

Educator's Guide To Supporting Students During Difficult Times

Faculty and staff play a critical role in supporting the needs of students. These situations provide us with a unique opportunity to build connections, character, and sensitivity within and between our students and colleagues. We encourage you to take advantage of this “teachable moment” to reinforce appropriate behaviors and responsibilities among our students.

The following guide will provide you with some talking points that we feel will help you address some of the anxieties and concerns that some students may have at this time. By proactively addressing this information, we hope to alleviate concerns and to return to a more conducive educational environment.

Do:

- **Provide an opportunity for discussion** – research demonstrates that the expression of thoughts and feelings play a key role in the healing process. Suppressing our thoughts can actually cause a person to experience greater difficulties at a later time. Consider starting with a statement of observation, such as “I see that you are feeling ___ about ___.” People feel a sense of comfort knowing that they are not alone in their reactions and thoughts. Don’t force students to talk, but be sure all who wish to speak have the opportunity.
- **Normalize their reactions** – help them realize that it is natural for them to feel anxious or concerned. State “it is okay to feel afraid, confused, and angry. These are all normal responses.”
- **Provide structure, safety, and routine** - these are very important at this time, given that some students may be feeling “out of control.” Be consistent about discipline so there is enough structure for them to feel safe.
- **Listen carefully and reassure them about their own safety** – emphasize that schools are good and safe places for people to be. Assure them that adults are doing everything they can to ensure that their school is safe. Students also have a responsibility to maintain a safe environment.
- **Suggest appropriate support services** – such as the guidance office or faculty and other staff.
- **Allow for questions** - always be honest in your communication with others. You are not expected to have all of the answers. Remember that you don’t have to become the instant counselor. Students simply need you to be there for them by letting them talk about their fears, concerns and feelings. They need to feel safe and not judged.

Educator's Guide To Supporting Students During Difficult Times (Continued)

Don't:

- **Say that you know exactly how they feel** – everyone has different backgrounds, experiences and views that are unique to them. We all respond in our own unique ways to challenges
- **Try to explain or answer “why?”** – we all have our own opinions about past situations. However, the conversation should be about their fears, anger, and concerns – and their misunderstandings and confusion – not yours.
- **Minimize their thought and feelings** – students are entitled to their thoughts. We want to provide an outlet and resource for them to talk openly about their challenges.
- **Promise something that you can't control** – like saying that something bad will never happen to them.

Refer the student for further intervention when:

- the student is not engaging in the classroom activities or discussions after a sufficient amount of time. Specifically, pay attention to students who appear isolated more than usual;
- student continues to express a high emotional response beyond that of other peers;
- a significant decrease in performance is noted in student who typically demonstrated adequate skills;
- student expresses suicidal or homicidal threats or thoughts. Additionally, students who are exhibiting self-injurious behaviors should be referred;
- student shows signs of prolonged sadness or depression such as displaying depressed mood, lacking concentration, exhibiting poor hygiene, and/or expressing feelings of hopelessness.

People are naturally resilient and will typically respond appropriately with the proper support. The cumulative effects of past personal experience can be quite challenging. However, we are all in this together and will provide the necessary support to help everyone in need. Our goal is to instill a sense of hope and expectancy that things will get better.

We thank you for your continued dedication and commitment towards education. We truly appreciate your strength and courage during this difficult time.



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