

If we change our perceptions, we change our reality.

How Science of the Positive and Positive Community Norms Can Impact Our Communities

The big question: How to stay positive?

Given the 24-hour news cycle, the relentless nature of our social media feeds, and access to information whenever, wherever, and however we want it, it can often feel like we live in a frightening world, where dangers and problems seem pervasive and overwhelming. This comes into particularly sharp focus when we consider the issues and risks that our youth are faced with on a daily basis.

Enter the Science of the Positive.

That sounds good, but what does that actually mean? It means that you can change the lens through which you view the world, and, while acknowledging and addressing the concerns, grow the positive, by first recognizing where it exists and then, with intention, growing it. How? By shining a light on all the good, positive behaviors that exist in any community. This then allows us to strengthen “protective factors” for our youth by growing the positive that already exists.

Sounds like social-work jargon - How does it relate to keeping kids safe?

The term “protective factors” may sound like something out of a “Law & Order” re-run, but it’s much more concrete. Protective factors include many things that may already exist for our youth, such as caring adults, strong families, mentoring teachers, clear boundaries, safe, healthy communities, a sense of belonging, and community connections.

Half empty, or half full?

It’s easy to make sweeping assumptions about youth and spread the negative; simply listen at the lacrosse field when a concerned parent may proclaim, “Every kid in the 8th grade is vaping!” Yet the truth is that the vast majority of our youth are NOT vaping and MOST are making healthy choices.

Are we concerned that vaping rates are on the rise? **Yes.**

Are we concerned that youth are at risk if they engage in this behavior? **Absolutely.**

Do we need to educate ourselves and kids about the health risks of vaping? **Absolutely.**

As parents, caring adults and communities that care deeply about the health and well-being of youth, we **absolutely are concerned** about youth vaping. Is everyone doing it? **NO.**

Do we need to promote the healthy norm that most kids do not vape among ourselves, our kids and our community? **Absolutely.**

Positive Community Norms: Empowering our youth to be part of the majority

So, what difference does educating kids about the norm make? By highlighting the positive norm, we are encouraging, and in turn, promoting, the healthy behavior. It may sound simplistic, a sort of childish “turn that frown upside down” mindset, but research unequivocally shows that highlighting the positive works! Why? *(Continued next page.)*

People tend to behave in ways they think is most typical of and accepted by their peers.



Did you know?

Tri-Town Council has a youth substance use prevention coalition – a community wide partnership whose focus is to prevent/reduce youth substance use **and PROMOTE and GROW** healthy youth norms?

Learn more at tritowncouncil.org/coalition

THE COALITION

Connect. Communicate. Prevent.

“Positive Community Norms is all about balancing concern (the very real dangers and harm that our communities face) with hope (the equally real sources of strength and positive change that exist in our communities, too).”

— JEFF LINKENBACH, FOUNDER, THE MONTANA INSTITUTE



What's in a Norm?

Dr. Jeff Linkenbach defines SOCIAL NORMS:

Behaviors or attitudes held by the majority of people in a community or group.

For example, if most people in a community do not smoke cigarettes, then NOT smoking is the norm. If most people do not approve of others smoking, this, too, is a norm. Not smoking is normal and perhaps even expected in this population, and thus would be considered a social norm in that community.

Not surprisingly, youth tend to conform to the perceived norms of their peers, or feel social pressure to do so—which can be a problem when they are considering risky behavior.

Here's why: if youth misperceive that more of their peers are drinking, smoking and engaging in risk behaviors than actually are, they are more likely to do the same. These misperceptions reinforce the belief that “everyone else is doing it” which can be a powerful influencer.

Studies show that when communities are repeatedly exposed to consistent, positive, data-based messages promoting the actual, prevalent, and positive behaviors of youth (i.e. norms), perceptions begin to shift from “everyone is doing it” to the more accurate perception that “NOT everyone does it”.

If we change perceptions, we change behavior. Healthy kids equal a healthy community.

Simple. Profound. Positive.

Have you heard about YAAB?



YAAB is the youth voice of Tri-Town Council's Coalition.

Learn more at tritowncouncil.org/youth-action-advisory-board-yaab



Healthy Youth = Healthy Community!

Supporting Tri-Town Council will help fulfill our vision of a community where all youth have the relationships, supports and skills necessary to grow and develop into resilient, healthy, thriving adults.

Please consider your gift to Tri-Town Council an investment in our youth, our communities and our future.

Please make your secure donation online at tritowncouncil.org via Paypal today!

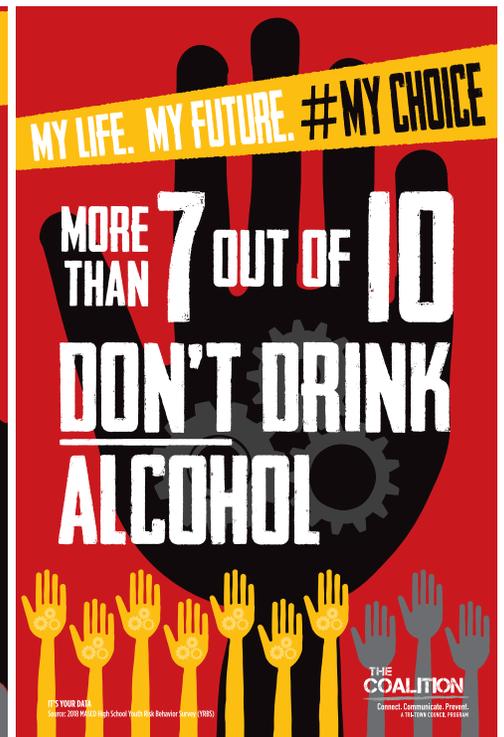
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Want to learn more about Tri-Town youth perceptions and health/safety behaviors?



Connect. Communicate. Prevent.
A TRI-TOWN COUNCIL PROGRAM

Take a look at the YRBS & APS data at tritowncouncil.org/coalition



Above are samples from a Tri-Town Council Positive Community Norms campaign promoting the healthy norms of Masco High School youth.