

Risk and Protective Factors in Drug Abuse Prevention

In more than 20 years of drug abuse research, NIDA has identified important principles for prevention programs in the family, school, and community. Prevention programs often are designed to enhance "protective factors" and to reduce "risk factors."

Protective factors are those associated with reduced potential for drug use. Risk factors are those that make drug use more likely. Research has shown that many of the same factors apply to other behaviors such as youth violence, delinquency, school dropout, risky sexual behaviors, and teen pregnancy

Protective factors:

- Strong and positive family bonds;
- Parental monitoring of children's activities and peers;
- Clear rules of conduct that are consistently enforced within the family;
- Involvement of parents in the lives of their children;
- Success in school performance; strong bonds with institutions, such as school and religious organizations; and
- Adoption of conventional norms about drug use.

Risk factors:

- Chaotic home environments, particularly in which parents abuse substances or suffer from mental illnesses;
- Ineffective parenting, especially with children with difficult temperaments or conduct disorders;
- Lack of parent-child attachments and nurturing; inappropriately shy or aggressive behavior in the classroom;
- Failure in school performance;
- Poor social coping skills;
- Affiliations with peers displaying deviant behaviors; and
- Perceptions of approval of drug-using behaviors in family, work, school, peer, and community environments.

