support for parents and caregivers of children with emotional, behavioral or mental health challenges.
- [Josh's Hope Foundation](#) works with young adults who have serious mental health issues, helping them identify resources, build skills and develop plans to successfully transition to adulthood.
- The Orange County Health Department offers free short-term counseling to clinic patients experiencing mental health issues.
- The Trevor Project crisis line for LGBTQ Youth: 1-866-488-7386
- Trans Lifeline hotline is a peer support phone service run by trans people for trans and questioning peers: 1-877-565-8860
- Your Life Your Voice teen crisis hotline for if you are having thoughts of harming yourself or you are being abused: 1-800-448-3000
- HopeLine NC is a local crisis/suicide prevention helpline: 919-231-4525
- [Open Path Psychotherapy Collective](#) is a nonprofit nationwide network of mental health professionals dedicated to providing in-office and online mental health care—at a steeply reduced rate—to individuals, couples, children and families in need.
- [Melanin Therapy](#) is a comprehensive directory of treatment options designed to meet the unique mental health needs of African-Americans and people of color.