

## How to Identify Potential Concerns

### **A Resource for Parents & Families Whose Students Are Interested in Joining a Fraternity or Sorority**

Office of Student Programs & Engagement, Bentley University

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*This resource is intended to serve as an educational guide for recognizing concerning behavior and/or culture within a fraternity or sorority. Chapters that demonstrate these behaviors may have problematic cultures when it comes to health and safety (issues of hazing, sexual violence, racism, homophobia, and other forms of exclusion, harmful alcohol and other drug use, lacking support for mental health, etc.). It is important to note the presence of any of these behaviors does not necessarily indicate an unhealthy chapter. Additionally, unhealthy chapters may possess none of these characteristics.*

*We also include in this document a section on potential signs of hazing; the purpose of this resource is to educate parents and families on possible warning signs. Please note, this is not an exhaustive list.*

*We encourage parents and family members to review the other resources located on the Bentley Greek Life website and to contact Nicole Chabot-Wieferich, Associate Dean of Student Engagement/Director of Student Programs & Engagement, at [nchabotwieferich@bentley.edu](mailto:nchabotwieferich@bentley.edu) or 781-891-2700, if you have additional questions or concerns.*

In order to more easily outline how to identify a fraternity or sorority chapter that might exhibit concerning behavior or culture, it is important to understand how Bentley University defines a healthy chapter.

#### A healthy fraternity or sorority chapter:

- **Avoids and actively prevents high-risk behavior;** members look out for each other and other members of the community; in situations where someone needs help or assistance, the organization steps up to provide or enlist the help of others; when chapters or members violate University policies, they own their mistakes and hold each other accountable. Most important, on issues of health and safety, healthy chapters are those that are committed to improving and show up to community-wide conversations and trainings on risk prevention.
- **Balances a fun, supportive, and developmental Greek Life experience** with opportunities for members to succeed academically and be involved outside of Greek Life. Healthy chapters are networks of support, create long-term memories and friendships, and encourage the personal growth of each member. At the same time, healthy chapters entail a reasonable time commitment that still provides members space to earn good grades, take on internships, and be involved in other things outside of Greek Life.
- **Demonstrates a commitment to diversity and inclusion;** a healthy chapter is a space where everyone belongs, and each student is not just accepted but also feels respected, supported, and safe, regardless of their identities. This also means that non-members of the organization also feel welcome and affirmed in chapter spaces and around their members. Healthy chapters are those with diverse memberships, reflecting a variety of racial, ethnic, country of origin, sexual orientation, religion, ability, and socioeconomic identities, and those chapters that are actively working to be more inclusive.
- **Collaborates and build connections at Bentley;** healthy chapters partner with other Greek organizations on campus, as well as with non-Greek student organizations. They support the programs and initiatives of different University departmental, their members can be seen wearing their letters at home athletic games, and they host events on campus for the benefit of the entire community.
- **Respects the authority of their elected student officers and builds up their new members;** healthy chapters elect executive board officers who represent University and organizational values, and the decisions of these leaders are respected by their peers. Healthy chapters have members who understand that acting contrary to the chapter president's expectations of safety and inclusion has real consequences, and positive bystander intervention and accountability is expected in those organizations. Healthy chapters also support their new members, offering safe and caring ways to welcome these students into the organization.

## An unhealthy fraternity or sorority chapter may:

- **Consistently demonstrate low or poor performance in Bentley's Standards Program.** You can review chapter standings in Standards by visiting the Greek Life website. Scores of "Not in Compliance" or "Silver" may indicate a chapter that struggles to hold itself and its members to Bentley's standards. You can reach out to Student Programs & Engagement to learn more about a chapter's score or history when it comes to Standards.
- **Have low member and/or new member GPAs, and/or may have a track record of new member GPA declines during their first semester of membership.** You can review chapter academic data by visiting the Community Data section of the Greek Life website. It is best to compare a chapter's GPA with the overall fraternity or sorority average as well as the All FSL average. It is also important to note the GPAs of new members, and if those GPAs go up or down during the first semester of membership. This varies of each chapter, and poor new member GPA trends may indicate a chapter does not create an environment that supports new member academic success while joining.
- **Have a problematic conduct history.** You can reach out to Student Programs & Engagement for historical context on any chapter's standing with the University. Certainly any unrecognized chapters were removed from campus because they were found to have engaged in behavior that demonstrates an unhealthy organization; however, currently recognized chapters may have engaged in less severe or repeat violations that might indicate potential concerns.
- **Make alcohol and/or other drugs part of their joining process.** It is important to note that Bentley policy and national/international headquarters policy for all of our chapters prohibits alcohol from all aspects of the new member process.
- **Be identified by your student.** If you ask your student questions from the "Questions to Ask" resource found on our website and you receive responses that are not encouraging, your student may be considering joining an unhealthy chapter.
- **Have a bad reputation.** While our office does not condone rumors or hearsay, it is important to note that your student might hear things that staff do not. An unhealthy chapter may be one that other students identify as problematic.
- **Have what feel like unreasonable expectations for new members.** Activities that interfere with school, work, or someone's personal well-being are likely to be considered hazing. If you have concerns about activities during the new member education process, contact Student Program & Engagement, as our office keeps a record of all approved new member activities. An unhealthy chapter is one that risks the personal, physical, or psychological safety and/or the academic goals of their new members but veils those risks as "a rite of passage," "earning it," or "bonding." See below for more information on potential signs of hazing.
- **Allow poor engagement among its seniors.** If upperclass students seem less engaged than new members, if seniors are not serving in leadership roles and attending events, or if seniors members seem to resist the decisions and goals of the rest of the chapter, that chapter may be unhealthy. Certainly students begin to adopt other priorities in their senior year, and some distinction between class-year engagement is to be expected, but when considering joining an organization that has a life-long commitment, one should expect a level of involvement from seniors in the chapter.
- **Lack diversity and/or an inclusive environment.** While it is important that chapters recruit members that reflect the organization's values, it is also important to recruit members that reflect different identities, experiences, and backgrounds. Historically, nationally, and at Bentley, Greek Life has not lived up to its full potential when it comes to creating an inclusive culture and garnering diverse membership. An unhealthy organization may be one that is made up predominantly of members who look the same and come from similar life experiences; an unhealthy organization is one that resists efforts to be more inclusive.

In order to more easily outline potential signs of hazing, our office thinks it is important we share some information about what hazing is.

## How Bentley defines hazing:

Bentley's full hazing policy can be found online in the [Student Handbook](#). In brief, hazing is defined as any conduct or method of initiation into any student organization, whether on public or private property, that willfully or recklessly endangers the physical or mental health of any student or other person. Hazing may include but is not limited to:

- **Subtle hazing:** Activities that emphasize a power imbalance between new members and other members of the group; often taken-for-granted or accepted as "harmless" or meaningless; breach reasonable standards of mutual respect and place new members on the receiving end of a power dynamic, ridicule, embarrassment, and/or humiliation tactics. New members often feel the need to endure subtle hazing to feel like part of the group or team. *Examples include running errands, doing chores, or driving for active members.*
- **Harassment hazing:** Activities that cause emotional anguish or physical discomfort veiled as ways to get members feel like part of the group; confuses, frustrates, and causes undue stress for new members. *Examples include verbal abuse, yelling or screaming or humiliation of new members.*
- **Violent hazing:** Activities that have the potential to cause physical, emotional, or psychological harm. *Examples include consumption of alcohol (whether forced or unforced), calisthenics or physical activities that create fatigue, and activities that have the potential to cause sleep deprivation, physical, and/or emotional/psychological harm.*

Please note that an activity may be considered hazing regardless of an individual's willingness or consent to participate. There is an inherent power dynamic that members have over new members and this power dynamic makes it extremely challenging for new members to say no to something they are told or asked to do.

In addition to the health and safety risks of hazing, and the fact that it is a violation of Bentley policy, hazing is illegal under Massachusetts law. Failing to report hazing is also illegal. Criminal court proceedings could result in a fine of up to \$3,000 and/or up to one year of imprisonment for violations of the hazing law alone; potential legal risks also include those related to violations of other criminal statutes committed during hazing acts as well as civil court proceedings that might be brought against the organization, individual members, and/or their families.

## Potential signs of hazing include:

- Change in your student's frequency or depth of communication with you.
- Your student indicates they are considering or planning to leave the organization for unexplained or ambiguous reasons.
- Changes in sleep and/or eating, signs of fatigue, or behaviors that indicate your student is staying up late.
- Change in your student's grades or academic performance, missing class.
- Secrecy or a lack of openness from your student about their joining/new member experience. Students oftentimes believe the entire process is "secret." This is not true. Only a small number of ceremonies and rituals are in fact secret; your student should be able to disclose the vast majority of their joining/new member experience to you, and if they are not sharing how it is going, it may be because hazing is occurring.
- Your student's use of alcohol and/or other drugs has changed or increased. It is important to note that Bentley policy and national/international headquarters policy for all of our chapters prohibits alcohol from all aspects of the new member process.
- Unexplained injuries or illness that your student has experienced.
- Loss in interest in activities your student was previously passionate about. This may be due to an overly-burdensome schedule and/or changes to emotional well-being – either of which may be signs of hazing.
- Changes to your student's emotional well-being; this may include new or changes in anxiety, depression, and mood.

## What to do if you have concerns

If you have questions or concerns – either in generally or specifically – about health, safety, hazing, or other issues, please connect with any of the resources below, depending on the nature of your concern.

1. If you are reporting an emergency situation or a situation in which you are worried about someone's imminent health and safety, you should dial Waltham Police (911 or 781-893-3600; or 781-898-3700 for non-emergencies) or Bentley Police (781-891-3131 for emergencies or 781-891-2201 for non-emergencies).
2. If you are interested in speaking with a member of the Student Programs & Engagement staff, you can contact us at [nchabotwieferich@bentley.edu](mailto:nchabotwieferich@bentley.edu) and [aerb@bentley.edu](mailto:aerb@bentley.edu) or by phone at 781-891-2700.
3. You can submit a report via a Bentley web form.
  - a. The Equity Reporting page has links to Bias Incident, Title IX, and EthicsPoint report forms: <https://www.bentley.edu/equity-reporting>
  - b. The Hazing Report form is a place you can submit concerns about hazing: [https://bentley-advocate.symplcity.com/public\\_report/index.php/pid392205?rep\\_type=1000](https://bentley-advocate.symplcity.com/public_report/index.php/pid392205?rep_type=1000)
  - c. University Police has an anonymous tip line: <https://www.bentley.edu/university-life/student-health/anonymous-tip-line#:~:text=University%20Life,-Campus%20Life&text=3131%2C%20or%20dial%20911%20for%20off%20campus%20assistance>.
4. You can also contact the headquarters staff for the fraternity/sorority if it is a member of a national/international organization. You can simply search “[chapter] headquarters” online and find the national/international organization's website.
5. We also encourage you to talk to your student if you have not done so already, and to remind them of the above resources. We are also always happy to talk with any students about their concerns and their options for moving forward.

### Additional Information

We encourage parents and family members to conduct as much additional research as they are interested in conducting so that they feel sufficiently informed about their student's potential membership in a fraternity or sorority. More information about healthy and safety within fraternities and sororities can be found below:

- Each chapter has its own policies related to risk management, member safety, and accountability. The national or international organization headquarters often post these policies on their public websites. If you cannot find the information you are looking for there, you can reach out to HQ staff (contact information on their website) to inquire. Our staff in Student Programs & Engagement can help you navigate this if needed.
- [StopHazing.org](http://StopHazing.org)
- [HazingPrevention.org](http://HazingPrevention.org)
- [Bentley University Student Handbook](#) (contains the Hazing Policy)
- Policies for Greek Life at Bentley (the [FSL Standards Program](#))