

Resilience/Protective Factors

Many youths, although living in high-risk environments, seem to possess personal resilience that helps them avoid alcohol, tobacco, and other drug problems. One current challenge to the prevention field is to identify these protective factors and determine how they can be instilled in all youth in high-risk environments.

The following is a checklist of youth protective factors:

1. *Community Environment*

- Middle or upper class
- Low unemployment
- Adequate housing
- Pleasant neighborhood
- Low prevalence of neighborhood crime
- Good school
- School that promotes learning, participation, and responsibility
- High-quality health care
- Easy access to adequate social services
- Flexible social service providers who put clients' needs first

• *Family Environment*

- Adequate family income
- Structured and nurturing family
- Parents promote learning
- Fewer than four children in family
- Two or more years between the birth of each child
- Few chronic stressful life events
- Multi-generational kinship network
- Non-kin support network, e.g., supportive role models, dependable substitute child care
- Warm, close personal relationship with parent(s) and/or other adult(s)
- Little marital conflict
- Family stability and cohesiveness
- Plenty of attention during first year of life
- Sibling as caretaker/confidante
- Clear behavior guidelines

• *Constitutional Strengths*

- Adequate early sensorimotor and language development
- High intelligence
- Physically robust
- No emotional or temperamental impairments

- *Personality of the Child*
 - Affectionate/endearing
 - Easy temperament
 - Autonomous
 - Adaptable and flexible
 - Positive outlook
 - Healthy expectations
 - Self-efficacy
 - Self-discipline
 - Internal locus of control
 - Problem-solving skills
 - Socially adept
 - Tolerance of people and situations

If the high-risk environment is the family itself, for instance if children are growing up in an alcoholic or drug abusing family, studies suggest that they have a better chance of growing into healthy adulthood if they:

- Can learn to do one thing well that is valued by themselves, their friends, and their community;
- Are required to be helpful as they grow up;
- Are able to ask for help for themselves;
- Are able to elicit positive responses from others in their environment;
- Are able to distance themselves from their dysfunctional families so that the family is not their sole frame of reference;
- Are able to bond with some socially valued, positive entity, such as the family, school, community groups, or church;
- Are able to interact with a (perceived to be) caring adult who provides consistent caring responses.

Resiliency factors, along with risk factors, need to be more widely publicized for the use of parents, gatekeepers, and prevention planners. While many of the factors listed are the result of external forces, those factors that may be taught or instilled in children can provide some protection to youths at high risk for alcohol, tobacco, or other drug problems.

References

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