

Belonging Shouldn't Hurt

HAZING EDUCATION CONVERSATION STARTER

When people join a sorority or fraternity, they're often looking for a place where they belong. We want to find people who know us, support us and make us feel like we are a part of something bigger than ourselves.

But what happens when we make people endure humiliation, harm or unnecessary risk to be part of our organizations? Can they ever achieve a true sense of belonging?

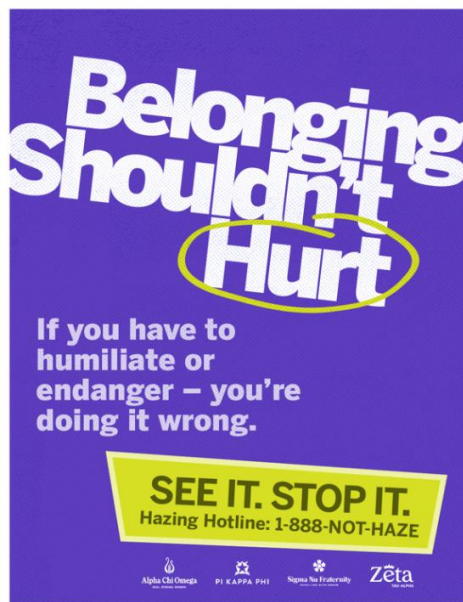
Hazing is often defended as a way to create stronger bonds. We hear that "going through it together" brings people closer or that difficult experiences make members value their organization more. But shared experiences do not automatically create healthy relationships, and research has found little evidence that hazing creates stronger group solidarity.

Hazing can instead create divisions between members, reinforce power differences and make people feel that they must tolerate mistreatment to earn their place. This can be especially true when new members are expected to perform tasks or endure experiences that are not part of what it means to be a lifetime member.

If the goal of new member education is to prepare people for membership, we should ask whether the experiences we provide prepare them for that membership.

The goal isn't simply to eliminate harmful activities; it is to think about how we create the belonging, connection and sisterhood that hazing claims to provide without harm.

This conversation starter helps chapters reflect on how they can support sisters and promote a culture of care and accountability. In this document, questions to ask and points to make verbatim are in **bold**. Notes and instructions for facilitators are in *italics*.



CHAPTER DISCUSSION

Show the “Belonging Shouldn’t Hurt” poster to participants.

What are your initial thoughts about the poster?

Allow responses from participants.

- What message do you think the poster is trying to communicate?
- What stands out to you about the language used?

Why do you think people believe hazing creates stronger bonds?

Allow responses from participants.

- Consider the argument “we went through it together, so it made us closer.” What makes that idea appealing?
- Who does a hazing experience actually bring closer: the people who went through it together or the people who made others go through it?

What makes you feel like you belong in our chapter?

Allow responses from participants.

- Responses might include friendship, trust, support, shared experiences, being valued, being included or knowing you can be yourself.

If new member education is supposed to prepare someone for lifetime membership, what should that experience look like? Are there things you expect from a new member that you would not expect of a member who has been initiated?

Allow responses from participants.

- Think about the knowledge, skills, relationships and responsibilities you expect from people after they are initiated. Are they different than those of new members?
- Do you only expect new members to plan events, fundraise for the philanthropy or clean up?

How can we build strong relationships without hazing?

Allow responses from participants.

- Think about ways our chapter can create meaningful shared experiences through mentorship, service, philanthropy, leadership, retreats, member class activities or simply spending time together.

What can you do when you see something that doesn't contribute to healthy belonging? What would it look like to "See It. Stop It." in our chapter?

Allow responses from participants.

- Hazing prevention is everyone's responsibility. How can members recognize concerning behavior, intervene when it is safe to do so and report hazing?

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

As you think about our chapter's traditions and membership experience, ask yourself:

- Does this bring people together or create divisions?
- Does this help people feel valued or make them feel like they must earn their place?
- Does this prepare people for membership or simply reinforce who has power?
- Does this create the kind of belonging we want our organization to be known for?

Belonging should be something we build together, not something we make people suffer for.

RESOURCES

- Hazing Hotline: 1-888-NOT-HAZE
- [Cimino, A., & Thomas, B. \(2022\).](#) Does hazing actually increase group solidarity? Re-examining a classic theory with a modern fraternity. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 43(5), 408–417.