

SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION

COMMUNICATION FRAMES FOR YOUTH 12-18

Evidence-informed communication frames using a social norms approach

The frames presented below can be used in both static (i.e., one-way) and dynamic (i.e., interactive) communications to support substance use prevention in youth ages 12-18. Static communications in substance use prevention typically include mass messaging via channels such as social media, videos, posters, and billboards. Dynamic communications most often occur in the course of conversation with individuals or groups. Examples are provided to demonstrate how static and dynamic communications can integrate these frames into messages designed to deter or delay the onset of substance use.

Frame	Description	Examples
<p style="text-align: center;">Social Norm + Solution</p>	<p>1) Research shows that people who hold misperceptions about youth alcohol use change their behavior to meet that perception. For example, if an adolescent thinks that most youth play drinking games when consuming alcohol, they will alter their behavior (i.e., play a drinking game) to meet that perception. Perceptions about substance use almost always overestimate the prevalence of the problem and underestimate the solution. We want to correct the idea that not everyone is doing the harmful behavior but also make visible, or expose people to, the true norm of the many good behaviors and values that most people have. Social norms messages and campaigns are designed to correct misperceptions about substance use by promoting healthy norms with the ultimate goal of lowering substance use. For example, if we change youth misperceptions that most teens smoke pot toward the true norm that most teens do not smoke pot, then teens will be less likely to smoke pot to match that perception.</p> <p>2) Highlighting solutions and providing examples that explain how those solutions improve outcomes can counter the strong tendency to think fatalistically when presented with social problems.</p>	<p>Static Communication Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you compare to most students? 60% of students in ABC county haven't had any alcohol during the past 30 days. • 72% of ABC students choose healthy options other than drinking when they're with their friends. Support your friends' healthy choices. Make a pact ahead of time not to drink. Leave parties together if there's drinking. Stand your ground—together. <p>Dynamic Communication Example:</p> <p><u>Law Enforcement Example</u> Giving a presentation to youth: "As an officer, we find that most students here at ABC protect themselves by making healthy choices to avoid alcohol and drugs. Your safety is important to people like me. If you find that you are one of the few who is struggling to make these choices, we are here to help."</p> <p><u>Educator Example</u> To the whole class: "When you look at information from expert sources, you'll see that the overwhelming majority of students your age have made the choice to avoid vaping, drinking alcohol, and using marijuana. Why do you think they made those choices?"</p>

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<p>Agency/ Self-Affirmation</p>	<p>Agency in youth refers to the feeling of being in the driving seat or being in control when it comes to their decisions and actions. Self-affirmation refers to being respected for your agency and autonomy. When talking with young people about healthy choices, triggering self-affirmation can help gain their respect and attention. During adolescence in particular, messages that tap into one's sense of agency increase the likelihood of influencing behavior.</p>	<p>Static Communication Example: You are a powerful generation. You protect the environment. You make your own way. You choose to avoid alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs!</p> <p>Dynamic Communication Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"You respect yourself and want to make decisions that are best for you."</i> • <i>"What really impresses me is that you want to make your own way and avoid the mistakes your parents' generation made. Maybe that's why so many of you are sticking by your choice to avoid drugs and alcohol."</i>
<p>Aspirations & Future Goals</p>	<p>An aspiration is a hope or ambition of achieving something. Similarly, a goal is a specific objective that someone is trying to achieve. An orientation towards aspirations and future goals resonates with youth. Messages using this frame are more effective at impacting behavior when the content is perceived as personally relevant. This frame can be especially helpful when communicating broadly with youth (e.g., via social media or advertising) since this frame resonates across a wide range of middle/high school aged youth.</p>	<p>Static Communication Example: Did you know that most students at ABC middle/high school avoid alcohol and drug use? They say they do not want it to interfere with their friendships and school success.</p> <p>Dynamic Communication Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Educator:</u> <i>"You are concerned about the health of the planet and care for your friends. Maybe that's why so many of you have chosen to avoid alcohol and other drugs. Keep up the good work. You make us proud."</i> • <i>"You are committed to achieving your hopes and dreams, limiting the challenges that could interfere with that."</i>

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<p>Risks of Addiction</p>	<p>The impact of substance use on the developing adolescent brain, awareness of how challenging it can be to change addictive behavior, and the negative impacts of addiction on life goals is a strong frame for youth. Activating the risk of addiction frame helps bring awareness to youth about how substances can harm their body and, over time, make it difficult for them to achieve their goals and be in control of their choices and behaviors.</p>	<p>Static Communication Example: People your age are smart. They know that avoiding or at least waiting to try alcohol or other drugs protects their still developing brain and body.</p> <p>Dynamic Communication Example: <i>"John, I am so happy that most kids your age are making the healthy and important choice to avoid drugs and alcohol. Unlike adults, young people have a brain that is still growing, and the science is clear that drugs interfere with that growth. The brain does not develop normally. Thank you for making healthy choices that protect yourself."</i></p>
<p>Relationships</p>	<p>Adolescents are heavily motivated and influenced by relationships with those that matter most to them, including those with parents/caregivers, friends, teachers, coaches, and mentors. For middle school youth, there is a stronger tendency to care more about not disappointing people in their lives. In contrast, high school aged students are more concerned about making the people they care about proud. Framing conversations around substance use that tap into these relational considerations can be helpful.</p>	<p>Static Communication Example: Most of the teens in our community avoid vaping, alcohol, and other drugs. Join your friends. They care about you as much as you care about them.</p> <p>Dynamic Communication Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For middle school: <i>"There are people in your life who matter to you and care about you. And you try hard not to let them down."</i> • For high school: <i>"There are people in your life who matter to you and care about you. And you try hard to make them proud."</i>

