



HAZING PREVENTION ARTICLE # 4

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The atmosphere you establish within your team will determine what behavior is acceptable and unacceptable by your athletes. **Culture is the soil where character can grow.** A positive and safe atmosphere builds character. A negative culture creates conditions where destructive behaviors can flourish, including hazing.

Hazing 101

Any act committed against someone joining or becoming a member or maintaining membership in any organization that is humiliating, intimidating or demeaning, or endangers the health and safety of the person.

Hazing includes active or passive participation in such acts and occurs regardless of the willingness to participate in the activities! Hazing creates an environment/climate in which dignity and respect are absent.

FIVE TIPS

Building positive and safe cultures within a program should be a priority for all coaches and administrators. Each month we will share FIVE tips to help you develop safe, positive programs in the areas that have the greatest impact: Team Culture, Parent Engagement, Policy Development and Communication. This month's tips will focus on **reporting systems**. Policies are only as good as the systems that are set up to ensure their compliance. So often we hear stories of hazing or harassment that occurs, and coaches and administrators are perplexed why they were never informed. We can only act when we have the information, but it's our responsibility to ensure that there are effective and safe ways for students to provide that to us.

We have said over and over again that one of the most important first steps in preventing hazing is by talking about it and reminding athletes that it is not something that you will accept on your team or within the athletic program. In order to ensure that you know what is happening you also need to speak about how to report it if they see something happening.

Here are some best practices for systems that work to ensure that students-athletes will feel safe to report hazing or harassment when they see it happen or suspect its happening:

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Tip #1

Set a very clear policy on what steps will be taken if a hazing complaint is brought to the department's attention. Some considerations:

1. Who gets the information first? Athletic director/principal?
2. Who is responsible for leading the investigation? Or following up on the inquiry?
3. What is the timeframe for when results of the investigation will be provided back to the athletic director and/or principal?
4. How will the rights and privacy of all involved be protected?
5. Who will document the investigation/inquiry?
6. Who/How will you keep the parties involved informed of the process?
7. How will everyone involved be kept safe and protected from retaliation?

Tip #2

Make it simple and safe for students to report hazing or harassment. Possibilities include:

1. Setting up a form that can be filled out anonymously through a website.
2. Setting up an email address that is just for such types of reporting.
3. Putting a question on the mid-season or end of season student-athlete survey.
4. Having frequent one on one meetings with athletes and asking them if they have seen or heard of anything.

Tip #3

How you respond to that first complaint will either ensure you never get one again or will allow athletes to feel safe reporting in the future. What athletes will be looking for, more than anything, is *if I report will I be safe?* **Ensuring that athletes who report don't become future targets should be a top priority.** This is done through policy and training staff on how to implement that policy.

Tip #4

Don't wait until the end of the season to check in with athletes. Its common practice in most athletic departments to ask student-athletes to complete an end-of-season survey to get information about their experiences on the team. But by the time the season has ended this information might be too late. We encourage departments to do three surveys each season with the first being the shortest, the mid-season a little longer and the final being the most comprehensive. At the start of the season a quick 5 question survey can ask athletes about any concerns they have, what their goals are, how the start of the season is going and any other information they want to share. Surveys should always be anonymous, and the athletic director shouldn't be the only one that has access. These surveys should be shared with the principal or vice principal.

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Tip #5

Athletes aren't the only ones who engage in hazing. It is assumed by many districts that athletes are the only ones who engage in hazing so reporting systems often reside with the coach or within the athletic department only. Safe 4 Athletes (safe4athletes.org) recommends that districts take into account the following considerations in regard to any process for a hazing complaint about a coach. The process should include:

- ***the opportunity for a student-athlete to report cases of abuse to a neutral third party outside the Athletic Department, such as: school counselor (who by law is allowed to keep the conversation confidential - therefore a trusted student advocate), or Title IX coordinator (using the institution's published complaint procedure)***
- *procedures that protect the privacy of the athletes (school counselor) and coaches involved (consult with HR and Title IX coordinator for specifics) and limitations on confidentiality (no confidentiality if leaving the situation unexposed poses a danger to the student or educational environment)*
- *an appeals procedure in the event that the accused or the alleged victim is dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation or hearing*
- *procedures that protect coaches and athletes from retaliation before, during and after a hearing or appeals process with retaliatory behavior viewed as seriously as abuse itself and acknowledging that retaliation can occur independently of whether a charge of abuse is substantiated*
- *requirement for immediate action to ensure that the environment is free of abuse and ensure that an investigation proceeds in a timely manner*

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Additional Resources:

Stop Hazing: <http://www.stophazing.org/>

Hazing Prevention: <http://hazingprevention.org/>

Inside Hazing : <http://www.insidehazing.com>

Coaching Peace: <http://coachingpeace.com>

Safe 4 Athletes: <http://safe4athletes.org>

Articles of Interest:

Hazing on School Campuses: What Parents and Students Need to Know

<https://www.stophazing.org/hazing-school-campuses-parents-students-need-know/>

(sample) Hazing Report Policy at Local University:

http://willamette.edu/offices/conduct/student_rights/hazing.html

Many Student Experience Hazing in High School:

<https://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/on-education/2009/04/17/many-students-experience-hazing-in-high-school-study-says>

Unsportsmanlike Conduct: Hazing in HS Athletics:

<https://www.socialworkhelper.com/2016/04/13/unsportsmanlike-conduct-hazing-among-high-school-athletes/>

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