

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

What are risk and protective factors?

Risk and protective factors are those aspects of a young person's self and surroundings that correspond to the likelihood of their beginning to use alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs. Risk factors are those characteristics that increase their likelihood of use, while protective factors are the positive aspects of a youth's life that buffer the negative influences of their risk factors. Research has shown that the more risk factors a young person has, the greater the likelihood of beginning to use, but the presence of protective factors can decrease that likelihood.

Are risk and protective factors only for substance use?

The risk- and protective-factor list we use is developed for substance use, but many other health fields have their own lists of risk and protective factors, though they may call them names like "determinants," "causal factors," or "root causes." Even though our risk- and protective-factor list is developed for substance use, our list has a great deal of overlap when compared to risk- and protective factor lists for other youth risk behaviors like delinquency, teen pregnancy, violence, and school dropout.

Why are risk and protective factors important?

Risk- and protective-factor prevention is based on the premise that to prevent a problem from happening, we need to first identify the factors that increase risk and find ways to reduce those risks or increase the potency of the buffering protective factors. If interventions are tailored to the specific risk and protective factors of the target population, it should be more likely to prevent use.

Where can I find the risk- and protective-factor framework?

The current endorsed list can be found on pages 11 and 12 of *The Governor's Comprehensive Strategy for Youth Substance Abuse Prevention*. The risk and protective factors are organized according to their domains (individual, peer, family, school, community, and society). Domains refer to the various segments of an individual's life that affect the various decisions he or she makes.