

## Youth Risk and Protective Factors

Improving the lives of children and youth, especially those at risk, begins with limiting the impact of "risk factors" (conditions which endanger youth and lead them off track) and increasing exposure to "protective factors" (conditions that promote healthy behaviors and sound decision making). Programs that address these risk and protective factors can be identified through the Program Directory.

### What Are Risk and Protective Factors?

Risk factors are conditions that increase the likelihood that youth will get into trouble or expose themselves to danger. Protective factors are safeguards that promote resiliency and enhance a young person's ability to resist risks or hazards and make good decisions. Like risk factors, protective factors can exist in—and be addressed by—individuals, families, communities, and institutions.

The greater the intensity or number of risk factors, the greater the likelihood that youth will engage in delinquent or other risky behaviors. Exposure to protective factors helps young people make better decisions, confront obstacles, and find the supports they need. They may prevent, diminish, or counteract the effects of risk factors.

Families and communities are key to enhancing positive youth development when they provide strong parenting, good adult role models, dependable sources of adult supervision, a strong sense of community, safe neighborhoods, and effective community-based and government services.

### Proven Risk and Protective Factors

	<b>Risk Factors</b>	<b>Protective Factors</b>	
<b>Individual</b>	Anti-social behavior and alienation; delinquent beliefs; general delinquency involvement; drug dealing		
	Chronic medical and/or physical condition		
	Cognitive and neurological deficits; low intelligence quotient; hyperactivity		
	Early onset of aggression and/or violence		
	Early sexual involvement		
	Favorable attitudes toward drug use; alcohol and/or drug use; early onset of AOD use		
	Gun possession; illegal gun ownership and/or carrying		
	Lack of guilt and empathy		
	Life stressors		
	Mental disorder; mental health problem; conduct disorder		
	Poor refusal skills		
	Teen parenthood		
		High individual expectations	
		Perception of social support from adults and peers	
	Positive/resilient temperament		
	Positive expectations; optimism for the future		
	Self-efficacy		
	Social competencies and problem-solving skills		

	<b>Risk Factors</b>	<b>Protective Factors</b>
<b>Family</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Victimization and exposure to violence</li> <li>Broken home</li> <li>Child victimization and maltreatment</li> <li>Family history of the problem behavior; parent criminality</li> <li>Family management problems; poor parental supervision and/or monitoring</li> <li>Family transitions</li> <li>Family violence</li> <li>Having a young mother</li> <li>Low parent college expectations for child</li> <li>Low parent education level; illiteracy</li> <li>Maternal depression</li> <li>Parental use of physical punishment; harsh and/or erratic discipline practices</li> <li>Pattern of high family conflict</li> <li>Poor family attachment/bonding</li> <li>Sibling antisocial behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective parenting</li> <li>Good relationships with parents; bonding or attachment to family</li> <li>Having a stable family</li> <li>Healthy, conventional beliefs and clear standards</li> <li>High family expectations</li> <li>Opportunities for prosocial family involvement</li> <li>Presence and involvement of caring, supportive adults</li> <li>Religiosity; involvement in organized religious activities</li> <li>Rewards for prosocial family involvement</li> </ul>
<b>School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dropping out of school</li> <li>Frequent school transitions</li> <li>Identified as learning disabled</li> <li>Inadequate school climate; poorly organized and functioning schools; negative labeling by teachers</li> <li>Low academic achievement</li> <li>Low academic aspirations</li> <li>Negative attitude toward school; low bonding; low school attachment; commitment to school</li> <li>School suspensions</li> <li>Truancy; frequent absences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Above average academic achievement/reading and math skills</li> <li>High expectations of students</li> <li>High-quality schools; clear standards and rules</li> <li>Opportunities for prosocial school involvement</li> <li>Presence and involvement of caring, supportive adults</li> <li>Rewards for prosocial school involvement</li> <li>Strong school motivation; positive attitude toward school</li> <li>Student bonding (attachment to teachers, belief, commitment)</li> </ul>
<b>Peer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Association with delinquent and/or aggressive peers</li> <li>Gang involvement; gang membership</li> <li>Peer alcohol, tobacco, and/or other drug use</li> <li>Peer rejection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good relationship with peers</li> <li>Involvement with positive peer group activities</li> <li>Parental approval of friends</li> </ul>
<b>Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Availability of alcohol and other drugs</li> <li>Availability of firearms</li> <li>Community crime/High crime neighborhood</li> <li>Community instability</li> <li>Economic deprivation; poverty; residence in a disadvantaged neighborhood</li> <li>Feeling unsafe in the neighborhood</li> <li>Low community attachment</li> <li>Neighborhood youth in trouble</li> <li>Social and physical disorder; disorganized neighborhood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear social norms; policies with sanctions for violations and rewards for compliance</li> <li>High community expectations</li> <li>Nondisadvantaged neighborhood</li> <li>Prosocial opportunities for participation; availability of neighborhood resources</li> <li>Rewards for prosocial community involvement</li> <li>Safe environment; low neighborhood crime</li> </ul>

## **Bibliography**

Arthur, M. W., J. D. Hawkins, J. A. Pollard, R. F. Catalano, A. J. Baglioni, Jr. (2002), "Measuring Risk and Protective Factors for Substance Use, Delinquency, and Other Adolescent Problem Behaviors. The Communities That Care Survey," *Evaluation Review*, 26(6):575-601.

Catalano, R. F., J. D. Hawkins (1996), "The Social Development Model: A Theory of Antisocial Behavior." In J. D. Hawkins (ed.), *Delinquency and Crime: Current Theories* (pp. 149-197), New York: Cambridge University Press.

Guo, J., J. D. Hawkins, K. G. Hill, R. D. Abbott (2001), "Childhood and Adolescent Predictors of Alcohol Abuse and Dependence in Young Adulthood," *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 62(6):754-762.

Hawkins, J. D., R. F. Catalano, et al. (1992), *Communities That Care*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hawkins, J. D., M. L. Van Horn, M. W. Arthur (2004), "Community Variation in Risk and Protective Factors and Substance Use Outcomes," *Prevention Science*, 5(4):213-220.

Howell, J. C. (2003), *Preventing and Reducing Juvenile Delinquency: A Comprehensive Framework*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Howell, J. C., A. Egley, Jr. (2005), "Moving Risk Factors Into Developmental Theories of Gang Membership," *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 3(4):334-354.

Kegler, M. C., R. F. Oman, S. K. Vesely, K. R. McLeroy, C. B. Aspy, S. Rodine, L. Marshall (2005), "Relationships Among Youth Assets and Neighborhood and Community Resources," *Health Education and Behavior*, 32(3):380-397.

Kirby, L. D., M. W. Fraser (1997), "Risk and Resilience in Childhood." In M. W. Fraser (ed.), *Risk and Resilience in Childhood* (pp. 10-33), Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers.

Stouthamer-Loeber, M., R. Loeber, E. Wei, D. P. Farrington, P. H. Wikstrom (2002), "Risk and Promotive Effects in the Explanation of Persistent Serious Delinquency in Boys," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 70(1):111-123.

Stouthamer-Loeber, M., E. Wei, R. Loeber, A. S. Masten (2004), "Desistance From Persistent Serious Delinquency in the Transition to Adulthood," *Development and Psychopathology*, 16:897-918.

Retrieved from: <http://findyouthinfo.gov/program-directory/research>