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"Bullying/Hazing" by Robert E. Martin August 2023

Bullying and hazing are insidious components of human small group behavior. Nature imparted humans with an innate instinct to band together and form tribes for purposes of survival and prosperity. Within small groups, such as competitive teams, a hierarchy of power and order forms to influence and direct

the group's activities and efforts to accomplish its goals, to survive and to jointly prosper as a unit and as individuals.

Bullying and hazing can occur as the result of the acts of an individual and/or in conjunction with small group dynamics. This article will focus on interactions within small groups/team environments, however, much of what is presented is also applicable to the actions of an individual.

In today's society, cyberbullying has become very pervasive and difficult to detect. It is recommended that parents monitor their children's internet use and/or periodically ask their children about bad experiences associated with their internet usage. Next Step suggestions provided at the end of this article describe what schools are obliged to report and act upon.

Bullying behavior often overlaps with Federal regulations associated with preserving the rights of Protected Classes' anti-discrimination laws. The violation of the rights of Federally Protected Classes are defined as:

"Unwelcome and objectively offensive, such as derogatory language, intimidation, threats, physical contact, or physical violence; Creates a hostile environment at school. That is, it is sufficiently serious that it interferes with or limits a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or opportunities offered by a school; and is Based on a student's race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or religion."

BMS Next Step suggestions with links and useful information in regards to this topic can be found at the end of this article.

Studies indicate that the most powerful influencer/motivator of human behavior is fear. The second most influential motivating factor is peer pressure/acceptance. These two motivators often play instrumental roles in incidents of bullying and hazing.

Multiple hierarchies may influence behavior within a group — usually characterized by 1) assigned, formal authority; or 2) by less visible authority influences assigned by and deferred to by the group. The "formal" leader(s) – such as team managers and coaches – can be the same as the informal group member/influencers (identified by the group itself); or, as in many cases, they can be different.

Within the category of leader(s) and influencer(s) assigned by the group, the assignment of the role of “leader(s)” can shift over time based on perceived threats to the group and/or evolving/changed group goals. Sometimes the goals of the formal leader can be in conflict with the informal leaders’ influence; thus, creating dynamics that are usually detrimental to the group’s ability to achieve group goals and that can greatly contribute to a dysfunctional group environment.

Bullying can be targeted toward individuals and/or subgroups within the entire group. Hazing often involves rituals intended to demonstrate an individual’s or group of individuals’ worthiness to qualify/earn membership and to become part of the group – an act of passage and a demonstration of commitment and loyalty.

There is a continuum of escalation associated with both bullying and hazing ranging from mild, light-hearted activities to cruel, dangerous harassment and harmful acts. Within team sports, bullying and/or hazing can occur with or without the knowledge and consent of the organization’s formal leadership.

The negative repercussions of bullying and/or hazing can be quite consequential to the group, the organization within which the group exists and – most importantly – to the victims. When formal leadership does become aware of bullying/hazing behaviors, too often the capacity for harm stemming from those activities can be underestimated... often ignored completely or dealt with inadequately.

Victims are faced with the choices of fight or flight. In many cases, both options are untenable leaving victims with a seemingly irresolvable dilemma. In scenarios where victims are trapped in what they perceive to be a no-win situation, things can unravel and escalate into tragic violence and/or self-harming outcomes.

As a caring, youth sports advocate, you must remain vigilant to the possibility of bullying and/or hazing occurring. When becoming aware, incidents of bullying/hazing MUST NOT be underestimated and an IMMEDIATE response is required. The magnitude of the impact on victims must not be overlooked by casual consideration. For those responsible for the group’s safety and welfare, there are also legal liability risks that can come into play.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS:

It is recommended that written anti-bullying pledges be presented, covered and signed by all members of the coaching staff, players and parents before a season’s team activities commence (such as practices/games). The written pledge should include 1) individual commitments not to instigate, participate or perpetuate bullying/hazing activities; 2) instructions for how to anonymously report such incidents to the proper authorities within the organization. Please consult the BMS Next Step actions provided at the end of this article for suggestions on how organizations, parents and victims can act in response and defense to bullying and hazing.

There are those who derive gratification by asserting power over others... those powers can be utilized for positive or negative purposes. In the case of bullying and hazing, the purpose is decidedly negative and can become evil and dangerously destructive. Those who instigate bullying and/or hazing actions should be subject to discipline and/or ejection from the group upon discovery.

Fight or flight? Unfortunately, there is no right answer. There can be severe retribution to the victims of bullying and/or those who report the incidents. Authorities are sometimes reluctant or hesitant to act decisively and quickly and/or underestimate the severity of the associated events. Victims are often too intimidated, embarrassed or afraid to report what is happening. When parents(s)/relatives become involved with alleged incidents of bullying/hazing their involvement can dramatically add emotional fuel to the situation and cause events to escalate into consequential legal, physical, or threatening confrontations.

The best outcome for the victim(s) should always be the principal determining factor when weighing responses to incidents of bullying and/or hazing. Please consider utilizing the BMS Next Step resources provided below as suggested guidance and a source of information regarding response options. These resources are not provided as the best or only resources to be considered; however, they can add to your understanding of available courses of action.

Every situation is unique and thusly must be approached based on the perceived merits and circumstances that are best-suited for the involved parties. The ultimate determination of what to do must be identified and decided upon by those involved based on their understanding of the situation.

It cannot be stressed enough, to ignore incidents of bullying/hazing imperil not only the victim(s), but everyone within the sphere of the group/organization. To fail to act may well further endanger the current victim(s) and also put future victims in harm's way. Acting before something happens is the best course, then assigning serious consideration/immediate response when you become aware that something has occurred becomes the next best course of action.

BMS Next Steps Resources

See below a description of school's obligations regarding alleged harassment violation of the rights of protected classes.

- 1) <https://www.stopbullying.gov/>
- 2) <https://www.stompoutbullying.org/bullying-and-hazing>

DESCRIPTION OF SCHOOLS' OBLIGATIONS

REGARDING ALLEGED HARRASSMENT VIOLATION OF THE RIGHTS OF PROTECTED CLASSES

(Note – These obligations are only applicable to violations of the rights of protected classes as defined by Federal Law... not all incidents of bullying/hazing fall under the purview and definition of Federal protected class violations.)

Anyone can report harassing conduct to a school. When a school receives a complaint, they must take certain steps to investigate and resolve the situation.

- Take immediate and appropriate action to investigate or otherwise determine what happened.
- Inquiry must be prompt, thorough, and impartial.
- Interview targeted students, students or staff alleged to have engaged in harassment, and witnesses, and maintain written documentation of investigation.
- Communicate with targeted students regarding steps taken to end harassment.
- Check in with targeted students to ensure that harassment has ceased.
- When an investigation reveals that harassment has occurred, a school should take steps reasonably calculated to:
 - End the harassment,
 - Eliminate any hostile environment,
 - Prevent harassment from recurring,
 - As appropriate, remedy the effects of the harassment, and
 - Prevent retaliation against the targeted student(s), complainant(s), or witnesses.

Source: <https://www.stopbullying.gov/>

-End-

EMERGENCY

In a crisis call "911" immediately

● If considering self-harm, call "988"
The National Suicide Intervention Lifeline

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

To speak to a counselor,

Call (800) 656-4673
RAINN

BULLYING/HAZING, VIOLENCE, ADDICTIONS & SUBSTANCE ABUSE

For helpful resources,

thebmsproject.org/Safety

CHILD ABUSE

To report suspected child abuse,

Call (800) 422-4453

Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline

It is recommended that incident(s) of serious misconduct be reported to law enforcement.
Minors should report incidents of misconduct to their parent(s) or guardian(s).