

Substance Use: Risk and Protective Factors

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Risk factors are characteristics, conditions, or behaviours that increase the chances of someone using substances. They can be affected by individual traits, family dynamics, social environments, and wider societal influences.²



Protective factors reduce the likelihood of substance use by acting as buffers, helping someone avoid drugs even in the presence of risk factors. They can be found in various areas, such as personal characteristics, family dynamics, peer relationships, and community environments.²



Individual Elements⁴

Risk Factors: Early aggressive behaviour, poor social skills, early substance use.

Protective Factors: Good social skills, high self-esteem, academic competence.

Family Circumstances⁴

Risk Factors: Lack of supervision, family substance use, conflict at home, inconsistent discipline.

Protective Factors: Strong family bonds, parental involvement and support, clear and consistent rules.

Peer and School Situations⁴

Risk Factors: Peer substance use, academic failure, negative school environment.

Protective Factors: Friends who do not use substances, are engaged in school, and participate in extracurricular activities.

Community Components⁴

Risk Factors: Easy access to drugs, living in a poor neighbourhood, low community support.

Protective Factors: Safe and supportive neighbourhood, access to after-school programs, community norms against substance use.

The more risk factors in someone's life, the more likely they are to experience substance-related harm.³

For example, a youth with a family history of substance use disorder, who also experiences conflict at home and surrounds themselves with peers who use drugs, would be at a higher risk of developing substance use problems than someone with less or none of these risk factors.



Family Conflicts



Family History



Peer Drug Use

For more information, please visit:
drugfreekidscanada.org



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A youth who has strong family support and is involved in activities they enjoy may be less likely to use substances because they feel valued and have healthy ways to handle stress.



How Parents Can Help Encourage Protective Factors⁴

Model Positive Behaviour: Show children healthy ways to cope with stress and emotions.

Set Clear Expectations: Discuss and enforce rules about substance use.

Stay Connected: Build strong relationships with your children through regular communication and shared activities.

Encourage Healthy Activities: Support involvement in sports, clubs, and other activities your child enjoys.



Creating a Safe Space for Parents and Youth

A safe space is a place where children and parents can talk openly without fear of judgment. It includes clear communication, mutual respect, and a supportive environment.

Active Involvement: Be involved in your child's life by participating in their activities, knowing their friends, and being aware of their daily routines.

Clear and Consistent Rules: Set clear expectations about substance use and enforce them consistently. Explain the reasons behind the rules to help youth understand their importance.

Open Communication and Trust: Encourage honest conversations about substance use and listen without judgment. Building trust makes it easier for youth to talk about their challenges and seek help.

Support Mental Health: Address underlying mental health issues with professional help if needed. Supporting mental health can reduce the risk of substance use.



References

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3. Leza, Leire, Sandra Siria, Jose J. López-Goñi, and Javier Fernandez-Montalvo. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and substance use disorder (SUD): A scoping review. *Drug and alcohol dependence* 221 (2021): 108563.
4. Nawi, Azmawati Mohammed, Rozmi Ismail, Fauziah Ibrahim, et al., Risk and protective factors of drug abuse among adolescents: a systematic review. *BMC public health* 21 (2021): 1-15.



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