

CHALLENGING SOCIAL NORMS

This printable exercise, [Challenging Social Norms w/ Facts](#), is designed to address a common issue among teens: teens tend to overestimate how much their peers are using drugs and alcohol.

This misconception can lead to increased pressure to conform to these **perceived norms**. By accurately presenting the facts, teens can be encouraged to make healthier decisions based on reality rather than misconceptions.

Below you will find the instructions and example conversation scripts for parents and caregivers to use for an informative conversation at home.

The data used in the printable exercise is from survey results for 12th grade students. To look up **grade-specific survey results, you can go to the [national survey website here](#).*

Instructions for Parents/Caregivers:

1. Preparation:

- a. Print out the [activity PDF](#).
- b. Fold over the right side of the sheet to cover the "The Facts" section, leaving only the questions and the "What I Think" section visible.

2. Initial Discussion:

- a. Sit down with your kid in a comfortable setting.
- b. Explain the purpose of the activity: "We're going to explore how our perceptions of what others do can influence our own choices, especially around drugs and alcohol."

3. Estimation Exercise:

- a. Ask your kid to answer the questions on the sheet based on what they think their peers are doing regarding drug and alcohol use.
- b. Reassure your teen there are no right or wrong answers; this activity is about exploration and understanding.
- c. Write down their estimates on the sheet in the column labeled "What I Think".

4. Revealing the Facts:

- a. Unfold the paper to reveal the "The Facts" section.

- b. Compare their estimates with the actual data.
- c. Discuss any surprises or misconceptions.

5. Reflective Conversation:

- a. Engage in a dialogue about why there might be discrepancies between perception and reality, and how this could influence decisions and behaviors.
- b. Review the sample conversation scripts below.

Wrap up the activity by emphasizing the importance of making choices based on facts rather than perceptions. Remember, open and non-judgmental communication is key.

Example Conversation Scripts:

Step 1: Introducing the Activity

Parent: "Hey, I thought we could do something interesting today. It's about understanding what we think others are doing versus what's really happening. It's related to drug and alcohol use among teens. What do you think?"

Teen: "Why are we doing this?"

Parent: "We're doing this to see how our guesses about what others are doing, especially with drugs and alcohol, compare with factual information. It's about understanding peer pressure and making choices based on reality, not just on what we think is happening. This can help you make safer and healthier decisions for yourself."

Teen: "Sounds okay, I guess. What do I have to do?"

Parent: "Just answer a few questions about what you think your friends and classmates are doing. No right or wrong answers, just your thoughts."

Step 2: Initial Guesses

Parent: "What percentage of kids your age do you think have drunk alcohol in the last month?"

Teen: "Maybe around 60%?"

Parent: "Interesting guess. Let's see what the actual statistics say."

Step 3: Revealing the Facts

Parent: "The actual percentage is much lower, only about **X**%. How does that compare to your guess?"

Teen: "Wow, that's a lot lower than I thought!"

Parent: "It's common to overestimate these things. Why do you think that is?"

Step 3: Revealing the Facts

Parent: "Look at this; the survey says only **X**% have tried. That's quite different from what you thought. Why do you think that is?"

Teen: "Really? I thought everyone was doing it because of what I see on social media."

Parent: "It's easy to get that impression. How do you feel knowing the real stats?"

Step 5: Reflecting on Perceptions

Parent: "Knowing this, how do you think it might impact the choices you or your friends make?"

Teen: "I guess it shows we don't have to do what we think everyone else is doing."

Parent: "Exactly. It's important to make choices based on facts and your values, not just on what you think is popular."

If your teen is struggling to grasp the importance of using accurate information to make decisions, it might help to relate the discussion to their personal experiences or goals. Below are additional scripts that aim to connect the concept of accurate information to the teen's everyday life, making the importance of informed decision-making more relatable and impactful.

Script 1 - Relating to Personal Goals:

Parent: "Imagine you're practicing for the basketball team because you heard everyone's making over 10 shots in a row. You feel pressured to match that, right? But then you find out the average is actually 3 shots. How would that change your approach?"

Teen: "I'd feel less stressed and focus on improving at my own pace."

Parent: "Exactly! It's the same with this. Knowing the real stats about peer behavior can help you make choices that are right for you, not based on exaggerated ideas."

Script 2 - Discussing Peer Influence:

Parent: "Think of a time when a rumor at school made everyone act differently, even though it turned out to be untrue. How did that make you feel?"

Teen: "Confused and a bit silly for believing it."

Parent: "That happens with drugs and alcohol too. Many act on what they think is common, not what's true. Understanding the real facts helps us not be swayed by rumors or peer pressure."

Script 3 - Discussing Peer Influence Alternate:

Parent: "Thinking about our conversation on alcohol and making choices, I wonder if there have been times when you felt swayed by what others were doing, especially in tough situations?"

Teen: "I don't know."

Parent: "That's okay, it can be tricky to pinpoint. Let's think about it in terms of your goals or things you enjoy doing. For example, you've been really focused on [Teen's goal or interest, e.g., making the soccer team, improving in art, preparing for college]. How do you think fitting in with what others are doing, especially if it involves drinking, could impact those goals?"

Teen: "I guess it could mess things up if I'm not careful."

Parent: "Exactly, and that's why it's so important to make decisions that align with what you want for yourself, not just in the moment, but for your future too. Remember when you [reference a specific personal achievement or positive choice the teen made], that was you making a choice based on what was right for you. How did that make you feel?"

Teen: "Pretty good, actually. Like I was in control."

Parent: "That's what we're aiming for—feeling in control of your choices, especially regarding alcohol and peer pressure. Making choices that support your goals and well-being can help you feel that way more often. If you ever find yourself in a situation where you're unsure of what to do, think back to your goals and how far you've come. What decision will help you stay on track?"

Teen: "I see what you mean. I'll think about my goals next time."

Parent: "And I'll be here to talk it through with you, anytime. It's not just about avoiding negative consequences; it's about creating a life you're excited about and making choices that get you closer to your dreams. How do you think we can support each other in making those kinds of choices?"

Script 4 - Relating to New Trends

Parent: "Have you ever noticed how sometimes people do things just because everyone else seems to be doing them? Like when a new trend takes off or everyone starts using a new app?"

Teen: "I don't know."

Parent: "That's alright, it's something we all experience at some point. Let's think about it in terms of your interests. You're really passionate about [Teen's hobby or interest, e.g., coding, skateboarding]. Imagine there was a sudden hype around something that's not really your thing, but you felt pressure to join in because it seemed like everyone else was."

Teen: "Yeah, I guess that could be weird."

Parent: "Right, and that situation is similar to making choices about tougher issues, like dealing with peer pressure in more challenging scenarios. It's about knowing what's right for you. Like when you decided to spend your weekend

working on that [specific project or activity the teen was involved in] instead of going with the crowd to that big event everyone was talking about. What helped you make that choice?"

Teen: "I wanted to finish my project, and I thought it was cooler than the event."

Parent: "See, that's you making a decision based on your own values and interests, not just going along with the crowd. It's important because it shows you're thinking about what truly matters to you. How did you feel after making that decision?"

Teen: "Good, actually. Like I did what was best for me."

Parent: "That's the spirit. Every choice you make, big or small, shapes your future. So, when you're faced with decisions, especially when they involve following the crowd or not, remember how making choices that align with your goals and interests has made you feel in the past. Think about how those choices fit with where you want to go in life. What are some other areas where making your own choices, based on what you value, might be important?"

Teen: "I guess who I hang out with and what I spend my time on."

Parent: "Exactly. Choosing friends who respect your choices and spending time on activities that bring you closer to your goals are big ones. I'm here to support you in making those decisions, talking through any pressures you might feel, and celebrating the wins along the way. How does that sound?"

This exercise aims to empower teens with accurate information, helping them make informed decisions and understand that substance use is not as widespread among their peers as they might think.

More About The Survey Data Used In This Exercise:

The [Monitoring The Future National Survey](#) is a valuable resource for understanding the behaviors, attitudes, and values of American youth. This ongoing study surveys approximately 50,000 8th, 10th, and 12th graders annually, providing insights into adolescent substance use, among other topics.