



# CARING RELATIONSHIPS + SUBSTANCE USE

SUMN.org FACT SHEET

2018

## Caring Relationships

### Definition

Caring relationships are important to emotional wellbeing at all ages. Adolescents are particularly affected by relationships with their parents, friends, and adults in their schools and communities—and students' perceptions of caring are significantly correlated with their substance use patterns. The 2016 Minnesota Student Survey examined 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students' perceptions of the level of caring in their relationships by asking how much they felt that:

- Their parents care about them
- Friends care about them
- Teachers and other adults at school care about them
- Adults in their communities care about them

Response options were *not at all*, *a little*, *some*, *quite a bit*, and *very much*. Here, *quite a bit* and *very much* are aggregated to represent caring.

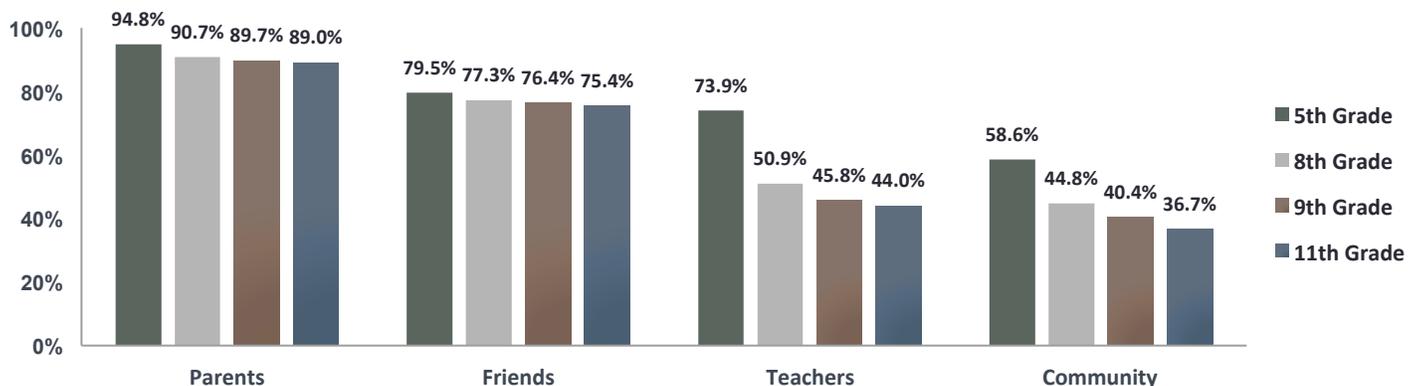
*For more information on alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use, consequences, contributing factors, and treatment, as well as mental health data, visit **SUMN.org***

### Levels of Care

According to the 2016 Minnesota Student Survey (MSS):

- Perceived level of care is highest from parents (91.1%), followed by friends (77.2%), teachers and other adults at school (53.8%), and community adults (45.3%).
- Levels of perceived care vary little by gender, although female students feel slightly less cared-for by parents and slightly more cared-for by friends, compared to male students.
- A more pronounced difference is found between grades: 5<sup>th</sup> graders report higher levels of care than 11<sup>th</sup> graders, for all groups (see graph below).

Minnesota Students Reporting They Feel People in Their Lives Care About Them, 2016 MSS



## Disparities in Perceptions of Caring

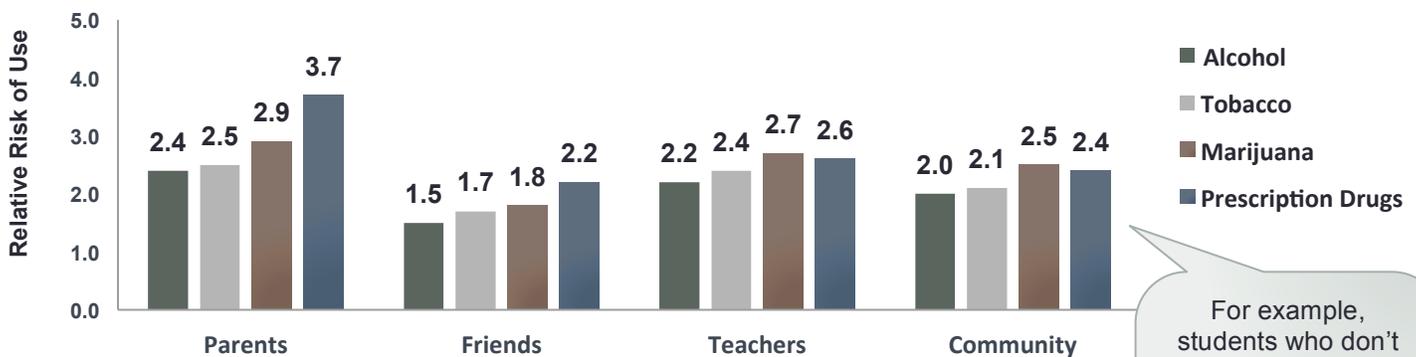
### Perception of Caring by Race/Ethnicity

- Native American students are the least likely to report feeling that people in their lives care about them; for instance, 85.9% of Native American students feel their parents care about them *quite a bit* or *very much*, compared to the Minnesota average of 91.1%.
- Multiracial students are the least likely to report their teachers care, at 44.4%, compared to 53.7% of all students. They are also least likely to report community adults caring (36.1% vs. 45.2% MN average).

### Perception of Caring by Sexual Orientation

- Only 71.5% of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students feel their parents care about them *quite a bit* or *very much*, compared to 91.1% of heterosexual students. LGB students are also much less likely to report teachers caring, and less than half as likely to report feeling that community adults care.

Relative Risk of Past-Month Substance Use for Minnesota Students Who Don't Feel People in Their Lives Care About Them, 8th, 9th, and 11th Graders, 2016 MSS



For example, students who don't feel adults in the community care about them are **2.4 times MORE likely** to misuse prescription drugs in the past 30 days

## Risk for Substance Use

### Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs

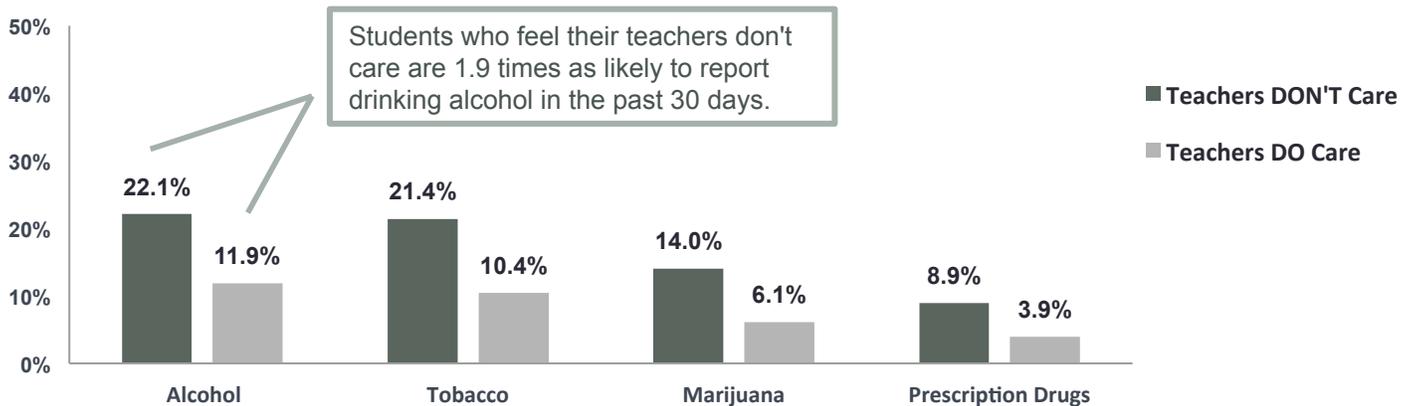
Students who feel their parents and other adults care for them are substantially less likely to have engaged in past 30-day substance use. Although the association is strongest for parental care, lower perceived levels of care are correlated with higher levels of substance use for every relationship category.

- Students who feel that their parents care about them *very much* or *quite a bit* are less likely to report past month alcohol use, past month tobacco use, past month marijuana use, and past month prescription drug misuse, as compared to those who feel their parents care only *some*, *a little*, or *not at all* (see graph below for comparisons between substances).
- For each relationship group, alcohol shows the smallest association with care levels, and prescription drugs the highest.
- The association between care and substance use is strongest for parents, followed by teachers, community adults, and friends.

## Buffering Risk

- Perhaps unsurprisingly, feeling cared about by the people in their lives can buffer the effects of other risk factors. For instance, of students who have been the victims of bullying, those who feel teachers don't care about them are almost twice as likely (1.9 times as likely) to report past 30-day alcohol use (22.1% vs. 11.9%) as those who are bullied and *also* feel their teachers care about them. They are also twice as likely to report past 30-day tobacco use (21.4% vs. 10.4%); marijuana use (6.1% vs. 14.0%); and past 30-day prescription drug misuse (8.9% vs. 3.9%).
- This buffering effect is also seen for other types of caring. Caring by parents has the strongest protective effect against past-month substance use.

Past 30-Day Substance Use by Students, According to Whether They Feel Their Teachers Care About Them, 8th, 9th, and 11th graders, 2016 MSS



## State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup

Minnesota's SEOW has been monitoring substance abuse trends since 2007. The Workgroup helps guide prevention planning at the state level, and provides training and technical assistance to communities. In, 2008 the SEOW launched the Substance Use in Minnesota (SUMN) website to ensure quick and easy access to data for prevention professionals.

### SUMN.org

SUMN is a one-stop-shop for data, tools, and prevention resources. Visitors can search county, regional, and state level data by topic, by location, and by demographic producing tables, charts, graphs, and maps. View and download data products, such as this fact sheet, and find tips on finding, analyzing, translating, using, and disseminating data.

## Contact Us

For questions or more information regarding the State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup or SUMN.org, please email: [info@sumn.org](mailto:info@sumn.org)

To contact the Regional Prevention Coordinator for your region, please visit: [www.rpcm.org](http://www.rpcm.org)

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