



Talking Points in Response to an Unexpected Death

Student Counseling Services – Division of Student Life

The first point is that there really aren't so much talking points, as there are listening points. We, generally, have very little that we know, and perhaps not much more we can say, even when we do know the cause of death.

In this situation we can't change a bad reality. We can be present to one another as we endure a bad reality together.

What we can do is say what we can say, say it directly, and then turn the conversation toward listening: e.g. "No, I don't know anything more about this case. But how did you learn of this? What has it been like for you to hear about this?"

When someone nearby, whether a friend or just an acquaintance, dies unexpectedly, we can have a variety of emotional reactions.

- Anxiety – It reminds me of when my friend died in a car accident.
- Sadness – My grandfather died unexpectedly, and when I heard about this death, I thought of him and began to cry.
- Guilt – I just wished I could have done something. He seemed OK, but I should have noticed something.

With each of the above feelings, the best reaction is to

- Recognize the feeling: "Ya, I can see why you would feel (anxious, sad, too responsible)
- Normalize it: "A lot of folks feel that way."
- Ask for more: "What did you think after you felt that way? How are you doing now?"
- Mostly, just listen, and don't try to make everything better.

If there are rumors, even rumors that are probably true...

- Don't confirm or deny any more than we can legitimately do so
- Just nod and listen and then repeat what the official story is – that there has been no official announcement, or whatever it is

If you believe someone in our community needs an additional ear, suggest talking to someone—an RD, someone in Campus Ministry, a priest, or another friend. If you think counseling would help, call Student Counseling Services (402.280.2735) or walk down to the Center for Health & Counseling.

<http://www.creighton.edu/CHC>