

# Risk & Protective Factors



## Individuals/Peers

At an individual level, life experiences play a more significant role in substance use than genetic traits. Important factors are the level of support and care from a parent or other adult at an early age, the quality of a child's school experience, and general personal and social competence, such as feeling in control; and feelings about the future. Adolescents who have spiritual beliefs and who do not believe that their friends use substances are less likely to use substances themselves.

At the peer level, the selection of friends with whom young people "hang out" with or are involved with and the activities they do together are crucial. Support from friends who makes healthy choices is important.

### Risk Factors:

- Association with friends/peers who model unhealthy behaviors
- Attitudes favorable to alcohol or other drug use and knowledge about drugs
- Delinquency such as shoplifting and gang behaviors
- Early and ongoing problem behaviors;
- General sense of hopelessness about life
- Genetic predisposition, behavioral not controlled
- Low expectations of success
- Low self esteem
- Perceptions of peer approval of drug using behaviors
- Personality; lack of social bonding, alienation, rebelliousness, resistance to authority
- Physiological factors, sensation seeking, boredom, poor impulse control
- Poor social adjustment
- Poor coping skills

### Protective Factors:

- Positive peer support with friends who model healthy behavior and positive standards about alcohol or other drug use.
- Good coping skills, empathy/caring, problem solving, ability to self-control.
- Intolerance of attitudes toward poor, negative behavior
- Moral beliefs and values
- Optimism and positive orientation toward health
- Perception of the risks associated with substance use
- Perception of strong anti-drug attitudes and behavior among friends
- Belief that the community has a strong anti-drug standard and that the rules/laws support that standard
- Positive relations with adults
- Spiritual beliefs and practices
- Social competence skills, e.g.; social interaction skills and values



## Families

At the family level, factors include a history of alcohol or other drug use/abuse; how well the family communicates; disciplines unacceptable behavior and what kind of family rules exist; what kind of coping skills the family uses and promotes; how "close" the parents child/children's relationship is; and the strength and availability of the extended family. Adolescents who have a positive relationship with their parents and whose parents provide structure and boundaries are less likely to participate in underage drinking or substance use or abuse than those families where there is conflict.

### Risk Factors:

- Chaotic home environments
- Family conflict
- Low bonding, lack of mutual attachment and nurturing, and poor family relationships
- Parents and/or other family members use or attitude that favors use of alcohol or other drug use.
- Poor and inconsistent parenting skills
- Unrealistically high expectations

### Protective Factors:

- Educational opportunities and social support for parents
- Parental monitoring with clear rules of conduct and parental involvement in their children's lives
- Secure and stable family
- Strong bonds or attachments between child and their family
- Strong family norms and morality
- Supportive caring parents



## Societal/Community

At the societal and community level, factors include the overall standard of your community and attitudes toward alcohol or other drug use. Social competency skills, communication, and resistance skills also play important roles. For example, if within a community it is easy for an underage youth to buy alcohol more young people will do so because of its availability and relaxed community standards or norms. If on the other hand, the community has made it very difficult for underage youth to buy alcohol fewer will attempt to do so or will condone others in their attempts to do so.

### Risk Factors:

- Availability of alcohol or other drugs
- Exposure to violence
- Extreme economic deprivation
- Lack of legislation and /or law enforcement
- Lenient laws and standards about drug and alcohol use
- Neighborhood disorganization
- Perceptions of approval of alcohol or other drug using behaviors in community environments

### Protective Factors:

- Access to support services
- Community or cultural norms against substance use
- Community networking
- Accessibility to leisure activities
- Strong bonds with pro-social institutions such as faith or civic organizations
- Strong cultural identity and ethnic pride



## School

### Risk Factors:

- Academic failure or poor school achievement
- Low degree of commitment to school
- Peer rejection in elementary grades
- Poor academic adjustment and commitment
- Unrealistically high expectations

### Protective Factors:

- Organizational changes in schools, e.g., tutoring, changed discipline procedures
- Positive orientation toward school and sense of belonging
- Positive school climate
- Pro-social peer group
- School standards and norms that discourage alcohol or other drug use
- Successful school performance and recognition of achievement