

YOUTH RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

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AADAC has prepared several papers on risk and protective factors associated with adolescent substance use. These papers provided an overview of findings of key government documents, journal articles and reports from leading addiction agencies. Based on these reviews, key risk and protective factors were included in the The Alberta Youth Experience Survey, 2002.

Risk factors are life events or experiences that are associated with an increase in problematic behaviours such as alcohol and other drug use.¹ Protective factors are life events or experiences that reduce or moderate the effect of exposure to risk factors.² The most effective prevention and intervention projects focus on risk and protective factors within five major life domains: individual, family, peer, school and community. While much research remains to be done, several risk and protective factors have been identified (refer to Table 1).

Based on the Alberta Youth Experience Survey, 2002³, the most important risk factors for harmful use of substances and gambling are age of user, peer risk behavior, family history of substance abuse, family discord and poor connections to school life. The most important protective factors for harmful use of substances and gambling by Alberta youth are parental monitoring, good social skills, availability of and participation in pro-social activities, high school marks and good connections to school life.

In the past, the emphasis of adolescent addictions research has been on risk factors associated with adolescent substance use. Recent research indicates the need for a broader perspective encompassing both risk factors and protective factors. Protective factors function as a buffer highlighting the interplay between risk and protective factors. The severity, frequency, and duration of both risk and protective factors affect the adolescent's ability to remain resilient against substance abuse and gambling.⁴

Continued research examining the most relevant risk and protective factors will aid youth initiatives to develop innovative and improved program solutions for this population.

TABLE 1
Risk and Protective Factors Within Major Life Domains

MAJOR LIFE DOMAINS	RISK FACTORS	PROTECTIVE FACTORS
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ social skill deficits ■ genetic predisposition ■ positive attitude about use ■ impulsivity ■ hostility and aggression ■ alienation ■ rebelliousness ■ learning difficulties ■ behavioural problems ■ temperament ■ physical trauma ■ early age of onset 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● social skills and responsiveness ● emotional stability ● positive sense of self ● problem solving skills ● flexibility ● resilience

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TABLE 1: Risk and Protective Factors Within Life Domains (continued)

MAJOR LIFE DOMAINS	RISK FACTORS	PROTECTIVE FACTORS
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ parental abuse of alcohol, drugs, and/or gambling ■ remaining in an abusive or conflict ridden family ■ low parental support ■ low parental monitoring ■ poor family management, discipline, and problem solving ■ favourable attitudes toward teen alcohol, other drug use and gambling ■ parents' mental illness ■ ineffective parenting skills, especially for children with learning disabilities or behavioural problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● positive bonding ● emotional support and absence of severe criticism ● a sense of basic trust ● high parental expectations ● clear rules and expectations ● parental monitoring
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ academic failure ■ negative, disorderly, and unsafe school climate ■ low teacher expectations ■ lack of clear school policies regarding drug use ■ lack of commitment to school ■ withdrawn/aggressive classroom behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● caring and supportive school environment ● high expectations ● clear standards and rules for appropriate behaviour ● youth participation, involvement, and responsibility in school tasks and decisions
Peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ involvement with peers who use and have favorable attitudes towards alcohol, other drugs, and gamble ■ involvement with peers who engage in other problem behaviours ■ peer rejections ■ poor social skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● involvement with positive peer group activities and norms ● social competencies such as decision making skills, assertiveness, and interpersonal communication
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ community norms that promote or permit substance use and gambling ■ living in impoverished neighbourhoods characterized by high crime rates and alienation ■ high rates of transition/mobility ■ cultural disenfranchisement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● caring and supportive community ● high expectations of youth ● being media literate ● counter-advertising messages (youth educated about advertising) ● religious based activities ● community sponsored activities

Source⁵

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¹ Hawkins, J. D., Catalano, R. F., & Miller, J. Y. (1992). Risk and protective factors for alcohol and other drug problems in adolescence and early adulthood: Implications for substance abuse prevention. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112(1), 64-105.

² Garnezy, N. (1985). Stress-resistant children: The search for protective factors. In J.E. Stevenson (Ed.), *Recent research in developmental psychopathology* (pp. 213-233). *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 4 (Book suppl.).

³ Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (2003). *The Alberta youth experience survey 2002: Summary report*. Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, Edmonton, Canada.

⁴ Roberts, G., McCall, D., Lavigne, A., Anderson, J., & Goodman, E. (1998). Gambling and other risk behaviors among eighth to twelfth grade students. *Pediatrics*, 192(2).

⁵ Brounstein, P. J. & Zweig, J. M. (1999). *Understanding substance abuse prevention toward the 21st century: A primer on effective programs*. Monograph. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. DHHS:USA.
 Centre for Addiction & Mental Health (1999). Common questions about mental health and addiction problems among youth. *Journal of Addiction and Mental Health*, 2(5).
 National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2001). "Preventing drug abuse among children and adolescents: A research-based guide." Accessed 23/02/2001. <http://www.nida.nih.gov/Prevention/Prevopen.html>