

# THE SOCIAL NORMS APPROACH

## LESSON #5

### REFLECTION GUIDE



Want to share your natural high with us? Tweet us @NaturalHigh with #LiveNaturallyHigh. We might tweet back!

It's important for us to understand what's going on inside the brains of kids as they grow into adults. It's not difficult to understand that a teenager's brain is not yet fully developed — especially their executive functioning in the prefrontal cortex. Just watch a teenager for a few hours. It's the part of the brain that helps someone make thoughtful decisions, plan ahead, think long-term, and exert self-control.

It's easy to dismiss kids as reckless and foolish or to turn a blind eye to their exploits since perhaps we didn't have any supervision when we were their age. The more we understand what's going on in their development process, the better equipped we will be to guide them through the transition to take wise ownership of their lives.

The prefrontal cortex is the part of the human brain where rational and logical thinking occurs. In adolescents, it's not developed...yet.

Which means we need to be their prefrontal cortex for a while longer. Developmentally, they're all gas pedal and no brakes. We need to help them make smart and healthy choices — we need to act as their brakes. When they lack the capacity to do so, we need to make those choices for them, when appropriate. This goes against the 'cool parent' philosophy of providing substances for teenagers to consume as long as there is adult supervision.

Kids are uniquely susceptible to addiction compared to adults, and the potential damage to their development and health is real. In other words, don't provide substances or turn a blind eye. You need to be their thinking brain and help them make the best choices that give them the best opportunity to thrive in life. Sure, you might not be thought of as cool, but it's worth the cost.

The lightbulbs that used to turn on from their natural highs — whether playing sports, playing music, experiencing the outdoors, or creating something with their hands no longer light them up.



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That's why we're so intent on educating parents and educators to understand these important brain functions. It's why we're relentless on giving kids the opportunity to learn about themselves and to be inspired by examples of go-for-it people pursuing their natural highs. It's why establishing guardrails and investing in family bonding are so vital.

Perhaps there's an opportunity to work with our kids and their natural, healthy, thirst for dopamine. I know it might sound crazy, especially to adults who are cautious and regret the mistakes they made during their teenage years, but what could it look like to provide them opportunities to be thrillseekers?

### **If you're a parent, then here are a few ideas you can create adventures for and with your kid(s):**

- Mountain biking: gear up and find a trail
- Surf with them — at night
- Create a Tik Tok video with them and make yourself look like a fool
- Rent a jetski for a couple of hours
- Buy a block of ice, bring a towel, and find a grassy hill. It's called Ice Blocking, and it's a blast
- Build a ramp with them following a YouTube tutorial and supplies from Home Depot

Sure, those activities have inherent risks, but so does driving to the store. Assume calculated risks knowing their abilities and unique wiring, and thoughtfully create opportunities for them to get the high they're looking for. Ask them what they'd like to do, and be a cool parent who says yes and funds the adventure. Hey, if they break a bone or get hurt, at least you'd be there to help.

### **If you're an educator, here are a couple of ideas you can implement with your students:**

- Assign a student each week to make a five minute presentation (or video) of their latest interest — something they enjoy doing that makes them come alive
- Give extra credit if a student shares their adventure

We believe every kid deserves the opportunity to thrive, and together we can ensure more students do.

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. *What can you expose your kid to that might light up a natural high for them?*
2. *What will you do to communicate your desire to help them find health outlets and expressions of who they are?*



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Natural High is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization that relies on the generosity of individuals, corporations and foundations to help youth discover, amplify and pursue their own natural high so they have a reason to say no to an artificial high.

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