



In recent years significant progress has been made in prevention of substance abuse among children. One helpful tool in this effort is the list of risk factors developed

through research. These risk factors are common characteristics that occur in the lives of those who develop substance abuse problems either as adolescents or as adults. The greater the number of risk factors that an individual has, the more likely he/she will become a substance user. The presence of multiple risk factors is also associated with the severity of later drug involvement, a child developing emotional disorders, and delinquent behavior. In *Breaking New Ground for Youth at Risk* (CSAP, 1990), the National Center for Substance Abuse Prevention published the following list of risk factors:

Risk Factors

Community Environment:

- Poverty
- Living in an economically depressed area with:
 - ✓ High unemployment
 - ✓ Inadequate housing
 - ✓ High prevalence of crime
 - ✓ High prevalence of illegal drug use
 - ✓ Minority status involving:
- Racial discrimination
 - ✓ Culture devalued in American society
 - ✓ Differing generational levels of assimilation

- ✓ Cultural and language barriers to getting adequate health care and other social services
- ✓ Low educational levels
- ✓ Low achievement expectations from society

Family Environment:

- Alcohol, tobacco, and other drug dependency of parent(s)
- Parental abuse and neglect of children
- Antisocial, sexually deviant, or mentally ill parents
- High levels of family stress, including financial strain
- Large, overcrowded family
- Unemployed or underemployed parents
- Parents with little education
- Socially isolated parents
- Single female parent without family/other support
- Family instability
- High level of marital and family conflict and/or family violence
- Parental absenteeism due to separation, divorce, or death
- Lack of family rituals
- Inadequate parenting and low parent/child contact
- Frequent family moves



Constitutional Vulnerability of the Child:

- Child of an alcohol, tobacco, or other drug abuser
- Less than 2 years between the child and its older/younger siblings

- Birth defects, including possible neurological and neurochemical dysfunctions which may not be visible
- Neuropsychological vulnerabilities
- Physically disabled
- Physical or mental health problems
- Learning disability

Early Behavior Problems

- Aggressiveness combined with shyness
- Aggressiveness
- Decreased social inhibition
- Emotional problems
- Inability to express feelings appropriately
- Hypersensitivity
- Inability to cope with stress
- Problems with relationships
- Cognitive problems
- Low self-esteem
- Difficult temperament
- Personality characteristics of ego under-control, rapid tempo, inability to delay gratification, overreacting



Adolescent Problems

- School failure and dropout
- At risk of dropping out
- Delinquency
- Violent acts
- Gateway drug use
- Other drug use and abuse
- Early unprotected sexual activity
- Teenage pregnancy/teen parenthood
- Unemployed or underemployed
- At risk of being unemployed
- Mental health problems
- Suicidal



Protective processes diminish risk factors to improve positive outcomes. Reducing risk factors and encouraging or facilitating the following resilience or protective factors are a part of a comprehensive, family-focused approach to

prevention of substance abuse, delinquent behavior, and emotional disorders (CSAP, 1990).

Resilience/Protective Factors

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
- High Fidelity Wraparound Services

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 Strength:

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

Personality of the Child:

- Affectionate/endearing
- Easy temperament
- Independent
- Adaptable and flexible
- Positive outlook
- Healthy expectations
- Self-efficacy or able to achieve desired results
- Self-discipline
- Internal locus of control
- Problem-solving skills
- Socially adept
- Tolerance of people and situations

For more information contact UPLIFT.

This brochure is intended for informational purposes only and not to replace professional evaluation and treatment.

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Risk and Protective Factors

Effecting the likelihood of substance abuse.

EDUCATIONAL SERIES



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