

USC Student Health

Keck Medicine of USC

213-740-9355 (WELL)

Guidelines for Faculty & Staff: Talking with Students about Suicide

Let them know you care.

“We are all experiencing shock and sadness about _____’s death.”

Listen with acceptance—many emotions can be normal including anger, grief and confusion. Avoid taking these personally if directed at you or your office. Validating and accepting anger is the best approach to diffusing it. “Everyone’s reaction to grief is a bit different, there is no right way to grieve.”

Be patient. Less is more. It is more about listening than what you have to say.

Offer practical support.

Does the student need assistance with classes or coursework?

Are they eating and getting rest?

Remind student to reach out to supportive family and friends.

Keep these things in mind

Suicide is complex and there are almost always multiple causes.

Offer hope. Help is available and people get better with treatment.

For privacy reasons, we can’t share specific information about any student. “Out of respect for the privacy of the family those questions are being addressed according to the family’s wishes. Today we can focus on how you are doing and what you need.”

Connect them to resources

Counseling and Mental Health Services is available 24/7. Call (213) 740-9355(WELL).

Take care of yourself

Reach out for support to family and friends.

Give yourself permission to step away and take a break.

Resources are available through the Office of Work and Family Life.

Things to avoid

Speculating on the “reason.”

Linking suicide to any specific event like a break-up, television show or bad grade.

Describing suicide as unexpected or without warning.

These guidelines were created by professionals in Counseling and Mental Health Services in USC Student Health. All clinicians are faculty in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences in the Keck School of Medicine of USC.