

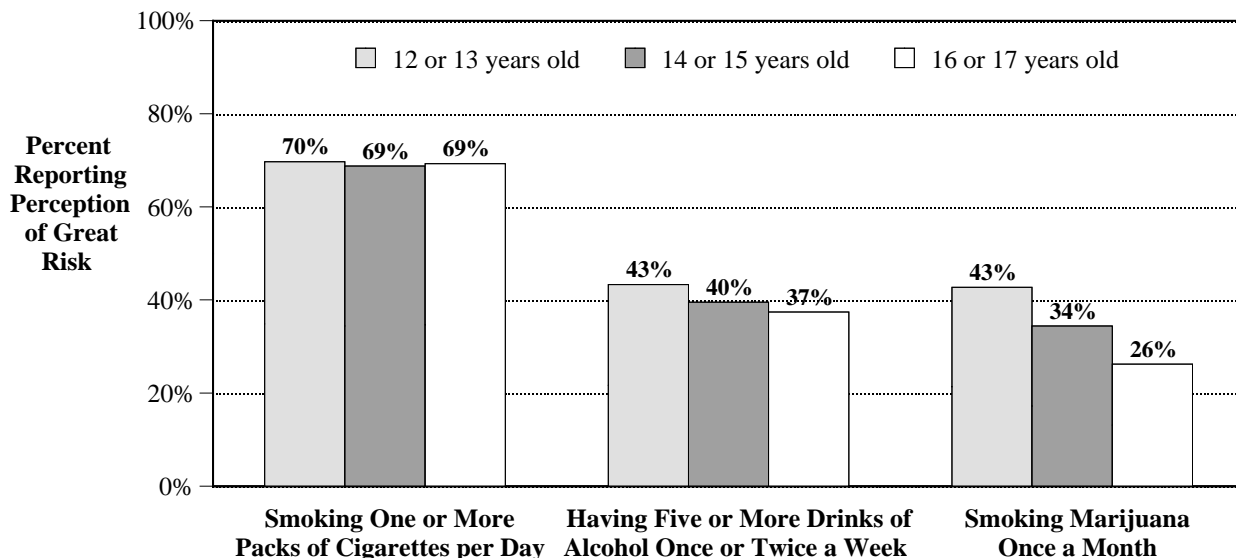
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Adolescents' Perceptions of Risk from Alcohol and Marijuana Use, but Not Cigarettes, Decreases with Age

While the perceived risk of smoking cigarettes remains the same among age groups, older youth are less likely to perceive great risk from alcohol and marijuana use than younger youth. According to an analysis of data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 43% of 12- or 13-year-olds reported that they perceived a great risk in having five or more drinks of alcohol once or twice a week, compared to 37% of 16- or 17-year-olds. Perceptions of risk of harm from smoking marijuana once a month also decreased with age, from 43% among the youngest youth to 26% among youth ages 16 to 17. In contrast, the perceived risk associated with using LSD, cocaine, and heroin increased with age (see *CESAR FAX*, volume 18, Issue 48). Previous research has shown that perceptions of high risks are associated with lower rates of use. According to the authors, these findings suggest that “providing adolescents with credible, accurate, and age-appropriate information about the harm associated with substance use is a key component in prevention programming” (p. 1).

Perception of Great Risk of Using Selected Substances, by Age
(2007 and 2008 data combined; n=44,979)



SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), “Perceptions of Risk from Substance Use Among Adolescents,” *The NSDUH Report*, November 26, 2009. Available online at <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/2k9/158/158RiskPerceptions.cfm>.