

Why it Matters

Exposing youth to the true positive norms that most youth **do NOT** engage in substance use decreases misperceptions and the likelihood they will engage in substance use. At the same time, these positive norm messages increase the likelihood youth will engage in these positive behaviors.

Actual Norms vs Perceived Norms

Actual Norms: What most people in a group actually do, think, or support

Example:

- 84% of students reported NEVER trying alcohol or marijuana.

*Minnesota Positive Community Norms (PCN) Student Survey 2013 (grades 6-12); MN PCN Parent Survey 2013, MN PCN School Survey 2012. Conducted by The Montana Institute, LLC. Funded by Minnesota Department of Human Services.

Perceived Norms: What people *believe* most others in a group do, think, or support

Examples:

- 65% of students thought MOST students had tried alcohol or marijuana.
- 77% of parents and 74% of school staff/teachers thought MOST students had tried alcohol or marijuana.



In other words, substance use was **NOT** the norm. Refraining from substance use **WAS** the norm. Yet students, parents, and school staff/teachers **misperceived** the actual norm.

The Value of Positive Norms

Positive norms represent what most people in a group do and support that is healthy, positive, and protective. When communicating, we can protect youth from inaccurate beliefs that exaggerate peer substance use by bringing to their attention the true positive norms within their group.

Challenge

Identify existing messaging communicating to youth about substance use (it could be your own or public messaging) and consider the answers to the following questions:

1. Are any actual or perceived norms shared? Is a data source cited in the message?
2. What positive norms (i.e., positive behaviors or attitudes), if any, can you identify?
3. Is the overall message content, tone, and/or imagery positive?
4. How do you think this message will be understood by, or impact, a youth audience?