

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **What is the definition of hazing?**

Hazing is any activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers them regardless of a person's willingness to participate.

## **Why is hazing a problem?**

Hazing can involve seemingly harmless activities, but such activities often set the stage for more risky and potentially dangerous behaviors. The risk level of hazing can quickly escalate and take participants by surprise. Alcohol, uneven distribution of power among the group, peer pressure, and groupthink are some of the factors that can impair judgment and contribute to increasing the danger level of hazing.

Hazing can be harmful on a number of levels and is often related to the following detrimental outcomes:

- Physical harm and death
- Emotional harm
- Student attrition
- Breeding of mistrust among group members
- Cultivation of a school/campus culture of abuse
- Bad press for individuals, organizations, institutions, or communities
- Lawsuits and liability

In some cases, determining the risk level of hazing is fairly straightforward—as in the case of forced alcohol consumption. In other cases however, many point to the so-called “grey areas” where it seems more complicated to predict whether or not a particular activity might be interpreted as hazing. While some activities may seem innocuous to one person, they may be considered humiliated, degrading, and harmful to another. It is often difficult for students to judge when they are crossing the line from harmless to harmful.

For instance, it is becoming increasingly common for girls/women's

groups to involve sexual simulation in hazing rituals. While some suggest such an activity is just “a joke”; others consider it degrading, insulting, and even threatening-especially for many young women who have experienced the threat of sexual harassment, stalking, and assault. Students need guidance in helping them understand that hazing isn’t simply about the activity (though this is one factor), it’s also about the process-the ways in which power and control are exercised among group members and how new members are made to feel about their place in the group.

### **What is the difference between hazing and bullying?**

There are important differences and similarities that one should be aware of when considering bullying and hazing. Both fall on the spectrum of interpersonal violence, have implications for students and schools, result in immediate and long-term consequences, and feature an imbalance of power between parties. However, according to Olweus (1999) bullying features aggressive behavior, is intended to cause harm, and is repeated over time. Activities considered hazing might not always involve repeated or aggressive behaviors and might be undertaken with positive intentions (such as fostering team unity) rather than to intentionally cause harm.

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