



The U.S. Department of Education's

**HIGHER  
EDUCATION  
CENTER**

for Alcohol,  
Drug Abuse, and  
Violence Prevention



Services

High-Risk Behaviors

Prevention Basics

**Environmental Management**

Resources

**Environmental Change**

Intervention & Treatment

Education & Awareness

Health Protection

- ▼ Offer Substance-Free Options
  - Tailgating: Effective Practices to Reduce High-Risk Drinking and Negative Consequences
- ▼ **Create a Health-Promoting Normative Environment**
  - Social Norms Interventions
  - Restrict Marketing and Promotion
  - Limit Availability
  - Develop Campus Policies and Enforce Laws

## Create a Health-Promoting Normative Environment

*Social norms* are people's beliefs, attitudes, and expectations about the behaviors and practices that are normal or acceptable in a certain social environment. People may regulate their behavior based on their perceptions of norms. The *normative environment* encompasses everything that establishes these norms.

The normative environment on campus influences students' decisions about alcohol and other drug use. Alcohol advertising, adults regaling students with stories of their own college drinking days, and the absence of Friday classes are all examples of factors that contribute to an environment that supports the notion that partying is a normal, accepted part of campus life.

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### Social Norms and the Normative Environment

Some students arrive on campus with expectations about drinking and other drug use that have been formed by the media, parents, and peers. Additionally, prevailing campus social norms about drinking and other drugs can further influence students' decisions about substance abuse. For instance, students who believe high-risk drinking is an acceptable or even expected part of college life may increase their alcohol use in order to fit in with what they think is the campus norm.

Many times, students' perceptions of their peers' drinking and other drug use are overblown. Research has shown that [social norms marketing campaigns](#), which are media campaigns designed to correct misperceptions of social norms, can reduce high-risk drinking on campus when implemented correctly.

### Promoting Healthy Norms

Campus administrators can help create a social, academic, and residential environment that promotes healthy norms. Beginning with recruitment and promotional materials, administrators can clearly state their expectations that students won't abuse alcohol and other drugs. Once on campus, faculty and staff

should reinforce this message in all communications with students.

Focusing on the academic mission of the college or university also dispels the notion that partying is a primary focus of campus life. Increasing early morning and Friday classes can decrease weeknight partying and promote academics as the priority. Additionally, faculty can greatly influence students' campus experience by becoming more involved with students. From reducing class sizes to offering seminars, faculty can increase their contact with students and help them become more engaged in classes.

There are other ways to create a healthy normative environment. Many campuses now offer substance-free and recovery housing, in which no substances of any kind are tolerated. Additionally, limiting or prohibiting [alcohol advertising](#) on campus eliminates mixed messages about alcohol that can undermine efforts to promote a healthy environment.

Finally, working with community leaders to change the neighborhood environment to one that promotes healthy norms creates a healthy campus and community normative environment in which students make decisions about alcohol and other drug use.

### **Examples of Specific Activities**

- Implement a social norms marketing campaign.
- Promote healthy norms in recruitment and promotional materials.
- Increase early morning and Friday morning classes.
- Give professors opportunities to engage with students as individuals.
- Offer substance-free living options.
- Limit or prohibit alcohol advertising.
- Work with community leaders to create a health-promoting community environment.

The Higher Education Center welcomes your feedback.  
Please use our [Suggestion Box](#).

The **Higher Education Center**, operated by the **Center for College Health and Safety**,  
is a project in **EDC's Health and Human Development Division**.