



## What's the Norm and What's Not?

An Introduction to Social Norms and The Norm Project Campaign

**Standards/Benchmarks:** HE.8.C.2.8; HE.8.P.1.1; HE.8.P.1.2 Healthy practices and behaviors that will maintain or improve personal health; HE.8.C.2.2 ; HE.8.C.2.7 ; HE.8.C.2.8 ; HE.8.P.1.3 Propose a variety of behaviors that avoid or reduce health risks; HE.8.B.3.7 Outcomes of a health related decisions; ISTE Standard 1: Creativity and Innovation

**Introduction:** Do a Snowball Survey with your class. Make sure every student has a standard piece of blank notebook paper and pencil. Tell students not to write their names on the paper. This will be an anonymous survey, so students can answer the questions honestly without anyone else knowing what they think. Have students number the paper 1 to 4 and answer the following questions:

1. Of these four choices, what makes you happiest?
  - a. spending time with friends
  - b. listening to music
  - c. spending time with family
  - d. playing sports
2. Of those same four choices, what do you think makes most teens happiest – a, b, c, or d?
3. Given the choice, would you rather have fun at a party?
  - a. without any alcohol present
  - b. with alcohol present
4. Given the same choices, how would most teens rather have fun at a party – a or b?

Now, wad the paper into a ball and wait for everyone to finish. For the next 10 seconds, declare a snowball fight and start throwing the paper balls into the center of the room. When time is up, have everyone pick up a paper “snowball.” Anyone who happens to pick up their own should not let others know, so the answers remain confidential. Now tabulate the results by designating a corner or section of the room to represent each possible answer: a, b, c, or d. As each question is asked again, students should go to the section representing the answer on their “snowball.”

**Discussion:** A SOCIAL NORM is a behavior, thought, or feeling shared by most people in a given group. Allow the class to discuss the concepts of norms and perceptions. It is important that students have the opportunity to think about and discuss how their perceptions are developed and how our perceptions might impact behavior.

- Question one tells us what makes each of you the happiest. This is the ACTUAL SOCIAL NORM for this class.
- Question two tells us what students in this class think makes most teens happiest. This is the PERCEIVED SOCIAL NORM for this class.

**Ask** (For results of question one and two): What did you learn about what makes the students in this room happiest versus what you predicted most teens would say?

**Share:** A national survey of young people conducted by MTV and the Associated Press in 2007 found that spending time with family was the #1 thing that makes youth happiest, followed by spending time with friends. Listening to music and playing sports ranked lower. Did the class predict the national norm, according to the MTV survey?

- Question three tells us how each of you prefer to have fun at a party. This is the ACTUAL SOCIAL NORM for this class.
- Question four tells us how students in this class think most teens prefer to have fun at a party. This is the PERCEIVED SOCIAL NORM.

**Ask** (For results of question three and four): Does this class's preference match with what you predicted most teens would prefer when it comes to alcohol? Were you surprised by your classmates' answers?

**Reflection:** Is having fun at party with alcohol a social norm in this classroom? Why or why not? If having fun at a party because of the presence of alcohol was the norm, how could this impact student behaviors or attitudes? Would it surprise you to know that using alcohol is NOT the norm for most Lee County students? Last year, the Department of Health surveyed approximately 2,000 high school and middle school students and found that MOST – 8 out of 10 – never or rarely drink alcohol. However, most of those surveyed misperceived the ACTUAL NORM believing that most students do drink alcohol. How could a major misperception like this impact the choices students make about drinking? What other types of behaviors besides substance use might we have misperceptions about? Why might it be important for us to have accurate perceptions about what happens around us?

**Activity:** List topics under alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Brainstorm and create positive, healthy norming messages for each. Use these positive norming messages to develop a poster for The Norm Project student poster contest.

Lesson created using the following resources:

Christensen, Sara. (2005, October). The Snowball Survey as a Component of a High School Norms Marketing Intervention: A Pilot Study. *The Social Norms Review*. DeKalb, IL. Retrieved from [www.socialnormsresources.org/pdf/SNR1-2-2005.pdf](http://www.socialnormsresources.org/pdf/SNR1-2-2005.pdf)

Youth First Inc. (2014). Most of Us Make the Most of High School! Retrieved from: <https://youthfirstinc.org/selmaterial/>

Youth First Inc. (2014) Most of Us Never or Rarely Drink Alcohol! Retrieved from: <https://youthfirstinc.org/selmaterial/>