

Research-Based Risk and Protective Factors

Research-Based Risk Factors for Adolescent Substance Initiation and Misuse The following table from *Facing Addiction in America: The Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health* shows some of the key research-based risk factors related to adolescent and young adult substance initiation and misuse in the individual/peer, family, school, and community domains.

Risk Factor	Definition	Adolescent Substance Use	Young Adult Substance Use
Individual/Peer			
Early initiation of substance use	Engaging in alcohol or drug use at a young age	✓	✓
Early and persistent problem behavior	Emotional distress, aggressiveness, and "difficult" temperaments in adolescents	✓	
Rebelliousness	High tolerance for deviance and rebellious activities	✓	✓
Favorable attitudes toward substance use	Positive feelings toward alcohol or drug use and low perception of risk	✓	✓
Peer substance use	Friends and peers who engage in alcohol or drug use	✓	✓
Genetic predictors	Genetic susceptibility to alcohol or drug use	✓	✓
Family			
Family management problems (monitoring, rewards, etc.)	Poor management practices, including parents' failure to set clear expectations for children's behavior; failure to supervise and monitor children; and excessively severe, harsh, or inconsistent punishment	✓	✓
Family conflict	Conflict between parents or between parents and children, including abuse or neglect	✓	✓
Favorable parental attitudes	Parental attitudes that are favorable to drug use and parental approval of drinking and drug use	✓	✓
Family history of substance misuse	Persistent, progressive, and generalized substance use, misuse, and use disorders of family members	✓	✓

Risk Factor	Definition	Adolescent Substance Use	Young Adult Substance Use
School			
Academic failure beginning in late elementary school	Poor grades in school	✓	✓
Lack of commitment to school	When a young person no longer considers the role of the student as meaningful and rewarding, or lacks investment in or commitment to school	✓	✓
Community			
Low cost of alcohol	Low alcohol sales tax, happy hour specials, and other price discounting	✓	✓
High availability of substances	High number of alcohol outlets in a defined geographical area or per a sector of the population	✓	✓
Community laws and norms favorable to substance use	Community reinforcement of norms suggesting alcohol and drug use is acceptable for youth, including low tax rates on alcohol or tobacco or community beer-tasting events	✓	✓
Media portrayal of alcohol use	Exposure to actors using alcohol in movies or television	✓	
Low neighborhood attachment	Low level of bonding to the neighborhood	✓	
Community disorganization	Living in neighborhoods with high population density, lack of natural surveillance of public places, physical deterioration, and high rates of adult crime	✓	
Low socioeconomic status	A parent's low socioeconomic status, as measured through a combination of education, income, and occupation	✓	
Transitions and mobility	Communities with high rates of mobility within or between communities	✓	

Research-Based Protective Factors for Adolescent Substance Initiation and Misuse Protective factors can reduce the negative impact of risk factors. Prevention is not just about eliminating risky or harmful behavior; it is also about supporting protective factors—such as resilience and development assets—and striving to optimize well-being.

The following table from *Facing Addiction in America: The Surgeon General’s Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health* shows some of the key protective factors related to adolescent and young adult substance initiation and misuse.

Protective Factor	Definition	Adolescent Substance Use	Young Adult Substance Use
Individual			
Social, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and moral competence	Interpersonal skills that help youth integrate feelings, thoughts, and actions to achieve specific social and interpersonal goals	✓	✓
Self-efficacy	An individual’s belief that they can modify, control, or abstain from substance use	✓	✓
Spirituality	Belief in a higher being, or involvement in spiritual practices or religious activities	✓	✓
Resiliency	An individual’s capacity for adapting to change and stressful events in healthy and flexible ways	✓	✓
Family, School, and Community			
Opportunities for positive social involvement	Developmentally appropriate opportunities to be meaningfully involved with the family, school, or community	✓	✓
Recognition for positive behavior	Parents, teachers, peers, and community members providing recognition for effort and accomplishments to motivate individuals to engage in positive behaviors in the future	✓	✓
Bonding	Attachment and commitment to, and positive communication with, family, schools, and communities	✓	✓
Marriage or committed relationship	Married or living with a partner in a committed relationship who does not misuse alcohol or drugs		✓
Healthy beliefs and standards for behavior	Family, school, and community norms that communicate clear and consistent expectations about not misusing alcohol and drugs	✓	✓