

Risk and Protective Factors



Many factors influence a person's chance of developing a mental and/or substance use disorder. **Prevention** includes a wide range of activities — known as “interventions” — aimed at reducing risks or threats to health. Prevention activities focus on reducing risk factors, and strengthening protective factors, that are most closely related to the problem being addressed.

Risk factors are characteristics at the biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural level that precede and are associated with a higher likelihood of negative outcomes.

Protective factors are characteristics associated with a lower likelihood of negative outcomes or that reduce a risk factor's impact. Protective factors may be seen as positive countering events.

Individual-level risk factors may include a person's genetic predisposition to addiction or exposure to alcohol prenatally.

Individual-level protective factors might include positive self-image, self-control, or social

RISK FACTORS	PROTECTIVE FACTORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Chaotic home environment■ Ineffective parenting■ Little mutual attachment and nurturing■ Inappropriate, shy, or aggressive classroom behavior■ Academic failure■ Low academic aspirations■ Poor social coping skills■ Affiliations with deviant peers■ Perceived external approval of drug use (peer, family, community)■ Parental substance abuse or mental illness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Strong family bonds■ Parental engagement in child's life■ Clear parental expectations and consequences■ Academic success■ Strong bonds with pro-social institutions (school, community, church)■ Conventional norms about drugs and alcohol 

SOURCE: US Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Drug Abuse, (1997) Preventing drug use among children and adolescents: A research-based guide. NIH Publication No. 97 - 4212.