Empowering Futures of Youth: Sharing Information to Prevent Youth Substance Use

Presented by Worsham El, LCSW, CFTP, TC-TSYF
## Today’s Objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identify</th>
<th>ways in which perceived norms influence youth substance use.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand</td>
<td>the psychological aspects that contribute to certain behaviors and how to address and reshape these perceptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use</td>
<td>the historical context of youth substance use to inform current and future prevention efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply</td>
<td>the Social Norms Approach in preventing substance use among youth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perception Influences Behavior

Youth perceptions of their peers’ use are associated with increased use of substances.

The vast majority of American youth choose not to use any substances.

(Perkins et al., 2023; Butler Center for Research, 2015)
Perception Influences Behavior

Research surveying 650,000 students across 25 countries from 2009-2015 using Student Attitudes and Behavior Survey found:

• While 86% of 8th graders do not drink, only 5% of peers believe classmates don’t drink.

• 70% of 9th graders do not drink, while only 15% believed classmates do not drink

(Perkins et al., 2023; Butler Center for Research, 2015)
Communication-Based Prevention

• Used in the 1950s and 1960s as one of the earliest prevention methods

• Goal is to deter use with curriculum by sharing the harmful effects and facts about substance use

• Hope is that it would impact use through a shift in attitude about use

Commonly Used Methods:

• Fact sheets
• Handouts
• Videos
• Scare tactics
• Personal Testimonials
• Substance use awareness and prevention campaigns

(Perkins et al., 2023)
Progression of Prevention Models

- 1970s: affective models became popular
- Goal is to reduce use by focusing on information regarding decision-making and values to reduce use
- Hope is to impact personal development and self-esteem
- As stand-alone models, found to be ineffective

(Perkins et al., 2023)
Lessons from Earlier Strategies

Communication and Affective Models:
- Have low impact as stand-alone prevention methods in prevention of initiation or increase in use
- Have poor impact on long-term changes on attitudes and substance use behavior
- Increase knowledge and awareness about substances and skills

Communication-Based Models (50s/60s)  Affective Models (70s)  Community-Based Prevention (90s)

(Perkins et al., 2023)
Unintended Harm

- Normalizes or glorifies substance use
- Causes fear that nothing can be done to solve the issue
- Causes use to cope with anxiety caused by tactics or rejecting information
- Increases perceptions of the number of peers using
- Decreases sharing of healthy or protective choices, attitudes, and behaviors

(Perkins et al., 2023)
Lessoned Learned: What Works?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integrate</th>
<th>Tailor</th>
<th>Target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrate information about the positive behaviors and attitudes among youth</td>
<td>Tailor to developmental stages and context of the audience</td>
<td>Target risk and protective factors influencing youth, including family, school, community, policy, and public systems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Perkins et al., 2023)
Overview of Social Norms

- Evidence based approach based on the concept that sharing healthy truths can reduce student use of substances

- Research has found regardless of level of use, those using this approach have seen a reduction in teen use

- Two Components:
  - Gather information on real norms
  - Correct false normative beliefs

(Butler Center for Research, 2015)
Social Norms Theory and Interventions

Aim to correct misperceived norms and strengthen accurate perceptions

Increase awareness and knowledge of healthy, positive, protective norms to influence desired behavior

Research supports that social norms interventions have prevented and reduced substance use among youth and increased the likelihood youth will intervene in a situation to prevent use and/or harmful outcomes by others

(Perkins et al, 2023)
# Social Norms Key Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actual Norms/Social Norm</td>
<td>What most people within a reference group think and do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Norms/Normative Belief</td>
<td>The perceptions of a person about what most people in a group do and support; descriptive norm when referencing behavior and injunctive when referencing an attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misperceived Norms</td>
<td>Incorrectly held beliefs about the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive/Healthy/Protective Norms</td>
<td>What most people within a group belief and do that is healthy, positive, or protective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Norms Intervention/Norms Change/Norms Correction</td>
<td>Strategy focusing on identifying and correcting misperceived norms as a mechanism to influence behavior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Perkins et al., 2023; Butler Center for Research, 2015)
## Additional Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anticipatory socialization</td>
<td>The way youth think about their future social life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>False Consensus</td>
<td>The incorrect assumption that others are like themselves in terms of unhealthy behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pluralist ignorance</td>
<td>Incorrect belief that others behave differently than themselves when it comes to healthy behavior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Video
Youth Prevention

Goal to address developmental needs associated with use:

• To promote healthy youth development
• Build social emotional skills
• Build refusal skills
• Build self-efficacy and self-esteem skills

(Devoought, et al. 2023)
Youth Prevention

Most effective when matched to target populations’ level of risk and needs through a needs assessment

(Devoought, et al. 2023)
School Age Developmental Tasks (7-11)

**Industry**: When encouraged to develop skills, children can gain a sense of competence and belief in their skills.

**Inferiority**: When negative feedback is given, or the demonstration of skills is prevented, it can prevent competence.

Comparisons used to gauge abilities and worth
Adolescence Development (12-18)

**Identity:** With support and freedom to explore, youth can develop a strong sense of self and a feeling of independence and control.

- Exploration of interests, values, and goals

**Role Confusion:** When restricted and not given the space to explore or they find the process too overwhelming or distressing, it may cause confusion.
Middle School Protective Factors

**Individual**
- Mastery of academic skills (math, reading, writing)
- Following rules for behavior at home, at school, and in public places
- Ability to make friends
- Good peer relationships

**Family**
- Consistent discipline
- Language-based rather than physical discipline
- Extended family support

**School**
- Healthy peer groups
- School engagement
- Positive teacher expectations
- Effective classroom management
- Positive partnering between school and family
- School policies and practices to reduce bullying
- High academic standards

(adapted O’Connell and Warner, 2009)
High School Protective Factors

**Individual**
- Positive physical development
- Emotional self-regulation
- High self-esteem
- Good coping skills and problem-solving skills

**Family**
- Family provides structure, limits, rules, monitoring, and predictability
- Supportive relationships with family members
- Clear expectations for behavior and values

**School**
- Presence of mentors and support for development of skills and interests
- Opportunities for engagement within school and community
- Positive norms
- Clear expectations for behavior
- Physical and psychological safety

(Adapted O’Connell and Warner, 2009)
Consideration of Unintended Impact

How do we warn youth without unintentionally creating a misperception that many or even most of their peers are using substances?

(Perkins et al., 2023)
3 Step Social Norms Framework

Used to share information while protecting the reinforcement or formation of misperceived norms

**Opening:** Begin with the positive norms that most youth do not use substances, and most do not approve of use. Use a reference group relatable to the audience (i.e., students from school, state)

**Middle:** Integrate a variety of positive social norms, messages with avoidance of risk statistics, scare tactics, or distracting images

**Closing:** Conclude with a final positive norms statement.

(Perkins et al., 2023)
Choosing Norms

1. Share at least one positive social norm that comes from a relatable audience.
2. Share norms about bystander action and protective strategies.
3. Share and support positive norms about healthy behaviors youth engage in.
4. Share norms about risk management if substance use occurs.

(Perkins et al., 2023)
Sharing Norms

- Share positive norms from other trusted or important figures
- Highlight growing positive trends if the current norm may not be positive yet
- Pair multiple broader statements together to summarize
- Reference where the data has come from

(Perkins et al., 2023)
Developing and Disseminating Information

• Find a credible norm data source
  • Intended audience

• State and regional-level data

• National data

• Data should target specific behaviors and attitudes related to the general behavior of substance use and typical protective attitudes and health behaviors

(Perkins et al., 2023)
Delivering to Your Audience

• Flip the data to represent the trend in the opposite direction
• Locate information on behaviors and decisions representative of your audience
• Train the adults in the dissemination of the information

(Perkins et al., 2023)
Assess Effectiveness

Monitor outcomes to inform adjustments and address skepticism

- Use of three steps to sharing information
- Avoidance of ineffective strategies
- Message dose or exposure
- Message reach
- Continuous quality improvement
- Outcome evaluations (i.e., shifts in attitudes, perceptions, or behaviors)

(Perkins et al., 2023)
Resources

1. Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey | Florida DCF assesses risk and protective factors for substance, in addition to substance use prevalence.

2. National Substance Use Data by Monitoring the Future Survey provides reports on national substance use trends and patterns.

3. Patterns and Trends of Substance Use in Florida provides youth substance use trends in Florida.

5. **State and Regional Youth Use Surveys and Data by Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System** provides reports on substance use across states and/or regions.

6. **Substance Use Prevention Communications Toolkit for youth 12-18** for guidance on implementation, evaluation, selection, and data collection.
References


