

Sharing the positive norms representing your intended youth audience will strengthen the protective potential of your substance-related communications.



How to identify positive norms in your community.

Find one or more datasets representing your intended audience that contains substance-related data.

Positive norm messages tend to be more effective when they present data that closely match your intended audience. The more local the statistics are, the better the chances the youth will find the data relatable and believable.

Look for credible data.

Local sources

- Substance use coalitions, school district offices

State and regional sources

- State-based surveys (e.g., Healthy Kids, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System) and community health assessments

National sources

- National databases (e.g., Monitoring the Future survey)



Gather multiple data points.

- Find substance non-use statistics (e.g., percent of youth who do not use marijuana).
- Then look for data about positive and protective behaviors and attitudes (e.g., healthy values, importance of intervening to protect others, parental rules against substance use).
- Try to find data reported from multiple perspectives, such as youth, parents and teachers.

Statistics may need to be “flipped” to reframe it into a positive statement.

Statistics, especially about youth substance use rates, are most often presented in the negative (i.e., how many kids are using substances).

You will need to “flip” these statistics to frame them as a positive norm. For example,

- Negative frame: 15% of students reported using alcohol in the past year.
- Positive frame: 85% of students reported no alcohol use in the past year.

Challenge

Step-by-step guidance on how to find norms through Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System and Monitoring the Future surveys can be found in the [Substance Use Prevention Communications Toolkit](#).

1. Find 3 statistics that represent your intended audience. Start local and check to see what data sources or summary reports are available. If local data sources are not available, find the next closest source, and so on.
2. Once you have your 3 statistics, reframe them (if needed) in the direction of the positive.