

CAMPUS SAFETY

How can campuses use science to encourage student compliance with new COVID-19-related health regulations?



Repopulating New England's Campuses

As higher education leaders continue to prepare campuses for reopening, new health and safety requirements are being made: daily health monitoring, mask wearing, social distancing, limits on class sizes and group gatherings, etc.

But the looming question still remains:

Will students comply with the safety guidelines and requirements that the region's higher education institutions have developed?



5 TAKEAWAYS FROM THE SCIENCE OF ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOR:

NOTE: WHILE THE MAJORITY OF THE RESEARCH CITED HERE FOCUSES ON ADOLESCENTS, MOST, IF NOT ALL OF IT, IS APPLICABLE TO VARIOUS STUDENT POPULATIONS, INCLUDING ADULT STUDENTS, STUDENTS AT BOTH LARGE AND SMALL CAMPUSES, AND STUDENTS AT NON-RESIDENTIAL CAMPUSES.

01

Changing culture is key.

03

Messaging matters.

05

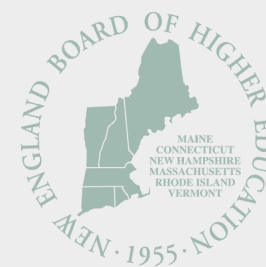
Peer influence is powerful.

02

Involve students in the process.

04

Focus on rewards, not punishments.



01 Changing culture is key

Exhorting people to change their behavior (i.e., "finger-wagging") is usually ineffective. The most fruitful strategies aim to shift cultural perceptions about a particular issue. For instance, over the past 50 years smoking has dropped precipitously — not because people were scolded for smoking but because of a cultural shift in society's perception of smoking. Smoking, which was once ubiquitous and cool, is now deemed very uncool. That change in how we regard smoking has proven highly effective in curbing the bad habit.

There are two main ways to change culture: (1) Rules and (2) Changing Values. Both are necessary.



02 Involve students in the process

Adolescence is a developmental phase of **self-individuation** — i.e., young adults are trying to find and define themselves. Furthermore, adolescent decision-making relies on **experiential learning**, making classroom-like delivery of information less effective. Because nobody has a rich experience base with pandemics, adolescents might be especially prone to resist instructions from others and instead test out different responses themselves.

Researchers recommend **involving students** in establishing new norms/rules. **Empower** them to make change, and seek their input on how to handle this situation. Tap into their **experience with social media** to determine the best messaging outlet.



03 Messaging matters

It can be useful to tap into Gen Z's sense of activism. Cast the adherence to health guidelines as something that creates a better society. Make it a cause they are leading — and that they perceive as worth leading. Frame it so that students feel that they are part of the solution to a collective problem.

Spread the word: “We’re all in this together. Let’s make the world a better place.”



04 Focus on rewards, not punishments

Research has shown that it is actually more effective to obscure what happens if someone breaks a rule. Once people know the punishment for breaking a rule, they begin a cost/benefit analysis to rationalize rule-breaking and cope with enduring the punishment.

Instead, keep students' eyes on the prize to incentivize positive behavior. The reward, in this particular case, is **success itself**. A return to some semblance of normalcy feels like a big win.

SOURCES: SANDRO GALEA, MD, MPH, DRPH | DEAN AND ROBERT A. KNOX PROFESSOR AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH; NICOLE SHOOK, PHD | ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, SCHOOL OF NURSING AT UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT; NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL (2020).

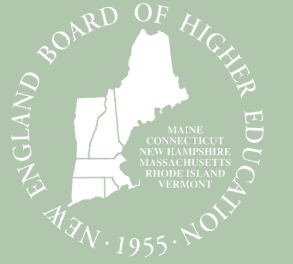


05 Peer influence is powerful

Numerous studies show that peers can be a source of both **positive and negative influence**, particularly peers they perceive as higher ranking. Adolescents tend to adopt certain behaviors because they fear social exclusion. The best interventions to diminish risky adolescent behaviors take full advantage of their desires for **peer respect and social status**.

Researchers suggest displaying **pictures of people** — especially role models — **doing the right thing**, such as wearing a mask.





WHAT ELSE CAN CAMPUSES DO?

5 HABIT-PROMOTING STRATEGIES

FROM THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES OF SCIENCES, ENGINEERING, AND MEDICINE

- **Make the Behavior Easy to Start and Repeat**

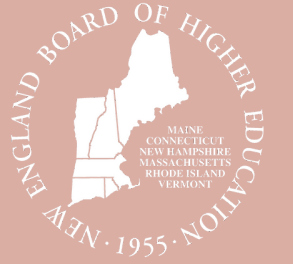
People are more likely to act in healthy ways when it is easy for them, meaning that a behavior is relatively frictionless, so that it takes little time and effort to perform it. For instance, establishing free or low-cost mask distribution sites convenient for populations most in need can make mask wearing easier.
- **Make the Behavior Rewarding to Repeat**

Efforts to make mask wearing instantly gratifying — such as promotion of fashionable masks, or masks with sports team or university logos or other identity decorations that make them fun to wear — could be beneficial. As another example, smart soap dispensers could reward every 100th user (or reward users at random).
- **Tie the Behavior to an Existing Habit**

People can be encouraged to establish preventive behavior routines through triggers and timely reminders, and encouraging planning can be invaluable. Applying this concept to mask wearing, people could be encouraged to keep masks in their car so they would put one on after opening the car door.
- **Alert People to Behaviors That Conflict with Existing Habits and Provide Alternative Behaviors**

People are more successful at controlling unwanted habits when they remind themselves of the unwanted behavior and think, “Don’t do it.” Providing alternative habits that oppose muscle movements — such as those involved in shaking hands (e.g., waving, bowing) — could further reduce interference from that old habit.
- **Provide Specific Descriptions of Desired Behaviors**

When individuals understand what specifically is expected of them, they are more likely to adopt the desired behavior. For example, it is more effective to use such messages as “maintain at least 6 feet of separation from others” instead of “socially distance,” or “masks required indoors” instead of “mask required if it is too crowded.”



10 RISK COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FROM THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES OF SCIENCES, ENGINEERING, AND MEDICINE

- Use Clear, Consistent, and Transparent Messaging
- Avoid Undue Attention to the Frequency of Socially Undesirable Behaviors
- Foster a Sense of Efficacy and Avoid Fatalism
- Appeal to the Collective Good of One's Community
- Use Messengers Trusted by the Target Audience
- Tailor the Framing of the Message to the Audience
- Link Prevention Behaviors to People's Identities
- Highlight Social Disapproval of a Target Audience Member's Failure to Comply When it Occurs
- Highlight the Growing Prevalence of Behavior Change within the Target Audience When It Occurs
- Avoid Repeating Misinformation, Even to Debunk It

Citations & Further Reading

UNDERLINED TITLES ARE ACCESSIBLE VIA THE EMBEDDED LINKS.



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Questions? Feedback?

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