

## ***Coping with College Series***

### **The Power of Community**

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As the second anniversary of 9/11 approaches I have been thinking a lot about the importance of community. We may not think of it often, but being part of a community is central to a sense of well-being. Without community, people feel isolated, unvalued, ungrounded.

ISU is a community. For many of you it is a new community and might not feel very safe yet. Many of you are probably missing your “real” community, the community you had back home. But if you’re here for any length of time, this will become your community.

Think about it. These people all around you are your community. The other students in your class, the guys on your hall floor, your teammates, the men and women in your chapter. This is it. These are the people who will see you every day. On the good hair days and the bad hair days. On the days when you’ve got it all together and the days you don’t. They’re the ones who will be down the hall when you find out your dad got laid off, your parents are divorcing, or your favorite aunt was diagnosed with terminal cancer. These are the people who could help you through the hard stuff.

Yet so often we do things that are detrimental to our community (and therefore to ourselves). We judge others in our community because they’re a different size, wear different clothes, have different sexual behaviors, don’t drink, don’t listen to the music we listen to. We gossip, backstab, scapegoat, exclude, bully.

Don’t do it. Don’t waste your time being judgmental. Don’t pick on the guy down the hall because he’s not what you consider a “man” should be. Accept that people are different. Challenge yourself to understand why this person is different than you. Perhaps she had different life experiences, has a different temperament, has different priorities, has different ways of getting her needs met. Let it go.

Shortly after 9/11, when the planes just started flying again, I heard this story about a pilot who announced to the cabin of very nervous passengers, “The doors have just closed. We’re family now.” And in those post 9/11 days, people got it. We have to look out for each other. We’re responsible for each other. Sometimes, our lives depend on each other.

It's true here too. Your life and the lives of your friends are incredibly intertwined. You have enormous power to make your community positive or negative. Gwendolyn Brooks said it most poetically: We are each other's harvest; we are each other's business; we are each other's magnitude and bond." This is YOUR community. Make it one you can be proud of.