



KEEP KIDS DRUG FREE FOUNDATION, INC.

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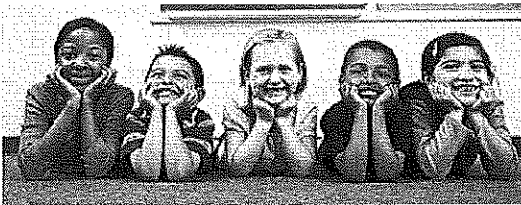
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RISK FACTORS AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE YOUNG PEOPLE

There are many factors that influence young people's attitudes and actions with regard to alcohol, tobacco and drug use or other behaviors. There are negative factors and positive. A negative behavior would be a **RISK FACTOR** while a positive behavior or action would be a **PROTECTIVE FACTOR**.

A **RISK FACTOR** is anything associated with the increased likelihood of creating or increasing negative consequences. A **PROTECTIVE FACTOR** is anything that reduces risks and negative behaviors by helping individuals not to become involved with things that lead to negative consequences and/or promotes positive alternatives.



Over the past few decades there has been tremendous research in the arena of alcohol and drug abuse prevention. We now know, for example, that the more risk factors present, the greater the likelihood of young people engaging in alcohol, tobacco or other drug use/abuse, or violence, or other negative behaviors.

Risk and protective factors exist on several levels:

- 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 peers/friends with whom young people "hang out" with or are involved with and the activities they do together are crucial. Support from peers/friends as a young person makes good choices is important. For example; associating with a peer/friend who is often "In trouble" vs one who makes good decisions and is involved with positive activities makes a large difference.
- At the **FAMILY LEVEL**, factors include a history of alcohol/tobacco or other drug use/abuse (whether there is a history or not affects the young people in a family...negatively or positively); how well the family is run and communicates; how the family 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 use alcohol, tobacco and/or other drugs. However, adolescents in families where there is conflict are more likely to use alcohol, tobacco and/or other drugs.
- At the **SOCIETAL AND COMMUNITY LEVEL**, factors include the overall standard of your community and attitudes toward alcohol/tobacco and/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 underage youth to buy alcohol more young people will do so...due both to availability and relaxed community standards or norms. If on the other hand, the community has made it very difficult to under aged youth to buy alcohol fewer will attempt to do so or will condone others in their attempts to do so.
- At the **SCHOOL LEVEL**, adolescents who have a positive relationship with teachers, attend school regularly and do well (or strive to do well) are less likely to use alcohol, tobacco, and/or other drugs.

INDIVIDUAL/PEERS:

Risk Factors

- Association with friends/peers who model problem behaviors, e.g.; use drugs
- Attitudes favorable to alcohol, tobacco, and/or other drug use, 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

Protective Factors:

- Affiliation with friends who model conventional/positive behavior and adoption of positive standards about alcohol, tobacco, and/or other drug use...positive peer support.
- Good coping skills, including; 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 risk of substance use
- Perception of strong anti drug attitudes and behavior among peers
- 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