

HAZING: Are you a coach or other school activity staff member?

By Caudill (CMS) Kathy on July 12, 2014

As a coach or other school activity staff member you have direct, regular contact with athletes and other school activity participants. You play a critical role in preventing and responding to hazing. Your influence and supervision extends beyond the school setting to buses, hotels, camps, and many other places. You have great influence in setting a climate and culture of respect (for self and others) within your sport or activity. In addition, the following can aid you in setting a climate of respect and civility that deters hazing.

- **Modeling respect**
- **Giving information**
- **Responding to behaviors that may lead to hazing or indicate that hazing has occurred**
- **Enforcing rules and policies about hazing**
- **Involving students and parents in preventing hazing**
- **Establishing healthier and safer ways to welcome new group members**



Modeling respect:

Model respect in all your dealings with students. What you say and do counts. Check your behavior to see that it matches the behavior you expect of students. Watch the subtle messages you send, particularly toward new members of your team or group.

Remember that we all make mistakes sometimes. Acknowledge when that happens to you and then make the appropriate corrections. Students seeing you admit to mistakes and then correct them can help them do likewise. It also models respect for self and others.

Giving information:

Provide information about your school's anti-hazing policies to students and parents. Student or Athletic Handbooks or other written communication provides a baseline. However, written information may not get read! Two other ways to provide this information are pre-season meetings and teachable moments.

- Pre-season meetings are an excellent way to provide this information about hazing so parents hear the same information as their students. These meetings, prior to the start of the activity season, are an opportunity to clearly state expectations, review policies, and provide other important information for participants and their parents or guardians.

- Teachable moments about things like hazing often come up naturally in sports and other school activities. Try to plan ahead for some of these situations by making a log of situations that are likely to come up and the key messages you want to send about hazing.

Responding to behaviors that may lead to hazing or indicate that hazing has occurred:

Respond to behaviors that concern you. You may observe behaviors that may lead to hazing or indicate that hazing has occurred. If you observe any behavior that causes you to be concerned, you should share that concern with the student.

Refer students for further help when situations are not being resolved or are in areas outside of your expertise. It is helpful to have one person or group (such as Student Assistance Program or Team) to make

these referrals. In any case, find someone in the school system who is willing to make sure that students receive appropriate counseling or help, and that you can get information when you have questions about students.

Enforcing rules and policies about hazing:

Enforce rules and policies about hazing (as well as other policies) fairly and consistently. This will not only help you deal with each incident in the most effective way, but it can have a significant deterrent effect as well. Consistent enforcement is a key ingredient in deterrence. Know and use the system in place for hazing and other issues. Carefully follow the procedures as spelled out in your school policy.

Involving students and parents in preventing hazing:

Consider the selection of team captains or group leaders carefully. Student leaders can positively or negatively impact other student activity participants. Choose students who will have a positive influence and don't leave it to chance (i.e., a vote by team or group members). Make sure that respect for self and respect for others is part of the criteria you use when you choose team captains or group leaders.

Encourage students to engage in positive team building activities on your team. If you have the resources, consider sending them with other team or group leaders to workshops that teach them how to conduct health and safe team building activities.

Encourage parents to guide their children toward positive activities and away from negative ones. The voice of parents usually counts in a student's life. However, parents often don't think it does. Your support and encouragement to parents may help them continue to send important messages that will positively impact students and your team or group.

Establishing healthier and safer ways to welcome new group members:

Promote and establish healthy and safe ways to welcome new group members. Provide some positive team building activities at the beginning of a new season as a way to develop group cohesion and unity.

Community service projects are a great way to build team unity, to "give back to your community" and build civic engagement among your activity participants.

