

Addresses Individual and Group Norms That Support Health-Enhancing Behaviors

Description: An effective curriculum (a) provides instructional strategies and learning experiences to help students accurately assess the level of risk-taking behavior among their peers (for example, how many of their peers use illegal drugs) and to correct misperceptions of peer and social norms, (b) emphasizes the value of good health, and (c) reinforces health-enhancing attitudes and beliefs.¹

This characteristic focuses on reinforcing and promoting healthy social norms and getting students to believe that practicing healthy behaviors is the “cool” thing to do. This can be accomplished in several different ways.

First, it is important to provide information that helps students accurately assess levels of risk and protective behaviors by their peers or youth who share similar characteristics and experiences (e.g., age, sex, gender identity, race, ethnicity, or geographic region). When presenting health-behavior data to students, it is important to report local data when possible. Many local health departments, and even school districts, may have available data on student health risk and protective behaviors. Data should be presented in a positive way, meaning it describes the protective or beneficial behavior or outcome you want students to engage in. For example, if 25% of students in grade 10 in their school district are current alcohol users, it should be reported to students that 75% of their peers are *not* current alcohol users. Presenting data in this way can help promote and reinforce health-enhancing norms around a certain behavior.



Second, it is important to correct misperceptions of peer and social norms, sometimes called “perceived norms.” Perceived norms are what people think others are doing or believe. Perceived norms can be based on what people see and hear around them (e.g., from family members, peers, school staff, people in the community, or media outlets), and they are reinforced when people receive information from various sources. It is common for preadolescents and adolescents to believe that most or all of their peers are participating in risky behavior, like drinking alcohol, because of what they see, hear, or have been told by someone. Using accurate and reliable health data about adolescent behavior is critical to correct misperceptions about peer and social norms.

Third, it is important to emphasize the value of good health and to reinforce health-enhancing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. The teacher can help accomplish this by modeling health-enhancing behaviors, such as drinking water (instead of soft drinks) during class, and by encouraging students to adopt or maintain healthy behaviors. Teachers can also allow for opportunities for students to share their health-enhancing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors throughout lessons. For example, the curriculum may include advocacy-related projects for students to develop persuasive messages to encourage their peers to adopt or maintain healthy behaviors.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool* (Atlanta, GA: CDC, 2021).

Grades K–2 Examples

Example 1

For this example, the unit that is being taught is Promoting Safety, and the Healthy Behavior Outcome (HBO) for this lesson is *S-4: Apply safety rules and procedures to avoid risky behaviors and injuries* ([HECAT Appendix 3](#)). The specific focus of this lesson is playground safety.

1. Promoting individual and group norms in a lesson will typically take place after students have learned functional information and skills related to the HBO of the lesson. In this example, the students have learned about safety rules for playing on the playground and how to encourage others to follow safety rules on the playground.
2. To build individual and group norms for playground safety, the students are asked to explain why it is important for each of them (individual norm), as well as everyone in the class (group norm), to follow playground safety rules.
3. The students then draw a picture of themselves practicing a playground safety rule on a preprinted page that has the words “I Play Safe” (individual norm) at the top of the page and the words “We Follow Safety Rules” (group norm) at the bottom of the page. The teacher then displays the pictures and asks the students to describe their posters to their classmates (individual and group norms).



Example 2

For this example, the unit that is being taught is Promoting Food and Nutrition, and the HBO for this lesson is *FN-3: Eat lots of fruits and vegetables* ([HECAT Appendix 3](#)).



1. Promoting individual and group norms in a lesson will typically take place after students have learned functional information and skills related to the HBO of the lesson. In this example, the students have learned about the food groups, the importance of eating foods from all the food groups, the benefits of choosing nutrient-dense foods that help people feel good, and the importance of trying new fruits and vegetables. They have also learned how to encourage others to eat fruits and vegetables.
2. The teacher works with food and nutrition services to provide a classroom fruit and/or vegetable taste test. Students are then asked to identify and share the new fruit and/or vegetable that they tried and enjoyed eating (individual norm). The class tabulates the total number of “likes” for each fruit and/or vegetable (group norm).

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Grades 3–5 Examples

Example 1

For this example, the unit that is being taught is Promoting Physical Activity, and the HBO for this lesson is *PA-1: Engage in moderate to vigorous physical activity for at least 60 minutes a day* ([HECAT Appendix 3](#)).

1. Promoting individual and group norms in a lesson will typically take place after students have learned functional information and skills related to the HBO of the lesson. In this example, the students have learned about the recommended amounts of physical activity for children, different types of physical activities, and the importance of choosing a variety of ways to be active. They have also learned how to encourage others to be physically active.
2. The students then select destinations in the community, region, and state where they would like to walk to as a class (group norm).
3. The students then use a path of a predetermined distance (e.g., a walk around the playground before, during, or after school) to keep track of individual and class mileage and their progress toward reaching the destinations in the community, region, and state. Throughout this activity, the students and teacher discuss the importance of everyone participating in the walking activity (individual norm) and the importance of supporting others to be physically active (group norm). Note: The teacher and students could compete with another class at their school to reach these destinations.



Example 2

For this example, the unit that is being taught is Promoting Food and Nutrition, and the HBO for this lesson is *FN-6: Drink lots of water* ([HECAT Appendix 3](#)). The specific focus of this lesson is playground safety.

1. Promoting individual and group norms in a lesson will typically take place after students have learned functional information and skills related to the HBO of the lesson. In this example, the students have learned about the benefits of consuming enough water and the skills to encourage others to drink water.
2. The teacher and the students have water bottles in the classroom and have regular water breaks to remind everyone to drink water throughout the day (individual and group norm).
3. The students create and post individual slogans for their desks related to the theme of “I Drink Water” (individual norm).
4. The students then work in small groups to create posters related to the theme of “We All Drink Water” (group norm).



Grades 6–8 Examples

Example 1

For this example, the unit that is being taught is Personal Health and Wellness, and the HBO for this lesson is *PHW-4: Prevent damage from the sun* ([HECAT Appendix 3](#)).

1. Promoting healthy norms in a lesson will typically take place after students have learned the functional information and skills related to the HBO of the lesson. In this example, students have already learned about the importance of using sunscreen and the consequences of not protecting themselves from the sun.
2. To help promote healthy norms related to the HBO of the lesson, students are taught about the skill of advocacy. Advocacy skills empower students with confidence to apply functional health knowledge to persuade others to adopt healthy behaviors. The teacher first explains what advocacy means and then shows examples of advocacy messages.
3. The students are paired up with a classmate and are charged with creating two messages to share on social media. The messages should describe actions to take to protect oneself from exposure to the sun, such as encouraging the use of sunscreen, avoiding indoor tanning beds, and wearing long sleeves and hats when out in the sun.
4. Students share (e.g., text, Instagram, Snapchat) their social media message with five friends.



Example 2

For this example, the unit that is being taught is Violence Prevention, and the HBO for this lesson is *V-3: Avoid bullying or being a bystander to bullying* ([HECAT Appendix 3](#)).

1. Promoting healthy norms in a lesson will typically take place after students have learned the functional information and skills related to the HBO of the lesson. In this example, students have already learned about bullying and have learned the skill of interpersonal communication including “I statements” and how to assertively communicate.
2. Students work in small groups and create a skit about why it is wrong to tease or bully others based on personal characteristics. They will then role-play the skit and demonstrate how to effectively and assertively intervene in a bullying situation.
3. The skits will be recorded and shared with elementary students.



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Example 1

1. Promoting healthy norms in a lesson will typically take place after students have learned the functional information and skills related to the HBO of the lesson. In this example, students have already learned about the dangers and consequences of driving while under the influence of alcohol and other drugs. In addition, students have practiced refusal skills on how to get out of a peer pressure situation to ride in a car with someone who is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.
2. To help promote healthy norms related to the HBO of the lesson, students are taught about the skill of advocacy. Advocacy skills empower students with confidence to apply functional health knowledge to persuade others to adopt healthy behaviors. The teacher first explains what “advocacy” means and then shows examples of advocacy activities (e.g., public service announcements, posters, videos).
3. Students are then placed in small groups and are directed to create a short video encouraging their peers to avoid either driving while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs or riding in a motor vehicle with a driver under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.
4. Students then share their videos with the rest of the class. Students vote on the most-effective videos, and the winning videos are shared on the morning announcements for the entire student body.



Example 2

For this example, the unit that is being taught is Sexual Health and the HBOs for the lesson are *SH-5: Be sexually abstinent* and *SH-7: Engage in behaviors that prevent or reduce unintended pregnancy* ([HECAT Appendix 3](#)).



1. Promoting healthy norms in a lesson will typically take place after students have learned the functional information and skills related to the HBO of the lesson. In this example, students have already brainstormed the financial, educational, social, and physical consequences and challenges of becoming a teen parent.
2. Students then create a poster of their top five reasons they do not want to become a teen parent. They verbally share their list with the class, and then the teacher posts the lists throughout the classroom.