

social norms for students

Understand the concept

Social norms theory states that much of young people's behavior is influenced by their perception of how other young people in their social group behave. According to social norms theory, young people tend to exaggerate the negative health behavior and attitudes of their peers. If young people think unhealthy behavior is normal, they are more likely to engage in that type of behavior.



However, if healthy students can help their peers realize that health, not risky behavior, is the norm, these students can promote an increase in healthy behaviors and a decrease in unhealthy behaviors in their school community!

Own the language

- A social norm is a real attitude or behavior of a group.
- A normative belief is a perception about a social norm. It can be accurate or inaccurate.
- Anticipatory socialization is a form of daydreaming in which young people imagine acting out roles and behaviors that lie ahead. It is a positive process when the imagined behavior is healthy, for example, going to college, but harmful when the projected behavior is risky or based on misperceptions. For example, if ninth-graders think all high school seniors drink every weekend, they may imagine themselves using alcohol in the near future.
- As students, you can use a social norms approach to help promote healthy social norms and correct inaccurate normative beliefs in your school community.

Promote Awareness

- Become media literate. Many young people's social norms come from the media portrayal of how youth behave on TV, in movies, in music and online. When you understand the marketing strategies behind many of these messages, you become an informed consumer, unconvinced by exaggerations of use by young people in the media.

- Focus on the positive. The majority of students at your school are making the healthy choice not to abuse alcohol or other drugs. For every student who may have had a drink this weekend, there are plenty of other students who did not. Take the opportunity to re-adjust your thinking, and when others focus on the unhealthy behavior of a minority of students, remind yourself that you are in the majority.
- Live your (healthy) life! One of the most meaningful ways you can contribute to the health of your school community is to set an example for your peers. When you laugh with friends, get great grades, lead a student group, or participate on an athletic team, all without using alcohol or other drugs, you are telling your peers that the choice not to use is not only healthy – it is fun, rewarding and respected.

