

Reflection & Processing Questions to Use with Students

Today's college students have, unfortunately, been exposed to school shootings throughout their lifetime. However, the images of April 16th mirror the campus buildings and college environment they see daily. The fact that this incident occurred on a college campus means there are likely students who are more impacted by this event than some in the recent past.

You may find a student entering your office to just "talk" or the agenda for a student meeting may be spontaneously altered to process student feelings and fears surrounding the events of April 16th. Some may not talk at all – but that doesn't mean they aren't thinking about it or talking among their peers. Sometimes asking a probing question or facilitating a guided reflection can help students process the mix of emotions and thoughts they are experiencing. Consider the following questions and reflections to help guide one-on-one or group discussions.

Provide an Observation of the Event—Begin with a low-risk observation of what occurred:

- *What happened at Virginia Tech yesterday was a tragedy. Although it didn't happen on this campus, because it happened on a college campus, it still feels like it hit close to home.*
- *I know I felt ... (complete with your own feelings)*

Provide Facts and Stifle Rumors—Make every attempt to be prepared with factual information regarding the incident. Often student fears are perpetuated by inaccurate information. If a student shares something that you believe is not completely accurate, help them reflect on the source of that information:

- *Can I ask how you received that information?*
- *That is interesting, because I understand this *** to be the truth.*
- *Where do you think we could find the most accurate information?*

In Their Words—Each student will respond differently to the incident. It is important that students have an opportunity to share their feelings in their own words. Some students will feel immense grief, some will suddenly feel unsafe, and some will feel nothing—they have not connected with the incident. All reactions are normal.

- *What were your thoughts last night as you reflected on this incident at Virginia Tech?*

- *What do you think the student/faculty/staff at Virginia Tech were feeling yesterday?*
- *What do you think college students across the country were thinking and feeling?*
- *How do you think parents of college students felt as they watched those images on the news?*

Am I Safe?— Help students identify the source of their fears or concerns. Often these incidents remind us of past tragedies in our lives, or renew fears surrounding personal safety, relationships, and death. Use this as a "teachable moment" to assist students in understanding their role in the safety of their community, while also identifying ways the college could be safer. Ensure them that you will share their suggestions with appropriate college officials.

- *It is understandable that you are concerned about your safety on campus. It is a priority of the institution to ensure each community member's safety.*
- *When do you feel safe on campus? Why?*
- *When do you feel less safe on campus? Why?*
- *What can you and your peers do to ensure our community's safety?*
- *What could the college/university do to make you feel safe?*

Resources—Just listening is valuable for students. And, if a student has approached you to discuss his feelings, he obviously trusts you and knows you will be supportive. However, sometimes students need more than just someone to talk through their fears and feelings with. They need professional help. Make sure that students know what resources are available on campus should they need them.

- *Are you finding others to talk to about your feelings? May I ask whom?*
- *I am so glad that you came to me, and I am wondering if you think you might want to continue processing your feelings with someone in the Counseling Center (Health Center, Pastoral Services, etc.).*
- *Are there other students who you think would benefit from talking more about this incident? What format do you think would be most helpful?*

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