

Welcome to the...



Lincoln County Drug Free Coalition Tomahawk Social Norms Project

When asked, students and adults usually **overestimate the percentage** youth who use alcohol, tobacco & other drugs. When students overestimate, they justify use by their peers **AND** are more likely to use themselves. When adults overestimate, they may actually encourage risky behavior and use by reinforcing inaccurate information through the messages they give young people.

The Social Norms Project uses a theoretical approach and marketing strategies to correct misperceptions of student alcohol & other drug use.

SOCIAL NORMS SURVEY:

The first step in the Social Norms project is to collect local data from students, parents and staff about youth behaviors and their perceptions of behaviors. Since the initial survey in February of 2010, the social norms surveys (student, parent and staff) have been issued annually in February through 2012. Due to lack of funding, no surveys were conducted in 2013. The student survey was administered at the Tomahawk High and Middle Schools in February 2014 and again in 2016. All completed surveys are sent to Northern Illinois University where they are analyzed. The Tomahawk Social Norms committee reviews the results received from Northern Illinois University to evaluate progress, the prior year's campaign and to develop the marketing campaign for the next school year.

From 2010 to 2016, there was an important reduction of perception of alcohol and tobacco use among Tomahawk High School students as measured by a decrease in perception of alcohol as the typical socializing beverage (30% to 19%), perception of students driving after drinking (90% to 64%), perception of students riding in a vehicle with another student who had been drinking (85% to 68%) and perception of peers who have drunk alcohol (96% to 90% perceived used by typical student; 66% to 53% perceived use is normative [more than half their peers used]). Between 2010 and 2016, the actual reported 30 day use of alcohol has dropped by 16% (54% to 38%) and smoked cigarettes dropped by 11% (22% to 11%). In addition the percentage of student reporting that they never tried alcohol increased by 25% (19% to 44%) or never smoked cigarettes increased by 21% (57% to 78%). This data demonstrates that by marketing true norms we are changing perceptions which leads to an increase in healthy behaviors.

SOCIAL NORMS THEORY:

The theory states that individual behaviors are influenced by misperceptions of how peers think and act. For youth in particular, peer influences and perceptions have been found to be more influential in shaping individual choices for behavior than other factors. The theory states that overestimating problem behaviors discourages healthy behaviors. Correcting these misperceptions by promoting actual norms can result in decreased negative behaviors and increased prevalence of healthy protective behaviors (Perkins, H. W. & Berkowitz, A. D.:(1986) Perceiving the Community Norms of Alcohol Use among Students: Some Research Implications for Campus Alcohol Education Programming. International Journal of the Addictions. 21, 961-976.)

SOCIAL NORMS MARKETING:

This type of marketing has been widely used throughout the past several decades in many disciplines as a behavior changing strategy. Social norms marketing is the adaptation of commercial marketing technologies to programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences.(Andreasen, A. R. (1994). Social marketing: Its definition and domain. *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*. 13(1), 108-115.) The Tomahawk Social Norms marketing campaign has included posters placed throughout the high school and middle school, information in the middle and high school parent newsletters, ads in school event programs, banners posted in the community and school, a sign at Sara Park, local radio commercials, ads and articles in local newspapers, ads posted on school Face book pages, Coalition website and presentations to various community groups and organizations.

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Learn more by visiting the Lincoln County Drug Free Coalition website at <http://lincoln.uwex.edu/dfc/> or find us on the Tomahawk Middle and High School Face book pages.