



Hazing Prevention: Strategies for Healthy Rites of Passage



Why Read This

Hazing is a complicated problem that jeopardizes the learning environment and poses serious safety risks to students. K-12 schools, colleges, and universities must ensure that degrading and humiliating acts aren't part of a student's initiation experience. With a strong anti-hazing policy, effective training, and continued responsiveness to potential hazing problems, institutions can help students create healthy rites of passage.

This report examines the issue of hazing and provides steps toward preventing it at your school.



Key Takeaways

Hazing occurs when an activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers the person, regardless of the person's willingness.

Many students believe that for an activity to constitute hazing, the victim must be unwilling; your anti-hazing policy should state that an activity is hazing even if the person willingly participates.

Hazing is common — research indicates that half of all college students were exposed to dangerous rites of passage while in high school.

Whether for an athletic team, marching band, or drama club, students engage in degrading and dangerous rituals just to belong. A review of United Educators' (UE's) hazing-related claims showed that over 50% of claims involved athletic teams or Greek life organizations. In addition, more than 80% of claims involved male perpetrators and male victims. This report explains what hazing is and provides steps your institution can take to help prevent hazing.

Steps to Help Prevent Hazing at Your School

When an activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers that person, regardless of the person's willingness, it is considered hazing.

For many, the idea of undergoing hazing to belong begins early. Research indicates that half of all college students were exposed to dangerous rites of passage while in high school. One study found that three of five college students were hazed while in college.

There are no easy solutions to prevent hazing, but your institution should follow these steps to take a firm stance against the practice and create an environment where healthy initiation and rites of passage thrive.

Step 1: Develop an Anti-Hazing Policy

- **Clearly define what constitutes hazing.** Many students mistakenly believe that for an activity to constitute hazing, the victim must be unwilling. Your policy should state that an activity is hazing even if the person willingly participates. Moreover, your policy should convey that hazing won't be tolerated and that any humiliating or demeaning activities are violations. Widely disseminate the policy in student, faculty, and staff handbooks, and on your school's website.
- **Identify the consequences for policy violations.** Hold those who haze — including the entire team or student group — accountable for violating the policy. Consequences reinforce your institution's prohibition of degrading and humiliating rites of passage. However, a zero-tolerance policy that expels any student violator may encourage under-reporting and drive activities further underground. A unique aspect of hazing is that perpetrators are often past victims of hazing. While you still want the penalty to send a strong message, consider offering a range of potential consequences that let perpetrators, the group, and the school community learn from the experience.

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Step 2: Create a Process for Reporting, Investigating Hazing

- **Consider an anonymous system for reporting.** In addition to victims and parents, bystanders with no affiliation with the group often report hazing incidents. To encourage as many reports as possible, many schools have developed online anonymous reporting systems. This lets people report suspected hazing without fear of isolation or retaliation from the group.
- **Establish a process for investigating hazing allegations.** Investigate every complaint of suspected hazing. To ensure your institution responds promptly and effectively, the investigative process should identify who has investigative responsibilities, such as a school official or student judicial body, and investigative steps. As appropriate, coordinate investigations with local law enforcement.

Step 3: Educate Your Campus About Hazing

- **Address misconceptions.** Often, hazing is perpetuated because of positive misconceptions, such as “it makes someone a better person” or that it is “no big deal.” Consider the following UE claims examples: *1. A coach told the school he considered allegations of rookies being called gay and held down in the locker room by older players who stuffed jock straps in their mouths to be “rough-housing.” 2. An advisor of a club sport team classified the practice of ordering initiates to strip naked and drink a keg of beer as “boys being boys.”*

To dispel these misconceptions, train students, faculty, and staff on the hidden harms of hazing and how to differentiate between hazing and healthy rites of passage. Explain what hazing looks like and how to facilitate a healthy initiation or team building exercise.

- **Engage student leaders in prevention.** Students are likeliest to identify problems within their organizations early and can act as advocates for healthy rites of passage among peers. Educate group leaders and team captains on the harms of hazing and remind peer leaders they are responsible for their organization’s behavior. Ensure coaches, advisors, and student affairs staff are visible in their organizations and can advise students on hazing issues and serve as a safe place to discuss concerns.

- **Train students, faculty, staff, alumni, volunteers, and parents.** Each of these constituencies can play a significant role in hazing prevention. For example, hazing events often occur in a residence or in the presence of alumni, parents, or staff. Consider these claim examples: *1. After enduring a degrading initiation process as freshmen, upperclassmen on a girls’ lacrosse team decided not to initiate new team members. However, a group of team alumni pressured the upperclassmen to hold an initiation night at an alumnus’ apartment. 2. During a team barbecue at a player’s house and in front of his parents, upperclassmen on a boys’ high school soccer team forced freshmen to take off their clothing and wear diapers and duct taped them together.*

Your training efforts should include what hazing is and how to identify it, elements of your institution’s anti-hazing policy, and how to report suspected hazing incidents.

- **Document your training efforts.** Maintain up-to-date files detailing the hazing education offered, session dates, and participants. These records can provide valuable insight if allegations of hazing arise and an investigation ensues.



Step 4: Encourage Proper Supervision and Communication

- **Ensure your student activities are appropriately supervised.** Most hazing incidents occur when students believe authority figures won't see them. To avoid these situations, train those who supervise groups or teams, such as advisors, coaches, and volunteers on what hazing is and how to prevent it. Consider the following claim example: *While at a hotel for an away game, freshmen basketball players were stripped, bound, paddled, and thrown out of their room naked. Coaches were unaware because they failed to do bed checks and stayed in a separate part of the hotel.*
- **Increase administrator, staff, and faculty visibility on campus.** Faculty and staff who interact often with students can help them make the distinction between fun and hazing by identifying potential dangers before they escalate. Train faculty and staff on warning signs of hazing so they are equipped to promptly handle red flag situations.
- **Promote an open dialogue about hazing.** Adopting a “don't ask, don't tell” hazing policy may be tempting for coaches and advisors, but it indirectly endorses hazing. The following claim example illustrates the importance of training coaches and advisors on how to talk to students about hazing: *After a freshman soccer player was teased by upperclassmen that he would be raped, the player asked his coach if he would be raped on their upcoming road trip. The coach said, “Don't be silly,” and ended the conversation. During the first away game, two upperclassmen sexually assaulted the student in his room. The school's investigation found that two other freshmen were sexually assaulted and this “tradition” had been going on for years. In fact, some of the perpetrators had been victims of sexual hazing as freshmen.*

can easily turn into hazing when new members are treated differently, especially if that treatment is less favorable. For example, a seemingly benign tradition of requiring freshmen to parade across campus to the first pep rally turned into hazing when upperclassmen began yelling insults and throwing food at them.

- **Promote alternatives to hazing.** Without guidance, students often have difficulty devising safe rites of passage. Your institution can offer and publicize healthy group activities such as: rope course or group trip; adopting a local charity; group dinners; dressing up for team functions or for away games; participating in a cross-mentoring program with local high, middle, or elementary schools; and/or participating in a community service project.

Alternatives to hazing should never be offered in lieu of training on hazing prevention. Research shows that students may continue hazing even when alternative activities are offered.



Step 5: Encourage Healthy Rituals for Establishing Group Identity, Pride

- **Don't tolerate treating new members differently.** Traditions and rites of passage can establish a sense of belonging and improve cohesiveness between group members and can create lasting bonds. However, they

Step 6: Add Hazing Prevention to Advisors' or Coaches' Responsibilities

An organization leader's attitude strongly influences whether hazing will occur. When hiring a new coach or advisor, ask candidates about their position on hazing and how they will welcome new group members.

When communicating your institution's expectations, go beyond prohibiting hazing. Require coaches and advisors to prohibit different treatment of new members and promote healthy ways to integrate them to the group. Furthermore, in annual reviews, evaluate advisors on their students' behavior and penalize them for not reporting hazing incidents to school officials.

Step 7: Address Alcohol's Role in Hazing

High-risk or binge drinking is common in hazing claims involving alcohol. Establish clear policies on alcohol use by students and student organizations.

For minors, prohibit drinking.

To encourage compliance with your institution's alcohol policy, set and enforce consequences for noncompliance. Also, educate students on your school's policy and the risks associated with alcohol misuse.

Check Your State Laws

Currently, [44 states have anti-hazing laws](#) and all define hazing differently. In most states, hazing is a criminal offense and some states allow for criminal prosecution of employees who fail to report incidents. Several states also cover hazing in education laws, requiring schools to develop policies and procedures that address hazing.

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Resources

More from UE

[Webinar: Hazing in Athletics](#)

[Course: Recognize and Prevent Hazing](#)

Additional Resources

[Stop Hazing: Hazing Prevention Consortium](#)

[National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments: School Discipline Laws & Regulations by Category & State](#)

[Clarion University: Anti-Hazing Policy](#)

[Syracuse University: Anti-Hazing Policy](#)

[Delta Sigma Theta Sorority: Anti-Hazing](#)

[Willow Hill School: Anti-Hazing Policy](#)



For more information, visit www.ue.org or call (301) 907-4908.

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