

Risk and Protective Factors



WHAT ARE RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS?

Risk factors, such as genetic susceptibility, adverse childhood experiences, community norms favoring substances and academic struggles can increase a young person's likelihood of initiating substance use and experiencing other harms or challenges associated with use ([Surgeon General's Report](#)).


Protective factors are conditions or characteristics of individuals, families, communities or the larger society that increase resilience, help people deal more effectively with stressful events, and reduce a risk factor's impact. Risk and protective factors may be biological, psychological, environmental, cultural or genetic. Effective prevention efforts focus on reducing risk factors and strengthening protective factors.

For example, exercising regularly can serve as a protective factor by decreasing the likelihood or severity of anxiety, while tobacco use is a risk factor. Supportive social networks can reduce the impact of depression and enhance mental health, while loneliness and social isolation increases risk.

The following worksheet can be completed individually or in collaboration with a youth-serving provider or other trusted adult.

MY PROTECTIVE FACTORS WORKSHEET

Choose the protective factors most important to you. Use the space below to list current examples or future goals.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS	 EXAMPLES
Positive physical development Positive physical development includes attitudes or actions you can take to optimize the rapid changes occurring in your brain and body.	<i>I stop checking my phone an hour before bed.</i> <i>I take a walk after an hour of homework.</i>
Calming techniques and brain breaks Being aware of the impact your emotions and actions have on yourself and others, and the ability to manage them.	<i>When I'm really angry or upset, I remove myself from the situation.</i> <i>I count to 10 before reacting when stressed.</i>
Self-esteem, self-efficacy Self-esteem is your overall sense of value and worth. Self-efficacy is a belief and confidence in your ability to take action.	<i>I'm willing to walk away from a fight and be true to who I am.</i> <i>I speak up when I see injustice.</i>
Interpersonal and problem-solving skills Skills that help you take into account feelings, thoughts and actions for working with others and resolving problems.	<i>I have a friend I can run things by before sending a text when I'm angry.</i> <i>I created a list of study strategies that work for me.</i>
Social connections Interest and involvement in activities or events such as at school, with friends, in athletics, employment, religion, culture, community.	<i>I joined the school diversity club.</i> <i>I volunteer in my community.</i>
Supportive relationships with family or other trusted adults Strong personal connections increase belonging. These relationships also support development of skills and interests.	<i>My grandma and I like cooking together.</i> <i>I've learned a lot from my coach about teamwork and reliability.</i>
Safety Safety can refer to physical or mental security and protection.	<i>I'm able to talk with my mom without worrying about being shamed or embarrassed.</i> <i>I feel safe in my home.</i>

MY PROTECTIVE FACTORS

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