



5 Steps to Stop Hazing

By NovakTalks and WITH US

With the start of each new school year students are welcomed into various clubs and organizations across campus. While this should be a positive and exciting experience, the reality is much more tragic for many newcomers.

Three out of every five college students are subject to 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 ([Allan/Madden, 2008](#)).

Hazing poses many risks to students including academic faltering, serious physical and psychological harm, and death. There has been at least one hazing-related death per year on a college in the U.S. since 1959 ([Nuwer, 2017](#)). It is critical for college administrators, parents, and student members to know the dangers of hazing and be equipped with the intervention skills to prevent it.

WITH US is committed to exploring bystander intervention strategies to empower students to address preventable issues like hazing alongside our

Upstander Week



National Network for Peer Accountability. Our Prevention Partner, **NovakTalks**, specializes in hazing prevention, risk management and organizational development in college student organizations. Kim Novak, founder of NovakTalks and recognized national expert in student risk management and hazing prevention, has shared with us her *top 5 recommendations to prevent hazing in student organizations*:

1. Recognize that your peers probably do not believe in or experience the perceived positive outcomes from hazing. Embracing this mindset should make it easier to focus on empowering those that are against hazing, opposed to only focusing your effort on those that advocate for hazing.

Data shows that the majority of students do not experience the perceived positive outcomes of hazing (Campo, 2005). Because the strongest attitudinal behavior of hazing relies on the belief that peers approve, empowering the voices that oppose hazing can remove barriers to action against it. Spending more time empowering the student voices against hazing, and equipping them with effective intervention strategies, can significantly reduce incidents of hazing.

Kim emphasizes that “shifting the metrics of social status and influence (among students) to those that are willing to confront hazing can lead to change.”



2. Know that increasing awareness does not change behavior.

Students are provided with awareness programs through a myriad of efforts: policy education, speakers, sharing case studies, public reports of hazing incidents, and awareness weeks. A great example of this are the [powerful messages being delivered by parents of young men that were killed in hazing incidents](#). These tragic yet compelling stories serve as a catalyst for engaging students in change.

These efforts are undoubtedly important, but increasing awareness alone will not change behavior. Comprehensive prevention efforts are necessary to put the awareness message into action - action for change.

NovakTalks employs a problem analysis approach to hazing prevention and has found that understanding the causes and contributors to hazing leverages a greater opportunity to impact change than awareness alone. Student leaders can use this same approach by exploring the underlying reasons why hazing is happening in your organization, what are the perceived benefits, and why your peers like it to continue - then utilize that information to identify where change needs to occur.

3. Be specific in your messaging.



If you do not want hazing to be part of your team, club, chapter or organization, be up front and clear about it. Clearly identify what constitutes hazing and what actions will be taken if members attempt to bring hazing into the experience. Do not use oversimplified messaging about hazing such as: “if something makes you uncomfortable, tell us”, but rather something more clear and direct such as: “hazing will not be tolerated in our organization so if someone makes you feel humiliated, demoralized, or at risk of physical harm, let us know immediately so we can address it.”

Share the campus policy on hazing with your incoming members and discuss examples of hazing incidents you’re aware of to reinforce what behaviors will not be tolerated. Ambiguity around the organization’s stance on hazing enables an environment for it to persist.

4. “Hands Not Hazing” is not enough. Recognize that hazing comes in many forms.

Many students identify hazing with physical force involving activities such as paddling, beatings, or tying up perspective members. However, hazing is not purely physical. Verbal degrading, coerced alcohol consumption, cumbersome membership requirements, embarrassing tasks, manipulation, among other non-physical acts, can be just as harmful and even fatal. Remember the



subtle acts and hidden harms of hazing and give them serious attention in your hazing prevention efforts.

Hazing in any form is often misinterpreted by incoming members and rationalized as necessary rites of passage that must be endured to gain membership. The [**National Study of Student Hazing**](#) reported:

Of students who report experiencing a hazing behavior in college, 9 out of 10 do not consider themselves to have been hazed (Allan/Madden, 2005). One student said, “Hazing is good and hazing is bad. It depends on how you are using it. If you are using it to inflict harm on someone then it is bad” (Allan/Madden, 2005).

Hazing persists because harmful and abusive treatment toward newcomers is processed as ‘paying your dues’ and ‘earning your membership’. It is unclear to a young person seeking acceptance that older members are abusing their position of power to ridicule another person in the name of tradition.

5. Remember that willingness to participate does not make it OK.

Regardless of a person’s willingness to participate, hazing is hazing. Most hazing definitions and policies will explicitly note that willingness to participate does not make the activity acceptable. Hazing is hardly ever ‘optional’ - compliance by the new member is coerced in a variety of ways.



Dr. Timothy C. Marchell's work (Cornell University) has taught us:

Coerced "Consent" may fall into these categories:

- *Consent under pressure*
- *Secrecy = uninformed consent*
- *Influence of alcohol: diminished capacity for consent*
- *Fear of Consequences such as:*
 - *Increased severity of hazing*
 - *More hazing for others*
 - *Loss of self-concept*
 - *Social rejection*

Some brain-scan studies suggest that our brains react to peer exclusion much as they respond to threats to physical health or food supply. At a neural level we perceive social rejection as a threat to existence (*Teenage Brains*, National Geographic, 2011); it can be said that the need to be accepted is so vital that it is comparable to needing food.

Other students in the National Study of Student Hazing explained that in order to constitute hazing, an activity must be against the will of a person. Many students did not account for the power of coercion involved in hazing dynamics. In describing their own and others' experiences, if a student perceived that one had made a "choice" to participate, then often the activity



did not constitute as hazing. This is incorrect and if students are using this as the determinant of whether or not a behavior is hazing they can find themselves on a slippery slope.

Hazing is nuanced and can present itself in ways that are hard to detect and mitigate. Know that you are not in this alone and there are many resources to support you. Seek out trusted peers and campus administrators for help and call the anti-hazing hotline to report anonymously at 1-888-NOT-HAZE (1-888-668-4293).

For more on how to prevent hazing on your campus, visit [NovakTalks](#).

In community,

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