



Preventing Hazing on Your Team

Hazing is the practice of rituals and other activities involving harassment, abuse, or humiliation used as a way of initiating a person into a group. Often held up as tradition, coaches may feel pressure to allow these rituals in the name of team bonding or because it is how things have always been done. Hazing is not always as extreme as pressuring players into dangerous activities - other forms of hazing include:

- Requiring new players to always carry equipment
- Making new players get a specific haircut
- Pressuring players to wear embarrassing clothes

An Alfred University Study on hazing found that 71% of players subjected to hazing reported negative effects, such as getting into fights, being injured, doing poorly in school, having difficulty eating, sleeping, or concentrating, or feeling angry, confused, embarrassed, or guilty.

A coach hoping to provide a positive, developmental experience for their athletes can find other ways to welcome new players onto the team and facilitate peer relationships based in respect and trust using methods of Positive Inclusion. Coaches can:

1. Pair new members of the team with more senior members to create a new comer 'buddy system'. Current players take responsibility for welcoming the newcomer to the team and ensuring they feel included.
2. Create a tradition around new players getting their uniforms. This can be a symbolic moment they always remember. The coach or a captain can talk about what it means to represent the team/school when wearing the uniform and welcome new players to the "family".
3. Kick the season off with a fun tradition that the whole team participates in. (ex. For the first day of cross country practice ask runners to wear their favorite color shirt and team up with someone with the same color).
4. Engage in activities outside of the sport together - something as simple as pizza or pasta party in an easily accessible community space or attending another sport game from your town.

Regardless of a team's tradition, it is important to prevent hazing. Coaches who want to create a positive, developmental sport experience for their athletes should be intentional about fostering an environment of empathy, respect, and care. Doing so may require adjusting negative traditions so that all players feel they are safe, seen, heard, and valued.

