

Sample Outline for Leading a Support Session After a Traumatic Event

This is a **voluntary**, single session/meeting to focus on coping skills and self-care. This can be led by staff or faculty. If this is being held during a set meeting time (e.g., class, staff or group meeting, etc.) allow attendees to decline attendance.

This is not a debrief session in which participants share how they have been impacted by the event, since these have been shown to have a negative emotional impact (e.g., increased anxiety, depression, trauma responses, etc.).

Students who feel the need for individual support may always see a Bellevue College counselor.

1. Introduction:

- Describe the purpose of the optional meeting.
- Acknowledge the traumatic event that occurred.
- Establish ground rules, which could include:
 - Listening to understand
 - Avoiding judgment
 - Being conscientious of others
 - Avoid interrupting

2. Shared understanding:

- Provide factual information about what has occurred (this part is not graphic in nature but a brief description).

3. Impact:

- This is not about what occurred but the now.
- Participants could share one or two words on impact.
 - Avoid more than a 1-2-word check-ins and **this should be optional**.
- Facilitator normalizes responses and provides education around how impact can vary:
 - Mention how not all people are always impacted and how impact can vary from person to person.
 - Also mention that there can be potential future impacts that may not be present now and say this is all normal and ok.

4. Strategies for Coping and self-care:

- Participants can share their strategies for coping.
- Facilitators can then provide self-care activities to try and free self-care ideas.
- Sometimes people forget to take care of themselves, so focus on self-care and remind them it's ok to take breaks.

5. Mobilization of social supports:

- Identify informal (friends, family) and formal (counseling, church) resources for ongoing support.

6. Wrap up:

- Thank participants for attending.
- Acknowledge experiences, impact, and strengths.
- Provide opportunities for individual follow-up.
- Share campus resources.

How to Help Others:

- Encourage them to take care of simple physical needs like getting nourishing food, drinking enough water, getting enough sleep and exercise and most importantly, having people around them who are willing to help them.
- Help can often come simply in silence, being willing to spend time with them.
- Reach out to them rather than expecting that they will know what they need and waiting for them to call you.
- Some may need permission to take more down time. For others the structure of work and school may be a welcome distraction and place for support.
- Don't immediately encourage them to change their schedule, follow their lead.
- Help people find a number of sources of support. Close friends, family and colleagues all play different roles in support.
- Let them know about formal confidential resources and informal support services on campus.
- Let your own feelings and impact inform your caring without comparing or imposing your story on theirs.
- People often find the need to take breaks from their impact yet feel guilty about doing this so it can be helpful to normalize it and offer such opportunities (i.e. a walk, a movie, getting coffee together, etc.)
- Remember that impact from trauma is a nonlinear process. It often comes in waves where people may do well for a while and then can be triggered by something and get down for a bit and then feel well again. These waves can occur over a stretch of time.

Content Credit: University of Colorado Boulder, Office of Victim Assistance:

<https://www.colorado.edu/ova/guidance-supporting-groups-and-teams-after-traumatic-event>