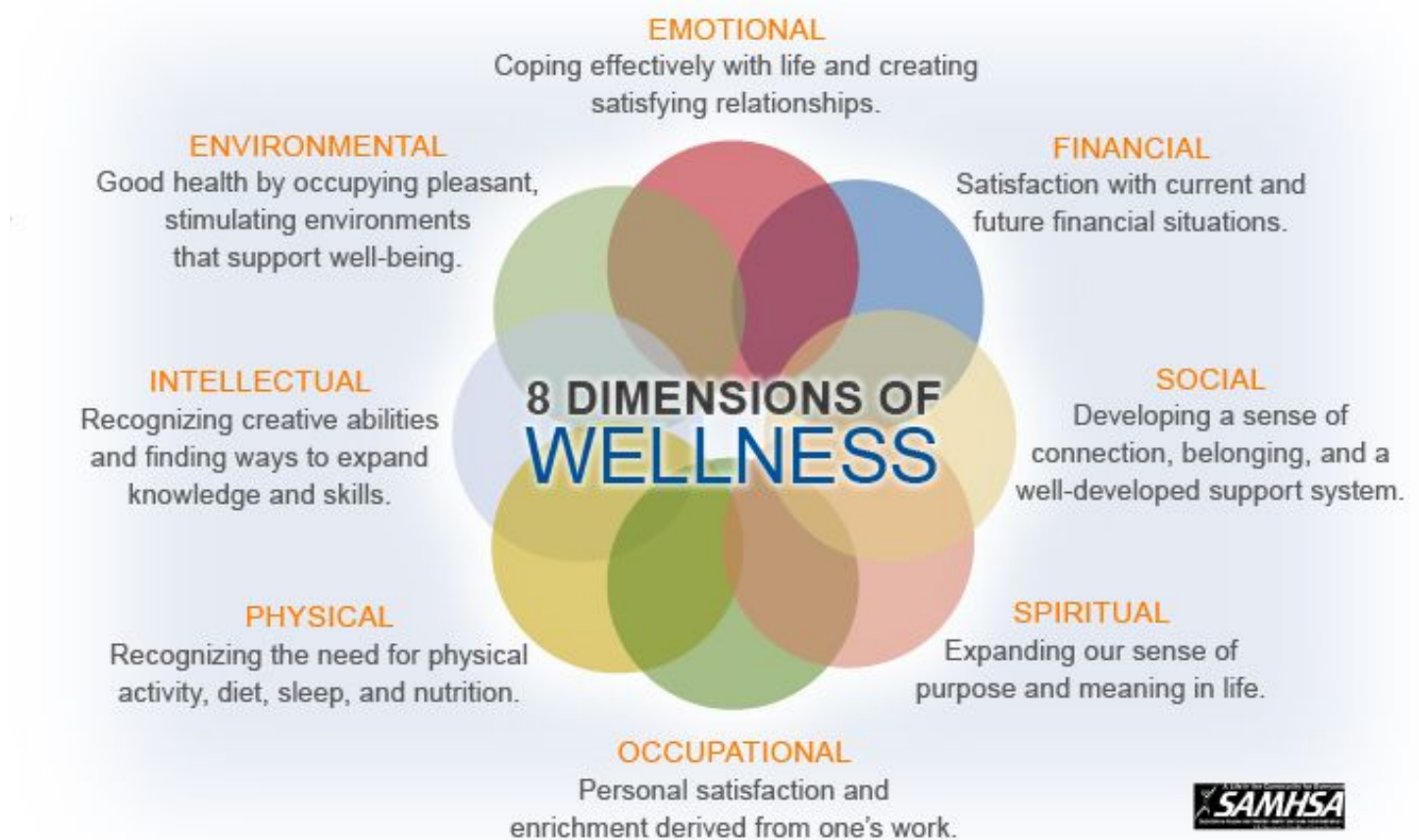


Connecting Mental Health and Hazing

Many students can identify and recognize physical impacts of hazing, but hazing behaviors can also lead to hidden emotional and psychological harms. Hazing can contribute to stress, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, and these mental health indicators can be exacerbated by hazing situations that isolate individuals from their support network, apply financial strain, or deprive them of sleep.

Hazing can have long-lasting effects on a person's well-being, as well as other aspects of their overall wellness. SAMHSA's Eight Dimensions of Wellness (2016) is a useful tool for understanding the potential impacts of hazing across an individual's daily life.

These eight components of health and well-being— emotional, physical, occupational, intellectual, financial, social, environmental, and spiritual— are interconnected, and each dimension can be negatively impacted by hazing.



The 8 Dimensions of Wellness Graphic

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2016). Creating a healthier life: A step-by-step guide to wellness (HHS Publication No. SMA-16-4958). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://library.samhsa.gov/product/creating-healthier-life-step-step-guide-wellness/sma16-4958>

Hazing and the 8 Dimensions of Wellness

Each person enters into a group environment with different lived experiences and personal values. While the impact of hazing can vary from person to person, there can be a range of mental health impacts from being hazed and hazing others. The following examples are not exhaustive, but provide a snapshot of potential harms throughout the eight dimensions of wellness.

Emotional

The National College Health Assessment (NCHA) found that 7 in 10 students who experienced hazing reported some level of distress (NCHA, 2025). This included feelings of stress, anxiety, depression, overwhelm, or psychological discomfort. Students experiencing hazing may also feel a sense of isolation or loneliness, feelings of guilt and helplessness, or anger (Finkel, 2002). Students experiencing hazing-related sleep deprivation may also experience fewer positive emotions, greater negative reactions to stressors, and greater emotional volatility overall.

Physical

Hazing can lead to acute or chronic physical injuries, sleep deprivation and exhaustion, or other long-term health concerns. Stress and lack of sleep can also weaken the body's immune system, making individuals more susceptible to infections.

Occupational

Stress related to hazing may impact academic and professional performance and goals. Students may feel pressured to 'suffer through' hazing because they perceive that membership in a particular group leads to particular internships, job opportunities, or alumni networks.

Intellectual

46.2% of students who experienced hazing reported a negative impact on academic performance (NCHA, 2025). Mental fatigue, stress, and a lack of time can distract students from reaching academic goals.

Financial

Individuals may incur unexpected costs related to hazing. For example, financial hazing might include being required to buy gifts, meals, alcohol or other substances for current members of the team or organization, surprise fees, costs related to hazing 'tasks' (e.g., gasoline; car maintenance or repairs from being a driver for other members), or covering rental fees without knowing whether a reimbursement is coming. Additionally, financial stress may stem from seeking out treatment for physical or emotional injuries.

Social

Hazing behaviors may deliberately isolate individuals from their support networks, such as family, romantic partners, or peers unaffiliated with the group. Hazing can also lead to distrust in others, fear of judgment, or pressure to conform, and it often exploits the human desire to belong and the fear of social isolation.

Environmental

Hazing that is normalized within an institutional or organizational culture can lead to the perpetuation of high-risk or unhealthy behaviors and toxic interpersonal dynamics. Hazing that causes damage to one's surrounding community, such as being tasked with stealing an object in a scavenger hunt or vandalism, can detract from the quality of the community.

Spiritual

Hazing can cause moral injury, where individuals are disconnected or acting inconsistently with their morals and values (e.g., Brownstein, 2025). Hazing can lead to ethical and spiritual conflicts where boundaries are tested and potentially crossed. Hazing impacts spiritual wellness when students witness or cause harm to others.

The Eight Dimensions of Wellness are interconnected, and hazing can impact multiple dimensions concurrently.



Example:

Someone experiencing hazing where they must be at full members' beck and call 24/7, could be deprived of sleep (physical), may feel anxious or stressed out about having to run an errand unexpectedly and missing class (emotional), will lose focus and time to complete academic assignments (intellectual), miss out on opportunities to work and earn an income (occupational), and may lose out on time to decompress with friends and family (social). Having a clear understanding of these potential impacts and the ways they can threaten students' well-being reinforces the need for comprehensive, primary hazing prevention.

Additional research highlights that students who were hazed experience:

- Increased substance use and difficulty sleeping (Allan et al., 2019).
- PTSD-like symptoms, including hypervigilance, flashbacks, and trust issues (Finkel, 2002).
- A higher likelihood of engaging in risk-taking behaviors, such as alcohol abuse (Finkel, 2002).

What can you do?

Recognizing the far-reaching impacts of hazing on students' holistic health and well-being is an important first step to cultivating group, team, and organizational environments that support well-being. Here are some action steps:

Students

- **Learn to recognize hazing** in all its forms. Hazing is not limited to physical violence or forced alcohol use. Understanding the **Spectrum of Hazing™** and recognizing emotional, psychological, financial, and social forms of hazing can help you identify concerning behaviors earlier.

- **Prioritize your well-being and stay connected.** Maintain relationships with friends, family, mentors, coaches, or others outside of the group. Healthy groups support—not isolate—their members, and staying connected can help protect your overall well-being.
- **Speak up and seek support when something doesn't feel right.** If you experience or witness hazing, talk with someone you trust and utilize available reporting options and support resources. Reaching out early can help protect both you and others.

Campus Professionals

- **Partner with mental health and wellness experts.** Invite mental health, health promotion, and suicide prevention professionals to participate in hazing prevention education, coalition efforts, and campus programming.
- **Expand conversations beyond physical harm.** Use frameworks such as the Eight Dimensions of Wellness and the Spectrum of Hazing™ to help students, coaches, advisors, and group leaders understand the broad impacts hazing can have on health and well-being.
- **Ensure students and families know where to turn.** Regularly share information about reporting options, confidential campus resources, community supports, and emergency resources so people know how to access help before a crisis occurs.

Family & Community Members

- **Create opportunities for open, judgment-free conversations.** Regularly ask students about their experiences in groups, teams, and organizations, and listen for changes in behavior, mood, sleep, or social connections that may signal concern.
- **Learn the warning signs and available resources.** Familiarize yourself with how hazing can affect mental health and overall wellness, as well as the reporting and support resources available through schools, organizations, and your community.
- **Help reinforce healthy group cultures.** Encourage groups to build belonging, leadership skills, healthy dynamics, and meaningful traditions rather than activities that humiliate, isolate, or endanger members.

Questions for Further Reflection

As you continue to think about the intersections between hazing and mental health, consider the following reflection questions:

- How can groups, teams, and organizations support and even promote well-being and healthy relationships for new members?
- How can you connect hazing prevention with ongoing mental health promotion or suicide prevention efforts in your school, groups, workplace, or community?
- In what other ways might hazing impact the Eight Dimensions of Wellness?
- How might hazing impact the groups, teams, organizations, or the community you're a part of?
 - Those who have been hazed?
 - Those who have hazed others?
 - Those who have witnessed hazing?
- What are some opportunities for you to help others understand the connections between hazing and mental health?

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