

What Is the Theoretical Foundation of Project Northland?

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Research indicates that factors within both the personality and the social environment strongly influence each individual teen's decisions about many behaviors. Project Northland's authors are leaders in the fields of behavioral epidemiology, public health, education, and psychology. Their research and practical experience with adolescents inform all aspects of program design with these factors of influence in mind.

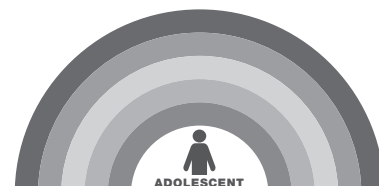
The personality characteristics and thought processes that increase or decrease the likelihood of an individual teen's underage alcohol use are called "intrapersonal factors." These include values, attitudes, self-efficacy to resist peer pressure, and knowledge about alcohol use and its consequences. Aspects of the social environment that support, permit, or discourage underage alcohol use are called "social-environmental factors." These include role models, social supports, family and school connections, specific opportunities for or barriers to drinking, and community norms and standards related to underage drinking.

Key social-environmental factors include the family, peer group, and community. Numerous studies document the strong influence of peers and family members on young people's alcohol use. It has been shown that when close friends or family members drink alcohol, an adolescent



tends to drink in a similar manner or under similar circumstances. Also, young people who believe their peers support use, or who have family members who do not discourage use, are more likely to drink than their peers. School and community actions also play a key role in promoting or discouraging alcohol use among adolescents.

Strengthening intrapersonal factors is also essential. Though experimentation with alcohol and other drugs generally occurs within social situations, not all teens in high-risk environments choose to use alcohol. Personal factors contribute to an adolescent's response to the social

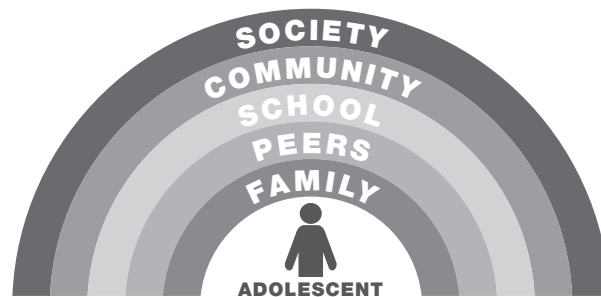


environment. Academic achievement and a sense that one has the ability to refuse offers of alcohol are both factors that influence youth decisions to use, or not use, alcohol. The value a young person places on conventional goals such as doing well in school, his or her repertoire of skills to refuse offers to drink, and participation in alcohol-free activities all influence these decisions.

For adolescents, the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other substances serves specific purposes that are related to the interplay of social-environmental and intrapersonal factors in their lives. For example, teens may perceive alcohol use as providing opportunities for them to

challenge authority, demonstrate autonomy and independence, gain social acceptance among peers, or simply relieve the stresses of growing up. Project Northland translates known factors into methods of delaying the onset of alcohol use.

Project Northland includes a comprehensive group of interventions developed to target the spheres of influence at the family, school, and community levels. The school-based interventions target peer group influences; they also offer ways to reinforce no-use messages for adolescents through school policies and ideas for safe extracurricular activities for young people. Underage access to alcohol is influenced by decisions made by local government (e.g., city councils or county boards) and local alcohol merchants, who are also targeted by Project Northland interventions. Finally, *Slick Tracy* and the other Project Northland curricula address the broader society's influences with, for example, discussions and activities about mass media messages and advertising of alcoholic beverages that influence young people.



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