

Social Norms Dos and Don'ts

1. Do your homework. You will need to do some research to determine your campus norms, where your students receive their information (campus newspaper, campus radio, fliers, posters, etc.), and what images they identify with.
2. Messages should be positive (promote achievable behaviors), inclusive (include all elements of target population), and empowering (affirm/encourage rather than scare and blame). (Haines)
3. Tell the truth and provide the sources for the statistics you use.
4. Use normative behavior (that which more than 50 percent do). Focus on normalizing protective behaviors, not on denormalizing negative behaviors.
5. Start with where you are. If your campus norm is six drinks or fewer, start there and adjust your messages as that number decreases.
6. Use one main message (i.e., "Most students drink four or fewer when they party."). A few supporting messages can help, but always tie them to your main message.
7. Feedback from students is critical. Use student focus groups to determine which messages are most memorable, and most favorably received.
8. Make ads visually appealing. Photographs of students tend to work well.
9. Match the photo to the message. A photo of a trashed after-party residence hall room will seem incongruous with a "most students drink moderately" message.
10. Don't overload your media with text. Newspaper ads should be kept simple. Posters that will stay up in places where students can read them can accommodate more information, but be judicious.
11. Dose the message. Use multiple forms of media. Newspaper ads, radio spots, posters, fliers, keychains, pins, cups, folders, bookmarks, t-shirts, and hats are all potential places for your message.
12. Realize that every campus is different, and each will require a slightly (or radically) different approach. Messages and media that work well on a commuter campus with high newspaper readership may differ from those that work on a residential campus with a popular campus radio station.
13. Don't expect immediate results. Believability and recognition comes with time.

14. Do take a look at the Center for Disease Control's publication "Simply Put" at <http://www.cdc.gov/od/oc/simpput.pdf>. This document explains effective ways to make posters and fliers containing health messages.

The above guidelines were drawn from the presentations and handouts of Alan Berkowitz, PhD, Michael Haines, MS, Koreen Johannessen, MSW, and Jeff Linkenback, EdD. and were compiled by Renee Drellishak, MPH of University of Washington