

RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Common questions. Simple answers.

WHAT ARE RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS?

Risk factors can increase a teen's potential for drug use, whereas protective factors can reduce that risk and help teens build resiliency when facing this challenge and many others. Risk factors are vulnerabilities that increase a person's risk for experiencing problematic substance use. Protective factors help build resiliency and increase the likelihood young people can cope with stressors or setbacks and therefore reduce the risk of problematic substance use, even with risk factors present. Protective factors can be present in many areas of a teen's life. Individual strengths, family supports, safe communities, school structure, and positive peers can all be protective factors.

Protective factors are key to building resiliency, promoting social and emotional health, increasing coping skills, and supporting young people in avoiding the risk of drug use.

WHAT ARE SOME COMMON RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS?

Risk Factors:

- Early aggressive behavior
- Lack of familial bonding, involvement, and supervision
- Family substance abuse
- Feeling no one cares about them
- Drug availability
- Poverty and other socio-economic challenges

Protective Factors:

- Individual self-control
- Family involvement and connectedness
- Academic competence for self and among peers
- School connectedness and positive climate
- Anti-drug policies in schools
- Strong neighborhood attachment

WHAT ARE SOME EARLY SIGNS AND HIGH-RISK PERIODS?

First, it's important to recognize that experimentation with substances is a part of normal youth exploration, and having open communication, trust, and discussion about the risks of addiction is key to decreasing the chance of substance use. Additionally, reinforcing the importance of delaying use can be critical in avoiding future addiction.

Early signs of risk can include lack of self-control, insecurity, and social challenges.

High-risk periods can include any transition period, such as going from middle school to high school, handling a family move, or dealing family discord.



HOW TO INCREASE *PROTECTIVE* FACTORS

Building protective factors starts in early childhood and can be impacted by other situations, such as family poverty and distress, neighborhood safety, schools that have a safe and positive climate, nurturing families, parents and guardians, and access to positive youth activities.

Protective factors include youth, family, community, school, and peer traits that:

- Create and maintain a strong bond between child and a parent.
- Have caring adults present and available in a young person's life.
- Include clear expectations and limits.
- Teach coping skills in times of distress or challenge.
- Include structure and expectations to help a child feel safe and cared for.

It should also be noted that increased risk can add to the likelihood that a teen will abuse drugs, but it should be recognized that increased risk is not the only indicator, and protective factors can offset that risk.

Scientists have proposed explanations for why some individuals become involved with drugs:

- Biological cause, such as a family history of drug or alcohol abuse
- Affiliation with drug-abusing peers
- Gender, race, and geographic location, which can all play a role in how and when children begin abusing drugs
- Low academic achievement
- Trauma history, including abuse
- Family rejection of sexual orientation or gender identity



NOW I'VE GOT THE FACTS — *WHAT'S NEXT?*

You can visit talk2kidsaboutdrugs.com for trusted, factual information for families and educators.


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