

Youth Substance Use: Risk Factors

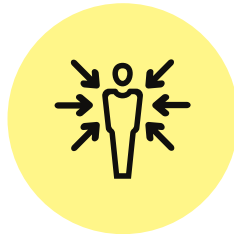
Risk factors are characteristics, conditions or behaviours that can increase the likelihood of a person's using substances problematically and/or developing health problems associated with substance use.

Risk factors for youth substance use can include:



Individual Traits

- Aggressive behaviour
- Poor social skills
- Early substance use
- Mental health issues
- Childhood sexual abuse or trauma



Peer and School Situations

- Peers who use drugs
- Lack of school connectedness
- Low academic achievement
- Negative school environment



Family Dynamics

- Family history of substance use and addiction
- Poor parental monitoring
- Conflict at home
- Inconsistent discipline
- Family rejection of sexual orientation or gender identity



Community Environment

- Easy access to drugs
- Living in a underprivileged area
- No community support
- Financial insecurity
- Shelter insecurity or homelessness

Risk factors can contribute to a vulnerable environment for a young person, making it easier for them to try and/or continue using substances. 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, could be at a higher risk of experiencing substance use harms and other negative outcomes than someone with fewer or none of these risk factors.

Risk factors do not determine a child's destiny – instead, they provide a general gauge as to the likelihood of experiencing substance-related harms or developing a substance use disorder.



Youth Substance Use: Protective Factors

Protective factors decrease the likelihood of an individual developing problematic substance use or health problems associated with substance use. Protective factors act as buffers, helping someone avoid drugs even when risk factors are present.

Protective factors for youth substance use can include:



Individual Traits

- Good social skills
- Resilience
- Self-esteem
- Academic competence
- Positive relationships with caring adults



Peer and School Situations

- Friends do not use substances
- Academically engaged in school
- Participate in extracurricular activities (sports teams, clubs, etc.)



Family Dynamics

- Strong family bonds
- Parental involvement and family support
- Clear and consistent rules
- Quality time spent together



Community Environment

- Safe and supportive neighbourhood
- Access to after-school programs
- Community programs for youth
- Community norms against substance use

Protective factors can help improve a young person's ability to cope with the everyday stresses, responsibilities and challenges they face as they navigate through teenage years. These factors help them make healthy choices about substance use.

How can adults promote protective factors?

- **Model positive behaviour:** Show children healthy ways to cope with stress and emotions.
- **Set clear expectations:** Set clear expectations about substance use and enforce them consistently. Explain the reasons behind the rules to help youth understand their importance.
- **Stay connected:** Build strong relationships with your children through regular conversations and shared activities. It can be as simple as having dinner together.
- **Encourage healthy activities:** Support involvement in sports, clubs, and other activities or hobbies your child enjoys.
- **Active parental involvement:** Be involved in your child's life by participating in their activities, knowing their friends, and being aware of their daily routines.
- **Build 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 a child's mental wellness:** Address any underlying mental health issues with professional help if needed. Supporting mental health can reduce the risk of drug use.

