Risk and Protective Factors

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years). Examples of ACEs are:

- Emotional/physical/sexual abuse
- Mother treated violently
- Substance misuse in household
- Mental illness in household
- Parental separation for divorce
- Incarcerated household member
- Emotional/physical neglect

Positive Childhood Experiences

Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) can help protect against the poor health outcomes associated with ACEs. Children and families thrive when they have access to safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments. A 2019 study measured the PCEs below and found adults who reported higher PCEs had lower odds of depression and poor mental health.

- Felt able to talk to their family about feelings
- Felt their family stood by them during difficult times
- Enjoyed participating in community traditions
- Felt a sense of belonging in high school
- Felt supported by friends
- Had at least 2 nonparent adults who took genuine interest in them
- Felt safe and protected by an adult in their home

Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences has outlined "Four Building Blocks of Hope":

- Relationships within the family and with other children and adults through interpersonal activities.
- Safe, stable, and equitable environments for living, playing, and learning at home and in school.
- Social and civic engagement to develop a sense of belonging and connectedness.
- Emotional growth through playing and interacting with peers for self-awareness and self-regulation.

Social Determinants of Health

The World Health Organization defines social determinants of health (SDH) as the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. Examples include: income, education, unemployment, food insecurity, housing, early childhood development, and access to affordable, quality health services.

Communities that Care Risk/Protective Factor Framework

The following are risk/protective factors identified through the work of Dr. J. David Hawkins and Dr. Richard F. Catalano.

Risk Factors	Domain	Protective Factors
Low Neighborhood Attachment Community Disorganization Transitions and Mobility Laws and Norms Favorable to Substance Use Perceived Availability of Substances	Community	Community Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement Community Rewards for Prosocial Involvement
Poor Academic Performance Low School Commitment	School	School Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement School Rewards for Prosocial Involvement
Poor Family Management Family Conflict Parental Attitudes Favorable Toward Antisocial Behavior and Substance Use Family History of Antisocial Behaviors or Substance Use	Family	Family Attachment Family Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement Family Rewards for Prosocial Involvement
Low Perceived Risk of Substance Use Early Initiation of Substance Use Sensation Seeking Rebelliousness Friend's Use of Substances Favorable Attitudes Toward Antisocial Behavior/Substance Use Rewards for Antisocial Behavior/Substance Use	Individual/ Peer	Religiosity Social Skills Belief in the Moral Order Interaction with Prosocial Peers

SAMHSA Risk/Protective Factors by Age Group

The following table was developed by SAMHSA based on information from a 2009 report from the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, *Preventing mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders among young people: Progress and possibilities*. An updated version of this report from the National Academy of Sciences in 2019, *Fostering Healthy Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Development in Children and Youth*, includes additional risk/protective factors for mental, emotional and behavioral health (e.g. risk factors in the prenatal period).

RISK FACTORS: Early Childhood		
Individual	**Family**	**Community/School**
• Difficult temperament	• Cold and unresponsive mother behavior • Parental drug/alcohol use	

RISK FACTORS: Middle Childhood		
Individual	**Family**	**Community/School**
• Poor impulse control • Low harm avoidance	• Permissive parenting • Parent-child conflict	• School failure • Low commitment to school

Individual	Family	Community/School
• Sensation seeking • Lack of behavioral self-control • Aggressiveness • Anxiety • Depression • ADHD • Antisocial behavior • Early persistent behavior problems • Early substance use	• Low parental warmth • Parental hostility • Harsh discipline • Child abuse/maltreatment • Parents/siblings model drug use • Parents have favorable attitude towards alcohol and/or drugs • Inadequate supervision • Low parental aspirations for child • Lack of or inconsistent discipline	• Peer rejection • Deviant peer group • Peer attitudes toward drugs • Alienation from peers • Laws and norms favorable toward alcohol and drug use • Availability of and access to alcohol • Extreme poverty for antisocial children

RISK FACTORS: Adolescence		
Individual	**Family**	**Community/School**
• Negative emotionality (propensity towards negative emotions) • Behavioral disengagement coping (giving up) • Conduct disorder • Favorable attitudes toward drugs • Rebelliousness • Early substance use • Antisocial behavior	• Substance abuse among parents • Lack of adult supervision • Poor attachment with parents	• School failure • Low commitment to school • Not college bound • Aggression toward peers • Associating with drug-using peers • Societal/community permissive norms about alcohol and drug use

RISK FACTORS: Young Adulthood		
Individual	**Family**	**Community/School**
• Lack of commitment to conventional adult roles • Antisocial behavior	• Leaving home	• Attending college • Substance-using peers

PROTECTIVE FACTORS: Early Childhood		
Individual	**Family**	**Community/School**
• Attention regulation • Appropriate emotional inhibitions and expression • Early mastery and intrinsic motivation • Executive functioning, planning, and problem solving • Secure attachment • Functional language • School attendance and appropriate conduct • Initiating interactions and appropriate conduct • Understanding of self and others' emotions	• Reliable support and discipline from caregivers • Responsiveness • Protection from harm and fears • Affection • Opportunities to resolve conflict • Support for development of new skills • Reciprocal interactions • Experience of being respected • Stability and consistency in caregiver relationship • Adequate income • Ability to provide adequate nutrition, childcare, safe housing, health care • Higher parental education • Cognitive stimulation in the home • Parental low economic stress	• Support for early learning • Access to supplemental services, such as feeding, and screening for vision and hearing • Stable, secure attachment to child-care provider • Low ratio of caregivers to children • Regulatory systems that support high quality of care

PROTECTIVE FACTORS: Middle Childhood		
Individual	**Family**	**Community/School**
• Learning to read and write a language • Learning basic mathematics • Attending and behaving appropriately at school • Following rules for behavior at home, at school, and in public • Getting along with peers in school • Making friends with peers • Empathy and acceptance of other children's emotional expressiveness • Preference for pro-social solutions to interpersonal problems • Realistic control attributions • Self-efficacy	• Time in emotionally responsive interactions with children • Consistent discipline • Language-based, rather than physically based, discipline • Extended family support • Parental resources, including positive personal efficacy, adaptive coping, self-views high on potency and life satisfaction	• Positive teacher expectancies • Perceived teacher support • Effective classroom management • Positive partnering between school and family • Culturally relevant pedagogy • High academic standards, strong leadership, concrete strategies to promote achievement

PROTECTIVE FACTORS: Adolescence		
Individual	**Family**	**Community/School**
• Positive physical development (good health habits, good health risk management skills) • Positive intellectual development (life, school, vocational skills; critical and rational thinking; cultural knowledge and competence) • Positive psychological and emotional development (self-esteem and self-regulation; coping, responsibility, problem-solving; motivation and achievement; morality and values) • Positive social development (connectedness to peers, family, community; attachment to institutions)	• Physical and psychological safety • Appropriate structure (limits, rules, monitoring, predictability) • Supportive relationships with family members • Opportunities to belong (sociocultural identity formation, inclusion) • Positive social norms (expectations, values) • Support for efficacy and mattering • Opportunities for skill building • Integration of family, school, and community efforts	• Physical and psychological safety • Appropriate structure (limits, rules, monitoring, predictability) • Supportive relationships • Opportunities to belong (sociocultural identity formation, inclusion) • Positive social norms (expectations, values) • Support for efficacy and mattering • Opportunities for skill building • Integration of family, school, and community efforts

PROTECTIVE FACTORS: Young Adulthood		
Individual	**Family**	**Community/School**
• Identity exploration in love, work, and world view • Subjective sense of adult status in self-sufficiency, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent • Future orientation • Achievement motivation	• Balance of autonomy and relatedness to family • Behavioral and emotional autonomy	• Opportunities for exploration in work and school • Connectedness to adults outside of family

The Developmental Assets® Framework

[Search Institute](#) has identified 40 positive supports and strengths that young people need to succeed. The Search Institute research indicates that youth with the most assets are least likely to have problems with alcohol and drug use.

External Assets

Support	- Family support—Family life provides high levels of love and support. - Positive family communication—Young person and their parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek parent(s) advice and counsel. - Other adult relationships—Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults. - Caring neighborhood—Young person experiences caring neighbors. - Caring school climate—School provides a caring, encouraging environment. - Parent involvement in schooling—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.
Empowerment	- Community values youth—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth. - Youth as resources—Young people are given useful roles in the community. - Service to others—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week. - Safety—Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.
Boundaries and Expectations	- Family boundaries—Family has clear rules and consequences, and monitors the young person's whereabouts. - School boundaries—School provides clear rules and consequences. - Neighborhood boundaries—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior. - Adult role models—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior. - Positive peer influence—Young person's best friends model responsible behavior. - High expectations—Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.
Constructive Use of Time	- Creative activities—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts. - Youth programs—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in community organizations. - Religious community—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution. - Time at home—Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do," two or fewer nights per week.

Internal Assets

Commitment to Learning	- Achievement motivation—Young person is motivated to do well in school. - School engagement—Young person is actively engaged in learning. - Homework—Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day. - Bonding to school—Young person cares about their school. - Reading for pleasure—Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.
Positive Values	- Caring—Young person places high value on helping other people. - Equality and social justice—Young person places a high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty. - Integrity—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for their beliefs. - Honesty—Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy." - Responsibility—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility. - Restraint—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.
Social Competencies	- Planning and decision-making—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices. - Interpersonal competence—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills. - Cultural competence—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds. - Resistance skills— Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations. - Peaceful conflict resolution—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.
Positive Identity	- Personal power—Young person feels they have control over "things that happen to me." - Self-esteem—Young person reports having a high self-esteem. - Sense of purpose—Young person reports that "my life has a purpose." - Positive view of personal future—Young person is optimistic about their personal future.

CSPN Risk/Protective Factors for Youth by Domain

The PA Cross Systems Prevention Network's [Youth Behavioral Health Risk and Protective Factor Assessment](#) outlines a list of risk/protective factors for substance use in youth. This list was developed through a literature review and synthesis which included reviewing several existing risk and protective factor matrices as well as recent empirical studies.

Individual

Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Early manifestation/onset of mental health, substance, misuse, and conduct problems • Early initiation into substances • Early onset of conduct and oppositional behavior problems • Early onset of psychological/mental health problems	**Social and emotional competence** • Healthy cognitive development • Emotional competence • Problem-solving skills • Social competence • Self-regulation
Impulsivity, risk seeking, and low self-control • Risk and sensation seeking • Impulsivity and self-control	**Self-esteem, identity, and self-concept** • Self-esteem and positive self-image • Autonomy • Cultural and ethnic identity
Favorable attitudes and belief towards problem behaviors • Favorable attitudes towards engaging in problem behaviors • Low perceived risk of problem behavior • Willingness to engage in problem behavior	**Future orientation and educational aspirations** • Academic achievement • Future orientation
Exposure to adverse childhood experiences • Experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect • Witnessing violence in the home • Household family member death • Family member, substance misuse, or mental health problems • Parental separation, or incarceration	**School engagement and involvement** • School engagement • Extracurricular involvement • Civic engagement, volunteerism, and prosocial involvement
Loneliness, boredom, and disengagement • Apathy • Boredom • Loneliness • Low commitment to school	**Positive attitudes, and prosocial norms** • Prosocial norms • Unfavorable attitudes towards substance use, and delinquency
Oppositional and conduct problems and disorders • Oppositional defiant and conduct disorder • Rebelliousness • Greater involvement in problem behaviors • Truancy	**Morals and values development** • Religiosity /spirituality • Belief in moral order **Engaging and healthy practices** • Physical activity • Healthy Sleep Patterns

Peer

Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Involvement in substance use and antisocial behaviors • Friends who engage in problem behavior • Substance misuse • Peer delinquency and antisocial behavior • Peer violence and aggression • Involvement with delinquent and antisocial peers	**Positive and prosocial peers** • Peer disapproval of substance use • Positive role models • Religious peers
Rejection and alienation • Peer rejection • Alienation from peers	**Intimacy and support in friendships**
Norms and attitudes favorable towards risky and problem behaviors • Favorable attitudes towards substance use and other behaviors • Rewards for antisocial and substance use behaviors • Older sexual partner	

Family

Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Family history of mental health concerns, substance misuse, or criminality • Parental substance use addiction or disorder • History of maternal depression • History of parental criminal activity, or conviction • History of parental smoking, or cigarette use • History of parental violent and antisocial behavior	**Clear rules and expectations for behavior** • Family recognition/reward for prosocial involvement • Family opportunities for prosocial involvement • Clear expectations for behavior/values • Higher parental expectations about school
Child management practices • Family dysfunction and child management problems • Low parental aspirations for child • Favorable attitudes towards youth problem behaviors • Ease of access and availability of substances in the home	**Parenting and child management practices** • Effective discipline practices • Parental monitoring • Parent-child communication • Warm, responsive, and supportive parenting
Problematic family relationships • Avoidant/disorganized parent child attachment • Parent child conflict	**Family connectedness and bonding** • Family attachment/parental bonding • Positive parent-child relationship quality • Shared family activities and time

Neglectful, harsh, and controlling parenting practices	Family resilience
• Parental hostility towards child • Harsh discipline • Inconsistent discipline • Permissive and neglectful parenting practices • Parental avoidant behaviors	• Opportunities to resolve conflict • Family coping strategies • Family shared decision making and problem-solving
Family stressors and adverse life events • Family and inter-parental caregiver conflict • Family stressors	

School

Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Low academic performance, and achievement • Academic failure • Low school readiness	**School bonding and positive relationships** • Bonding to prosocial others • Quality parent-teacher relationship • Positive partnering with parents • School connectedness • Positive school climates
Low commitment to school	**School practices and policies of safety and acceptance** • School, recognition and opportunities for prosocial involvement • School policies to reduce bullying • Regulatory systems supporting care • Schoolwide skills building prevention programs
School violence and bullying • Violence and drugs on school property • Social trauma • Bullying • School stressful or traumatic events	**Classroom management and standards for supportive learning** • High academic standards • Clear expectations for behavior • Effective classroom management • Access to supplemental services and student support • Support for early learning • Positive norms

Community/Societal/Environmental

Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Economic depression and hardship • Poverty • Diminished economic opportunity • Food insecurity and hunger • Poor quality housing	**Opportunities for economic growth** • Policies, supporting employment opportunities • Health Literacy

Community laws and norms	Community opportunities and reward for prosocial involvement
• Laws and norms favorable toward substance misuse • Alcohol outlet density • Media portrayals of substance use	• Community, recognition, and opportunities for prosocial involvement • Programs/policies/practices to promote healthy youth behavior
Transitions and mobility	**Community cohesion and support**
• Residential mobility • Housing, instability, and homelessness	• Community support/connectedness • Bonding to prosocial others in community
Lack of available, accessible, and affordable healthcare	**Access to quality and culturally, responsive healthcare**
Community disorganization and violence	
Availability of substances	
Cultural and sociopolitical norms • Sociocultural norms favorable towards substance misuse • Inadequate policies and laws regarding social welfare and health	

Problem Gambling Risk/Protective Factors

Dowling, et. al. looked at multiple studies to, "identify early risk and protective factors (in childhood, adolescence or young adulthood) longitudinally associated with the subsequent development of gambling problems.[1]" The risk and protective factors identified in this review include:

- Substance misuse
- Delinquency
- Depressive symptoms
- Impulsivity
- Sensation seeking
- Male gender
- Frequent gambling
- Poor academic performance
- Parental monitoring (protective factor)
- High socio-economic status (protective factor)

Other potential risk factors that have been identified include:

- Parental problem gambling[2]
- Availability/increased exposure to gambling[3]
- Stressful life events (e.g. recent loss)[4]
- Greater portion of friends/family who are regular gamblers[7]
- Cognitive distortions/fallacies about gambling (false beliefs about how gambling works)[8]
- Gambling permissive culture[4]
- Traumatic Brain Injury[5]
- Childhood maltreatment (abuse/neglect)[6]

[1] Dowling, et. al. 2017. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2016.10.008
[2] Kourgiantakis, et. al 2016. https://doi.org/10.4309/jgi.2016.33.2
[3] Snead, et. al. 2010. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20491417/
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[6] Ahuja, et. al. 2018. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6233904/
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