

Hazing, Bullying Prevention – Collaborative Effort for Schools, Communities

By Cody Porter

It's a common misconception that newcomers to a group embrace its hazing rituals. Realistically, no one wants to be abused, humiliated or embarrassed – all which typically occur when hazing practices are left unchallenged within education-based athletic and activity programs.

Doing their part to combat hazing and bullying, former athletic administrators Peg Pennepacker and Arthur Ballard are educating school administrators on how to recognize the signs of these forms of abuse and the steps they can take to prevent them.

"Hazing and bullying are among the aspects associated with education-based athletics and activities that need to be cleaned up," Pennepacker said. "We really need to make better efforts to eliminate it."

As national faculty members for the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association's (NIAAA) Leadership Training Institute (LTI) legal issues courses, Pennepacker and Ballard were tasked with developing the "Recognizing Signs of Hazing and Bullying" workshop that they presented to their peers at the 2017 National Athletic Directors Conference in Phoenix.

Using several resources – many of which are made available by the NFHS and NIAAA – in addition to a combined 68 years of experience, the former athletic administrators developed a presentation to address the issue. Having worked in five different Pennsylvania school districts during her 36-year career, Pennepacker said she became more aware of issues as she matured. At certain times, she said, an administrator gains more courage, which is what it takes to combat "culturally entrenched phenomenon" like hazing and bullying.

"When you get into it certain school cultures, fighting the hazing and bullying trend really does take courage and bravery. I think – I want to believe anyway – that I spoke up when I saw something wrong in every district I've worked for," Pennepacker said. "In the last district I worked in and retired from, I was faced with a hazing issue on a team during my second year on the job. I was at the point in my career where I was kind of a right or wrong person. If I know it's wrong and it's going to hurt kids, I'm going to speak up, but it can be painful because you're dealing with trying to shift a



culture. You get beat up and you have to decide as an administrator and human being that it's about doing the right thing."

The NFHS defines hazing as any humiliating or dangerous activity expected of a student to belong to a group, regardless of his or her willingness to participate. Practices often associated with high school hazing have the potential to bring bodily harm or even death to an individual. These practices – as documented by Pennepacker and Ballard – include: tattooing, piercing, head-shaving, branding, sleep deprivation, physical punishment (padding and "red bellying"), kidnapping, consuming unreasonable/unacceptable foods or beverages, being deprived of personal hygiene and/or inappropriate sexual behavior.

Much like domestic violence victims, hazing victims may mask their injuries. Reassurance is recommended for anyone working close to someone they suspect to be a hazing victim, according to HazingPrevention.org – keeping in mind risk factors such as age, participation in athletic or military activities, and the involvement of alcohol use. Another way to recognize hazing is by being aware of students who "may exhibit excessive fatigue, appear disheveled, or wear off clothing." Students may also isolate themselves from friends and family and be tardy or absent from school or any associated activities due to sleep deprivation or depression.

As part of their research, Pennepacker and Ballard cited a study by Alfred University on "Initiation Rites in American High Schools" that revealed "48 percent of students who belong to groups reported being subjected to hazing activities. Forty-three percent reported being subjected to humiliating activities and 30 percent reported performing potentially illegal acts as part of their initiation." A significant number of the individuals who responded to the Alfred University survey reported experiencing their first forms of hazing before the age of 13.

The duo defined bullying in the presentation as "intentional, repeated hurtful acts, words or other behaviors, such as name-calling, threatening, and/or shunning by one or more individuals against another."

Information provided by StopHazing, a leading resource for hazing research and prevention, was included with the workshop presentation, listing notable differences and similarities between hazing and bullying. According to the educational prevention group, "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." While hazing practices may not always intentionally cause harm, bullying features repeated aggressive behaviors with harmful intentions.

"Hazing and bullying go hand-in-hand. My mission as a presenter of the presentation was to give people something to help them deal with their day-to-day operations and procedures in their

buildings," Ballard said. "There were days as a high school assistant principal where I spent my whole day dealing with discipline issues, and a good part of them came from bullying."

Ballard, whose entire career was spent as an administrator (athletic director and assistant principal) for Estill County (Kentucky) Schools, noted that the Kentucky Department of Education has provided additional online resources for all new teachers, as well as other school faculty and staff members, to review.

"A lot of times when it comes to bullying, kids don't want to come in there and tell on somebody because they're afraid of the possible repercussions," Ballard said. "Being able to work with your staff and student body to put those things in place so that they have a reporting mechanism gives you the opportunity to deal with it."

Much like Ballard, Pennepacker said much of her time as an assistant principal was spent addressing bullying. However, as opposed to face-to-face bullying, she often dealt with cyberbullying.

Although social media can be a great educational tool, Pennepacker said it has its drawbacks.

"We know social media is here to stay and that it's a very powerful tool. We just have to learn how to use it properly, especially in education," Pennepacker said. "On the flipside, it can also be a catalyst in some cases to condone hazing and especially bullying. We would spend days and days investigating cyberbullying. The bullying is going on through social media at home and the anger comes to school, leading to all kinds of stuff going on."

"It should go without saying, but with how social media has

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evolved, there's so much more that you now have to be aware of and deal with," Ballard added. "I've been a victim of this and had to make people aware. For example, when it comes to Snapchat, those pictures and videos can disappear in seconds unless you screenshot them and save them. We learned those lessons the hard way because we would have evidence in front of us and then boom, it was gone. School administrators are often way behind the kids."

Several remedies and preventative steps for hazing and bullying are available for athletic administrators. However, a commitment to "change the culture" and a "buy-in" are required from upper-level administration and the school board. Among these methods are creating an open line of communication between students, parents, school administration and the community, sending a clear message that hazing and bullying will not be tolerated, explaining leadership responsibilities to coaches, and leading teams or groups in developing new, positive traditions. Examples of new traditions may include attending college games as a team, team dinners, sleepovers, assigning an older team or group member a younger "buddy," and community service projects.

"We sometimes feel like we're the only person dealing with a certain issue, but once you get to talking to people around the country, we're all dealing with the same issues. In most high schools that you walk into today, the assistant principal is dealing with the same kind of discipline issue that the guy down the road is," Ballard said. "Sometimes you just want to have the discussion to see if what they're doing reinforces what you are doing; sometimes

it gives you more insight into something new to try, and most of the time I think it makes you feel better to know that everybody else is dealing with what you're dealing with. The number one resource is drawing information from what others are experiencing, somebody who is fighting the same battles that you are."

While the NIAAA covers hazing as part of LTC 508 (Legal Issues III) and LTC 710-B (Current Issues in American Sports), the NFHS Learning Center offers two free courses of its own. "Bullying, Hazing and Inappropriate Behaviors" is available for free to students, coaches, parents and administrators, in addition to the student-specific "Hazing Prevention for Students" course.

"I think the biggest kept secret every time I teach the NIAAA legal courses is that the NFHS offers free courses through NFHS Learn," Pennepacker said. "I always hold up my social media course certificate, emphasizing the free aspect of it, and tell those in my class that 'the easiest and best thing that you can do for your coaches is to require them to take these free courses.' The resources that they provide are exceptional and so easy. There can't be any excuse to not do it."

To learn more from the "Recognizing Signs of Hazing and Bullying" PowerPoint presentation, visit www.nfhs.org/media/1018990/wksp-13-ballard-pennepacker.pdf. HST

Access this article online at www.nfhs.org/resources/high-school-today.

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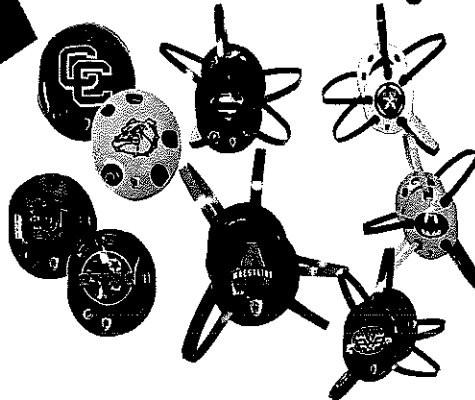
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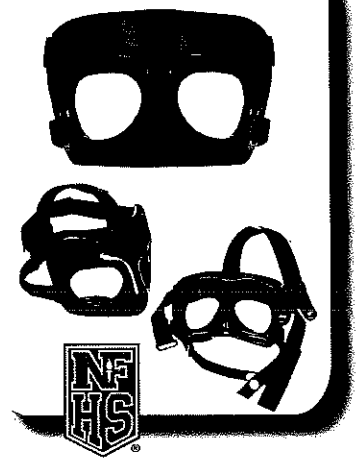


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