

Ways to Come Together as a Community

The April 16, 2007 Virginia Tech shootings will be a day many campus officials and students remember forever. As we struggle to make sense of these horrific events, it's only natural for individuals to want to talk and listen to one another. You may be wondering how to comfort and communicate with members of your campus community.

- **Hold a candlelight vigil outside in the snow or sand.** At the conclusion of the vigil, place the candles on the ground in a peace sign formation and leave them to burn into the night.
- **Post blank pieces of butcher paper on hallway walls or on tables in the dining hall.** Place markers nearby and invite individuals to share their thoughts about school violence.
- **Select a day to invite community members to wear Virginia Tech's colors—Chicago Maroon and Burnt Orange—to honor the victims and their families and demonstrate support for the Virginia Tech campus.**
- **Have a moment of silence on campus** in memory of those who were killed during the shootings.
- **Create a mobile of peace cranes with students in remembrance of the Virginia Tech victims.** These origami birds have long been a symbol of peace, since the American attack on Hiroshima, Japan during World War II. Learn how to make them at www.wtchealingproject.org/instructions.html.

Keep Parents in Mind

Parents, especially those separated by distance from their students, are likely having a difficult time wrapping their heads around the Virginia Tech incident, too. They are important community members to consider as you work to bring your community together.

Some schools, like the College of Saint Catherine (MN), have developed letters to parents. Highlight your campus security measures and remind constituents about safety tips they can use to assist in prevention efforts. Check out the free "Is My Child Safe on Campus?" pdf available with our Virginia Tech coverage. It's ready to post to your website and/or send out to parents as a way to keep them in the loop and to help set their minds at ease.

- **Encourage residential life staff members to bring together their individual communities for conversation and reflection.**

This will also provide an opportunity for reiterating safety and security tips.

- **Create a forum for community members to orally share their thoughts informally or formally.**

This could be as simple as placing a mic and a podium in a public area or as elaborate as organizing a peace rally.

- **Invite students to journal their thoughts in classes.**

This will help them reflect individually and process any worries they have about being a college student at a time of such violence on a campus.

- **Send an email outlining the facts as we know them regarding the shootings.** Encourage community members to view and review reputable news sources when gathering additional information.

- **Set up a large TV or projection screen in a comfortable space on campus and show the news.** Invite members of the community to gather together to watch and share stories.

- **Create a pledge to work together to maintain a safe campus.** Encourage individuals to sign it.

- **Bring faculty, staff and administrators together to discuss their feelings about the events.** Ensure that they feel supported and safe, as well as understand safety and security protocol and procedures. It's difficult work looking out for students' best interests, especially during a time of such tragedy. These folks need care, too.

Social Networks Pull Communities Together Online

Hundreds of Facebook groups have been established nationwide to offer individuals a forum to grieve together and share their stories. It is likely that your students have tapped into Facebook for information. Download the pdf available with our Virginia Tech coverage about online communities' role within this incident and for instructions on finding groups established by campus communities everywhere.

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