



Recognizing and Preventing High School Hazing

Students participating in school-related activities have a right to be safe and to be free of humiliation and intimidation. Here are the basics in understanding and in preventing high school hazing.

Defining HAZING:

While hazing can be difficult to define precisely, it's clear that it almost always includes new members showing subservience to older members, lowering the self-esteem of the newcomers. Definitions could include a variety of terms including, but not limited to, committing an act or coercing a student to commit an act that creates substantial risk of harm (mental or physical). Hazing usually involves compromising the victim's safety and/or dignity. Additionally, in many hazing incidents students are forced to violate state or federal law (such as the use of alcohol/tobacco) or other school policies.

The following information was taken from the NFHS IAA Publication for Winter, 2002:

Hazing can be defined as any act or ceremony which creates the risk of harm to the student or to any other party and that is committed as a form of initiation into a particular club or activity. Hazing includes, but is not limited to, activities that involve the risk of physical harm, whipping, branding, ingesting vile substances, sleep deprivation, over-exposure to heat or cold, restraint, nudity or kidnapping. Hazing could also include actions or simulations of a sexual nature, activities that subject a student to unreasonable embarrassment or shame, or activities that create a hostile, abusive or intimidating environment for the student.

Who is HAZED?

Nearly every group undergoes hazing: athletes, peer groups, gangs, students in music, art or theater, and church groups. Hazing is not limited to organized groups but may also be part of non-sanctioned groups.

HAZING isn't that prevalent, is it?

It's difficult to get an actual count on the number of hazing incidents that occur annually in the United States. Hazing by its very nature is secret, and it's estimated that nearly half of all hazing incidents go unreported. The increase in court cases seems to indicate that high school hazing is on the rise, and recent studies illustrate that the severity and the danger of the incidents continue to escalate.

But doesn't HAZING make students feel like part of the group?

It's hard to feel unity among a group of students when some members subject others to humiliation and embarrassment. Hazing creates tension, and oftentimes hazing can have the opposite effect: it becomes divisive and dangerous.

Is there a law against HAZING?

Forty-two states have anti-hazing laws. There are a number of legal protections in the state of Oregon that might apply to hazing situations, including laws that protect against assault and against harassment. To see examples of laws that exist in other states, visit www.stophazing.org/laws.html.

What can schools do to prevent HAZING?

Schools should take steps to stop hazing. Here are some suggestions:

- Adopt strict anti-hazing rules and written policies.
- Make hazing awareness a part of your coaches' responsibilities and a part of your P.E. curriculum.
- Provide information about the dangers of hazing, ranging from the loss of civility to the loss of life.

- Develop an anti-hazing contract for students and parents to sign.
- Require students to meet behavioral standards to continue participation.
- Develop alternative spirit-building or team-building activities that carry a positive message.

How can I learn more?

This material was prepared using several resources, including:

“High School Hazing: When Rites Become Wrongs” by Hank Nuwer

“Initiation Rites in American High Schools – A National Survey” conducted by Alfred University.

“Hazing—An Unnecessary Evil”, NIAAA Magazine, Winter, 2002.

Many sites on the worldwide web address hazing issues, including www.stophazing.org/laws.html.

Many schools lack an anti-hazing policy. Read the cases below (actual cases from around the country) and ask yourself how you would respond if they occurred at your school...

- Four years ago, a student suffered through a hazing ritual to become a high school choir member.
“I was beaten with a two-by-four, and left welts across my rear, and I was hit about four times. I was then covered in human waste, Crisco oil, peanut butter, things were shoved down my pants.”
- When a student showed up for picture day at his high school, he expected to pose for a snapshot with the track and field team. Instead, he says, he found himself face down on the athletic field, the victim of humiliating sexual assaults by his teammates.
“A kid grabbed me from behind and held me,” said the 17-year old. “And another one ran up and tacked me to the ground. And then two others came and held me down to the ground, and one of them started putting their fingers into my rectum area, through my sweats and underwear.
- Two football players testified in juvenile court that they rescued a teammate after he allegedly was sexually assaulted with a foreign object in the locker room.
- A freshman gymnast alleges that she was surrounded one night by 30 upperclassmen and forced to participate in a mock sex act as part of a team hazing ritual.
- Thirteen football players were suspended after a junior varsity player was beaten up after entering the varsity locker room. The player was treated for fluid in his lungs and later quit school.
- Three baseball players were suspended and charged with battery for overpowering a sophomore player and cutting his hair.
- Members of a girls’ athletic squad charged that they saw evidence of male athletes being sodomized with fingers and objects. A parent of a young man accused of hazing says due process was not followed. The basketball coach was indicted on three felony counts of child abuse.
- Fourteen female field hockey players have lost team status after younger players said they’d been subjected to sexual stimulation acts and demeaning activities. Lawyers for some of the parents said they would sue to get their daughters back on the team.
- Five seventh-grade football players said they were bruised following a paddling by eight eighth-grade players. “Isn’t no big deal,” said the father of one eighth-grader.
- Eight students were arrested and seven expelled after a new wrestling teammate was injured in a hazing ritual. Police say the victim, a student with learning disabilities, was stuffed inside a locker, slammed into a wall and sodomized with a plastic knife handle in a series of attacks. The victim suffered a serious knee injury in one incident and is receiving counseling for emotional trauma. A team member also reportedly told police that both the wrestling and basketball coaches at the school saw the victim hog-tied and did nothing.

Is your school prepared to handle a hazing complaint?