

Helping Students Concerned about the Threat of War and Terrorism: A Guide for Faculty and Staff

Terrorist threats and the possibility of war instill feelings of helplessness and fear. Different people react, and cope, in vastly different ways. A person's natural temperament, social support, prior life experiences, and coping skills combine to trigger that individual's specific reaction. It is important, however, to be aware that even when students do not express verbal concern, they may still be having strong internal reactions.

Dealing with students on a day-to-day basis, faculty and staff are likely to see students in need of assistance. Understanding the potential reactions, the possible interventions, and the resources available to students, faculty and staff, is critical to being able to work effectively with these students.

Possible reactions:

- Preoccupation with terrorist incidents and war
- Watching the media frequently
- Increased reactivity to small issues and events
- Increased moodiness and anxiety
- Changes in sleeping and eating patterns
- Strained relationships with loved ones—either increased isolation or irritability
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Increased fear or hostility toward individuals from other countries

What concerned faculty and staff can do to help:

- Listen. Allow students who confide in you to share their experience. Encourage them to confide in their support system.
- When you are discussing class topics that might remind students of the current political climate and threats of violence, be aware that some students might react strongly (even if they do not express this aloud). Try to be sensitive in how you introduce such topics, and be tolerant if some students need to take a break during class.
- Students whose families live far from Bowling Green, and those from major metropolitan areas, may be especially likely to react strongly to these situations. Far from their support systems, they may rely more extensively on supportive faculty and close friends.
- It is often beneficial for people to continue with their usual routine as much as possible. Encourage students to keep up with assignments, classes, and other activities as much as possible. Even so, be aware that some students might need some brief time away.
- If students express hostility toward individuals from specific countries (e.g., Middle-Eastern countries), help them appreciate the distinction between the country's leaders and the innocent population. Increased divisiveness in our own country will not ultimately help students feel safer.

- Be aware that strong reactions may come from many sources, including previous experiences of trauma. What seems like an unreasonable response on the outside may be perfectly understandable in the context of that person's life.
- If some students' reactions seem particularly strong, or if the reactions continue over time, make a referral to a professional. The Counseling Center is available on an appointment or an emergency basis. When needed, we can provide community referrals. We are located in 320 Saddlemire Student Services Building, 419/372-2081. (Outside of office hours, individuals in distress are welcome to call the Link Crisis Hotline at 419/352-1545.)
- Be aware that these stressors do not only affect students, but also faculty and staff. Know your Employee Assistance Program resources and mental health benefits. EAP assistance is provided by Harbor; Harbor representatives can be reached at 800/422-5338. Additionally, faculty, staff and students may seek assistance through the Psychological Services Center (419/372-2540).

Resources

The BGSU Counseling Center provides free, professional and confidential counseling to students. Faculty and staff are invited to contact the Counseling Center (419/372-2081) to consult about concerns pertaining to the welfare of students. Additional written information about mental health issues and Counseling Center services is available at our Center's web site (www.bgsu.edu/offices/sa/counseling/).

The following resources provide relevant information:

American Psychological Association:

<http://helping.apa.org>

<http://helping.apa.org/daily/terrorism.html>

<http://helping.apa.org/daily/traumaticstress.html>

<http://helping.apa.org/daily/tassey.html>

National Mental Health Association:

<http://www.nmha.org/reassurance/anniversary/index.cfm>

Mayo Clinic:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/invoke.cfm?id=MH00021>

Bowling Green Campus Ministries Resource Page:

http://www.bgsu.edu/studentlife/organizations/st_toms/bgcmresources.html

Adapted (with minor revision) from an informational brochure developed by Dr. Karen Lese, Counseling Center, University of San Diego, 2003.

