

"Is Everybody Really Doing it? Using a Social Norms Approach to Successfully Reduce Risk Behaviors"

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<http://www.AlcoholEducationProject.org>

<http://www.YouthHealthSafety.org>

Description

Effective prevention of substance abuse and related problems among youth and young adults requires coordinated efforts using science-based strategies. The "Social Norms Model" has emerged as a science-based approach focusing on the influence of perceived peer norms and has provided notable success in many initiatives including higher education, secondary schools, and community settings. Based on more than two decades of research with tens of thousands of middle school, high school, and college students as well as studies of other young adults and parents in community settings, Dr. Perkins will describe the harmful misperceptions of peer norms that are so pervasive in schools and communities and how the perception of peer norms is the most important factor predicting risk behavior. He will then discuss the causes and consequences of peer misperceptions and the potential for program interventions to challenge these misperceptions. Research clearly shows the importance of harnessing the positive power of peers through the promotion of accurate social norms. Yet putting the social norms approach into practice is not without challenges. Dr. Perkins will conclude by noting key elements of successful interventions employing this model.

Biographical Sketch

H. Wesley Perkins received his Ph.D. from Yale University and is Professor of Sociology at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York. Dr. Perkins is also Project Director of the Alcohol Education Project at Hobart and William Smith, an initiative providing research, educational resources, and strategies to reduce alcohol and other drug abuse throughout the U.S. and internationally. This Project has received multiple national awards from the U.S. Department of Education as a Model Prevention Program. Dr. Perkins has published extensive research on risk behavior and health and well-being among youth and young adults in professional journals and has been a pioneer in work uncovering how youth misperceive peer norms about substance abuse, bullying, other violence, and sexual risk taking. He developed the theory underlying the social norms approach to preventing risk behavior and is editor of a book on *The Social Norms Approach to Preventing School and College Age Substance Abuse*. Dr. Perkins has delivered over 300 guest lectures, keynote addresses, and workshops for universities, secondary schools and professional conferences in the United States and internationally and frequently serves as a consultant to schools and to state and federal drug abuse agencies. In 1999 he received the Outstanding Service Award by the Network of Colleges and Universities Committed to the Elimination of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse for his career contribution to prevention work at both the local and national level. Dr. Perkins' work has been frequently cited in the press and television news coverage including the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, CNN, New York Times Magazine, Newsweek, and Time Magazine.