

Hazing in High School Athletics: Recognition and Prevention

It is the right of a student who is participating in high school athletics to be safe and free from humiliation and intimidation. The following information is what you need to know about recognizing and preventing hazing in your school.

Defining Hazing:

Hazing can be a difficult term to precisely define as the hazing activity may be engaged in on a voluntary basis or be seemingly “light-hearted” in nature. Typically in the high school setting, older members of the group force new members to show subservience to the veteran team members. As a result, the self-esteem of the new members is lowered because of being forced to complete humiliating acts or to endure intimidation. Hazing is an act, including physical, mental, or psychological, which subjects another person, voluntarily or involuntarily, to anything that may abuse, mistreat, degrade, humiliate, harass, or intimidate him/her, or which may, in any fashion, compromise his/her inherent dignity as a person. In most hazing incidents, student athletes are asked to violate school policies and state or federal law (i.e., use of tobacco or alcohol).

Definition of hazing from the NFHS' *Interscholastic Athletic Administration* magazine (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 create a hostile, abusive, or intimidating environment for the student.

Who is hazed?

Hazing occurs in most sanctioned and non-sanctioned groups. These groups could be athletic teams, music-related groups, art or theater groups, peer groups, and gangs.

The prevalence of hazing.

While it is not easy to know the extent to which hazing incidents are occurring in the United States due to the secretive nature of hazing, yet one study from Alfred University has been done to determine the extent and nature of hazing in U.S. high schools. This study found that of those polled 48 percent of the students that belonged to a group reported that they had been subjected to hazing activities. Thirty-six percent of the students reported that they would not report a hazing incident because they feel that there is no one to tell and 27 percent feel that the adults will not handle the situation “right.”

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

It is hard to create and feel unity within a group of students when some members subject others to humiliation and embarrassment. Hazing creates tension and can become divisive and dangerous. In the hazing study, 71 percent of the students that had been subjected to hazing reported that they experienced negative consequences (e.g., getting into fights, being injured, poor academic performance, fighting with parents, feeling confused, angry, guilty, or embarrassed, and difficulty eating, sleeping, or concentrating).