

LEADING AN EMOTIONAL DISCUSSION

One of the strengths of UC Berkeley is the engagement of students, faculty and staff in campus dialogue. At times these discussions can be emotionally charged and those leading the discussion are looking for guidance about how to support students who may be understandably distressed by the content. There cannot be a counseling presence at all of these events and moderators/leaders are often in the role of facilitating discussion and addressing emotions that arise.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LEADING EMOTIONALLY CHARGED DISCUSSIONS:

Make a statement at the beginning of the class/event

You could say something such as:

“I want to thank you all for coming to the meeting. Some of the topics, which we will be discussing today, can be intense and may bring up strong thoughts and/or feelings. These reactions can be normal and we want you to be able to experience them. If these thoughts/feelings arise I hope that you will think about the kinds of coping strategies that you can use for healthy living. You may consider seeking support from family or friends who understand your experience. If you think you are needing more than this kind of support, know that campus support services are available to you.

If you need support, you can call Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at (510) 642-9494 or you can go to CAPS, on the 3rd floor of Tang Center, for crisis drop-in Monday-Friday from 10am-5pm.”

Respond supportively if any students have a reaction.

In most cases reactions are going to be normal and simply providing a warm and caring environment can be the help the student needs.

If you see someone having a reaction, just remember to be compassionate. You can approach them at a natural break (maybe before or after the class/meeting) and ask if it is okay to talk. Here are some questions you might ask when reaching out to a student:

“What is happening for you now?”

“How are you doing?”

“How have you coped in the past?”

“What might help you now?”

“What could you do after you leave today that might help you feel better?”

Share your concerns about individual students

If, after a campus discussion, you have concerns about an individual student, please call CAPS to consult with a counselor at (510) 642-9494. For after-hours support, call (855) 817-5667.

TANG TIP:

It is a completely legitimate choice, and a model of healthy self-care, to NOT engage in an activity that may feel too challenging at any given time.