

PARENT'S GUIDE TO RECOGNIZE THE RED FLAGS OF HAZING OR POORLY MANAGED CHAPTERS

9 THINGS YOU CAN DO OR ASK TO HELP YOUR CHILD AVOID HAZING

About 98% of all the bad things that happen in a fraternity chapter occur during the new member or pledge period. This is the result of one group of people initiating power over and other group. If initiated members do not understand what it means to help others become members, this is a problem.

Lasting approximately 8 to 12 weeks, the new member or pledging period should focus on understanding the organization's history and structure. New members should be able to attend a variety of social events, intramural events, community service events and spend time with initiated brothers. There is a cost associated with fraternity membership and the new member period provides time to experience this as well.

Membership is a mutual decision. The pledge or new member period should be a time for both initiated and new members to determine whether this experience is right for them. Some may be asked to leave in a few weeks, but most should be initiated. It should not be a game like Survivor or a reality tv show. It is a time to get to know others and determine if this is a relationship they wish to grow throughout life.

1. Review college or university reports on the fraternity.

Every campus with a fraternity community has at least one staff member who works with fraternity life. In many cases, this person or their office collects information like grades, retention, average chapter size, incident reports, campus policy violations, award recognition, service efforts and safety inspections (if applicable). If you call or email to inquire about a chapter and don't receive a response or no information is released to you about their status, this is a significant red flag.

2. Examine the fraternity's grades.

Fraternities exist for two primary reasons: 1) To help students excel academically; 2) To serve the institution that hosts it. If a fraternity is below the all-men's average on its campus, it is not serving its membership. Weak grade point averages can be the result of many things including but not limited to:

- Pledges being required to do menial things around the house that takes away from their time to study.
- Too many social functions.
- Excessive noise or disruptions that make the house a poor study environment.
- Scholarship seen as an individual thing rather than a group commitment.
- Lack of accountability between brothers ensuring that all are attending class, etc.
- Poor identification of members during the recruitment process.

3. Ask fraternity headquarters' staff to view the last report on the fraternity.

The vast majority of fraternities are affiliated with a national or international organization with a headquarters and staff to assist in group management and development. Most of these organizations have traveling staff who visit the chapter one or more times each year to provide best practices for administrative functions, scholarship programming, relations with alumni, community service, membership recruitment, planning safe social functions, proper new member education and managing their relationship with the university. As such, they develop files and reports on each group which should be made available to a parent or prospective member upon request.



4. Meet the fraternity's local advisor.

In addition to paid staff, fraternities have a large volunteer network that is used to assist in chapter management. Most fraternities will have a primary chapter advisor in addition to several members of an advisory board and/or a house corporation. The house corporation exists to ensure the housing is safe, comfortable and financially sound. The commitment of advisors may vary among roles and chapters—with some appearing in name only. If you inquire about the advisor and are told they are not available or they do not respond to calls or emails, this should be a red flag. Proper guidance at this level makes a huge difference in the daily activity of the group. Most importantly, this individual can intervene before a bad idea turns into a tragedy. When they are engaged, few problems generally exist.

5. Determine how engaged the local advisor is in day-to-day chapter functions.

There is a wide divide between good, poor and non-existent volunteerism. You can make a better analysis of the environment by speaking directly with the chapter's primary advisor. By discussing what they do for a living and how involved they are in the local fraternity you'll gain greater insight.

In particular, ask the chapter advisor:

- Do you attend each meeting with the cabinet or executive leadership team within the chapter?
- Do you attend each fraternity meeting?
- How much time do you spend at the fraternity each week?

If the advisor is not present often or averages less than an hour each week, this is a red flag. Most advisors spend one to three hours with the fraternity.

6. Ask to view the fraternity's new member or pledge education manual.

All fraternities have a written program. This should be available for viewing and should outline a calendar with a schedule. Good programs will include a focus on study skills and academic commitment, outline the history and structure of the fraternity, focus on good citizenship and provide opportunities to become involved in a committee to develop further involvement. The new member or pledge program should not create second class citizens or treat individuals in a demeaning way. Instead, it should offer assistance to help students transition to college life and assist them in developing friendships and finding a sense of belonging.

7. Research the organization on the internet.

In some cases, a simple internet search will reveal several public stories on a fraternity chapter disciplined by the university or a national organization. In those cases, a search will reveal helpful information. One must dig deeper for good information—often the university will post useful information to assist prospective members and their families in making an informed decision.

You should search both the fraternity and the fraternity on a specific campus. This will give you a sense of how well the group may or may not be doing at large as well as within the local community. People make mistakes, so if there is a negative story it does not mean the group is terrible. However, it will help assist you with seeing the bigger picture. All fraternities are not bad—but sometimes you may need to do some research to find a better one.

8. Visit the fraternity house.

Parents should feel welcome and plan to visit the fraternity house. If the house is in disrepair, this is a potential indicator of other management problems. All major fraternities have their homes inspected every three years per mandates from insurance companies. You can ask to see the last report.

9. View the fraternity's social media accounts.

Social media is a great way to get yet another glimpse into the organization's activities. Photos of chapter activities and small videos of programs are often uploaded by the chapter and could provide red flags. Students and parents should read comments on social media posts. Parents should join, follow and view comments on the chapter's accounts on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat. Also, don't forget to review the chapter's website to see what the chapter might be up to.