

BREATHE, NOLAN, BREATHE -

Facilitation and Discussion Guide

The following serves as a guide for facilitating a group screening of the “Breathe, Nolan, Breathe” documentary. The content of the guide is applicable to virtually any demographic, whether it’s general student populations, student organizations, college or university staff, faculty, or administrators, parents, community members, or various public servants.

Including the documentary, the session should last no less than 60 minutes and no more than 90 minutes, depending on how much discussion the group engages in.

The words in italics can either be stated verbatim or paraphrased to suit the style of the facilitator. Facilitator notes are provided throughout this guide.

Although a working knowledge of hazing prevention, alcohol education, and higher education experience is beneficial, it is not an absolute requirement for successfully facilitating a screening session. Students are encouraged to facilitate sessions, if they are sufficiently trained, prepared, and comfortable with the material.

As a facilitator, be sure to know the hazing laws and policies of the state in which you are presenting. These can vary from state to state.

The facilitator should begin with a brief self-introduction, thanking participants for their time and attention. Explain that the session will consist of a 36-minute documentary entitled “Breathe, Nolan, Breathe” detailing the tragic hazing-related death of Nolan Burch at West Virginia University during the Fall 2014 semester - Nolan’s first year on campus as an incoming freshman. This will be followed by a group discussion allowing for reflection on the content of the documentary, education on the pertinent related issues, and planning for positive outcomes in the future.

Content Warning

Due to the graphic nature of this documentary, the following content warning should be provided to participants:

This documentary contains graphic footage and emotionally intense discussion regarding a tragic incident that many of you may find upsetting or disturbing. Please feel free to exit the room if you are uncomfortable or need a few moments to yourself to process the content.

Proceed to play the documentary. At the conclusion of the documentary, use the following guide to process the content of the documentary and facilitate meaningful group discussion.



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Reflection

First, I want to establish that tragic incidents such as this one are not only the result of a single individual's choices, or even the choices of a small group of individuals. There are multiple contributing factors including the students involved, student organizations, institutions, communities, and beyond. For that reason, I want to emphasize that anyone and everyone can play an important role in preventing these tragedies in the future. It's my goal that everyone leaves this session today with a deeper understanding of how they fit in to this and what they can do to help prevent such senseless tragedies in the future.

Your perspectives as students / staff / faculty / administrators / parents / public servants / community members (adapt as needed according to your audience) are invaluable for ensuring that Nolan's death, while tragic and senseless, can also serve as an opportunity for positive growth toward better, brighter futures for other young people who are now seeking meaningful, fulfilling, and rewarding experiences in higher education, as Nolan once did.

This documentary is likely to cause a wide range of emotions, reactions, and thoughts for those who view it. I want to take some time to explore and process that now, for the benefit of everyone here.

Let's hear from at least four people. (This number can be changed at the discretion of the facilitator with consideration to time, the number of participants, or other factors.) If you will, please share a few of your initial thoughts, reactions, emotions, or observations that arose while watching the film.

Facilitator Notes:

For this portion of the discussion, it's helpful to use active listening techniques. These can include:

- Showing that you are interested in what they have to say. Be genuinely concerned about their responses and show appreciation for sharing their thoughts by thanking them and validating their comments.
- Summarize what they've said back to them. This will let them know that you understood and may also help to clarify the comment for others in attendance.
- Make eye contact.
- Invite them to elaborate, if you feel that may have more to add – “Can you say a little more about that?” “Can you explain that a little further?” “Please, go on.”
- Help draw out further discussion by asking open-ended questions to the group (rather than yes/no questions) related to what's already been shared by participants.



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Common responses to the content of the documentary may include themes of anger, sadness, confusion, disbelief, sympathy, shock, or disgust. All of these are understandable and to be expected given the nature of the content.

Be prepared for contrarian or challenging comments.

These comments may include:

- Justifying or rationalizing some forms of hazing
- Glorifying or glamorizing alcohol or other drug use (e.g., “war stories”)
- Excessive hostility toward the individuals, organizations, and institutions involved in this documentary. (while anger may be a natural response to the content, keep the discussion productive and positive.)
- Cynicism or defeatism (e.g., “I can’t control what other people do. What’s the point in trying?” “People have been trying to stop hazing for years and nothing changes.”)

While it’s difficult to predict all comments that may be made, as a facilitator you can have a plan in place for how to handle those comments when they arise.

It’s best to avoid becoming argumentative, whether the person’s comment is objectively wrong or not. Arguments in this context are counterproductive to the purpose of this session and tend to bring about defensiveness in the participant making the argument and “shut down” openness to new ways of thinking. This may also be the case for other participants who had similar thoughts, but chose not to express them.

It’s important to understand that these contrarian or challenging comments often stem from strong and long-held beliefs that have been shaped and reinforced for many years by numerous cultural factors. Changing a person’s entire belief system isn’t a realistic outcome to expect for participants in this session. The most important goal is to provide knowledge, cultivate empathy, and establish tangible action steps that people can take to prevent hazing and help someone in need.

Generally, when challenging comments arise, it’s best to acknowledge, validate, and move on.

Before providing the information in bulleted points in the Reflection, Education, and Action sections, prompt the participants to see if they can come up with the information themselves first, sharing and discussing aloud as a group. There is certainly the possibility for additional information to be included, whether from the participants or the facilitator.



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EDUCATION

After the reflections, be sure to thank the participants for sharing their thoughts. Begin the education section by saying:

This documentary provided a lot of helpful, important information about alcohol and hazing. I want to reiterate and expand on some of that information. And, of course, your questions and thoughts are always welcome as we proceed.

In the film, we learned that:

- *Any form of hazing, whether it may be considered mild or extreme, can result in legal consequences depending on the laws of the state.*
- *There is no such thing as “consent” when it comes to hazing.*
- *Hazing can be defined as “the imposition of strenuous, often humiliating, tasks as part of a program of rigorous physical training and initiation.”*
- *At least one college student has died each year as a result of hazing since 1970.*
- *5% of college students admit to being hazed.*
- *40% of college students admit to knowing about hazing activities.*
- *Acts of hazing often go unreported.*
- *A BAC of .400 is a lethal dose of alcohol.*
- *If a 140lb person drinks a pint of beer (5% alcohol) in an hour, their BAC will be approximately 0.04 (half the legal limit). If a person drinks a pint of 100 proof liquor (50% alcohol) in an hour, their BAC will be approximately 0.400.*
- *88,000 people die from alcohol-related consequences each year. It’s the third leading preventable cause of death in the U.S.*
- *If a person who has been drinking is breathing 8x or less per minute, is unable to speak, move or remain conscious, that person is at risk of death due to alcohol poisoning.*
- *Even though a person may appear to be functioning, their BAC may still be rising to dangerous levels.*

Let’s focus on hazing.

Hazing can take many different forms. This includes being made to:

- *do, say, or chant embarrassing things.*
- *Eat gross, unusual food items, or eat excessive amounts of any food or drink.*



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- *Endure social isolation. (Only being allowed to interact with certain people or being locked in a room alone for a period of time.)*
- *Endure sleep deprivation.*
- *Perform acts of servitude.*
- *Consume alcohol or other drugs.*
- *Engage in any kind of sexual or intimate activity.*
- *Engage in acts of physical exertion.*
- *Wear specific clothing or accessories, especially if failure to do so results in reprimand or punishment.*
- *Engage in any illegal activity, like theft, trespassing, or vandalism.*

While this list doesn't include everything that could be considered hazing, none of these things should be part of initiation into a group. If something doesn't feel right to you, if you sense pressure to comply, or if an activity is being justified as "tradition," trust your gut and don't participate.

The documentary establishes that Nolan was coerced to drink the amount of alcohol he did that night. This means he was compelled to drink by force, intimidation, or authority. Whether physical force or verbal threats were made or not is irrelevant. In cases of hazing, there is implied pressure to go along with what's happening due to the power imbalance between new and current members. There is an implied risk of social exclusion, ridicule, or hostility for choosing not to participate. This raises an important point about hazing. A person's willingness to participate in these activities has no bearing on it's classified as hazing or not.

Now, let's focus on alcohol.

Alcohol and hazing are closely related. 82% of hazing deaths involve alcohol. Approximately 1,825 college students between ages 18 and 24 die each year due to alcohol-related consequences, including motor vehicle accidents.

Aside from when it's involved in hazing, there are some people who may view drinking as a rite of passage, especially at college. Despite all the negative outcomes and associated risks of drinking, this attitude toward alcohol is pervasive in our culture.

Let's take a moment to establish what a few of the potential negative outcomes of excessive drinking are:

- *Fatality due to alcohol poisoning or accident.*
- *Increased risk of involvement in sexual violence.*
- *Personal injury.*



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- *Increased risk of involvement in physical altercation.*
- *Regrettable or embarrassing behavior.*
- *Possible development of alcohol use disorder (alcoholism).*
- *Difficulties in personal relationships.*
- *Hangover or sickness.*
- *Poor academic performance.*
- *Legal troubles and conduct violations.*
- *Physical and mental health effects.*

Unlike other drugs, alcohol is more socially accepted, as well as heavily marketed, and often glamorized in pop culture. People begin forming beliefs and ideas about alcohol starting a very young age, long before they may start drinking.

There are multiple factors for why alcohol is prevalent and problematic on college campuses across the country, including:

- *For many students, college is the first time they've lived independently without parental or other supervision.*
- *Many students turn 21, the legal drinking age, during their time in college.*
- *College is commonly viewed as a time for young people to have new experiences, push limits, and socialize, all of which may involve alcohol.*
- *For traditional college-aged students (18-24), their prefrontal cortexes are not yet fully developed. This doesn't occur until around age 25. The prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain responsible for regulating behavior, impulse control, rational decision-making, and understanding consequences. This can contribute to irresponsible decisions in drinking behavior.*
- *College is often a time of high stress and anxiety for students due to the demands of classes, social stressors, personal issues, financial struggles, or balancing work and school. Some students may choose to self-medicate with alcohol and other drugs to reduce or alleviate this stress and anxiety.*

While there are many more factors to consider regarding alcohol misuse on campus, staff, faculty, and administrators acknowledge that despite all the potential negative outcomes, there will be students who choose to drink.

For this reason, we want to establish action steps that each person can take to prevent problems related to alcohol and to prevent hazing in all forms.



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ACTION

What can students do to prevent problems related to alcohol?

- *Seek information about alcohol and other drugs from campus resources. Find out if there are educational programs offered that you can participate in. Search your school's website for helpful information and know the policies.*
- *Know that what you say and do (as well as what you don't say and don't do) can have a positive impact and influence on those around you. You can serve as an example that having fun and socializing doesn't have to involve alcohol, or excessive drinking.*
- *If you or a student organization you're involved with hosts a party, promote safety by:*
 - *Checking IDs and not providing alcohol to anyone under 21.*
 - *Making sure food, water, and non-alcoholic beverages are available to guests.*
 - *Discouraging drinking games, chugging contests, or anything that involves rapid consumption of alcohol.*
 - *Being observant of your guests' behavior. If someone's drinking is causing them to act in a way that's bothersome or annoying to others, or if they seem to be approaching a dangerous level of intoxication, intervene. (Depending on the situation, it's best to intervene in a way that's polite and nonjudgmental. You also might consider seeking help from others at the party to reinforce your message, especially in cases where you think it's best to cut someone off from drinking.)*
 - *Calling 911 if there are any threats to safety, like potential violence, aggressive behavior, or possible alcohol poisoning or overdose.*
- *Know the signs of alcohol poisoning:*
 - *Blue-tinged or pale skin.*
 - *Vomiting*
 - *Unconsciousness or semi-consciousness*
 - *Irrregular, shallow breathing (8 breaths per minute or less)*
 - *Cool, clammy skin*
 - *Confusion or unusual behavior*
 - *Seizures*
 - *Low body temperature*



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- *If you choose to drink, follow these “Party Smart Tips”:*
 - *Eat before and during drinking*
 - *Set a limit*
 - *Keep track of how many drinks you have*
 - *Alternate between alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks (Water is a great choice.)*
 - *Avoid drinking games*
 - *Have a plan to get home safely*
 - *Have a friend let you know if you’ve had enough*
 - *Know that you always have the choice to not drink*
 - *Stick with same type of alcohol*
 - *Pace your drinks to one or fewer per hour*

What can students do to prevent Hazing?

- *Recognize when hazing is occurring.*
- *Refuse to participate in hazing activities in any role and insist that others involved do the same.*
- *Know how and where to report hazing on campus.*
- *Recognize possible signs of hazing in a friend, including:*
 - *Behavior or mood changes that happen around the same time as joining a group.*
 - *Dropping grades or missing classes.*
 - *Being vague about initiation activities.*
 - *Strange photos of your friend on social media.*
 - *Changes in energy level or appetite.*
 - *Being fatigued or depressed.*
 - *Only associating with certain people.*
- *Show concern for a friend who may be experiencing hazing in a nonjudgmental way.*
- *Have a conversation with your friend where you can discuss potential resources and options.*



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What can parents do to help prevent hazing and alcohol misuse?

- *Set clear expectations for your student.*
- *Try to engage your student in meaningful conversation about alcohol misuse and hazing.*
 - *Ask what their thoughts are on the issue.*
 - *Create a dialogue by sharing your thoughts and inviting more discussion.*
 - *Communicating that you disapprove of alcohol misuse in your student can have a positive impact on their attitude and behavior. Avoid assuming it's pointless or futile to try to influence their choices around alcohol.*
 - *If your student expresses interest in joining a student organization, make it clear that all forms of hazing are unacceptable, and a person can be held liable whether involved in hazing directly or as a bystander.*
 - *Instill confidence in them to refuse participation in any hazing activities and to report incidents of hazing as needed.*
 - *Emphasize the expectation of good judgment, maturity, accountability, and responsibility.*
 - *Ensure your student understands that calling 911 immediately is crucial if someone's life is at risk due to alcohol or other drug overdose. Nolan Burch's life, and so many other lives, could have been saved had emergency medical assistance been requested sooner.*
- *Familiarize yourself with campus resources, policies, and staff members, as well as student organizations your student is involved with. Many colleges and universities have organizations parents can join to keep them informed and involved in campus happenings.*
- *Learn about campus medical amnesty policies and Good Samaritan Laws of the state.*

What can we all do to help?

- *Understand that hazing and alcohol misuse are serious issues that can lead to severe or tragic consequences. Avoid taking these issues lightly or assuming their occurrence is inevitable.*
- *Avoid feeding into jokes or casual dismissal of these issues. Challenge and counter the notion that such behavior is expected of college students.*
- *Stay informed and be involved. Policies and laws regarding substance use, including alcohol, and the wide range of related issues are often topics for public debate. Know what their implications are for yourself and your community and take action as you see fit.*
- *Understand the power we have as individuals to positively influence those around us. Your words and your actions can make a difference.*

