



Risk and Protective Factors

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For Everyone

KEY POINTS

- Many factors can increase or decrease the likelihood of someone experiencing or perpetrating violence.
- Risk factors can increase the risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence and protective factors can reduce the risk.
- Preventing adverse childhood experiences requires understanding and addressing risk and protective factors.

What are risk and protective factors?

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are not often caused by a single factor. Instead, a combination of factors at the individual, relationship, community, and societal levels can increase or decrease the risk of violence.

Although some risk and protective factors are at the individual and family level, no child or individual is at fault for the ACEs they experience.

Risk factors are characteristics that may increase the likelihood of experiencing adverse childhood experiences. However, they may or may not be direct causes.

Protective factors are characteristics that may decrease the likelihood of experiencing adverse childhood experiences.

Please note the term “caregiver” will be used throughout to refer to parents and those who care for children but may not be biological parents.

Watch the **Moving Forward** video to learn more about how increasing what protects people from violence and reducing what puts people at risk for it benefits everyone.



Moving Forward
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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Risk factors

Individual and family risk factors

- Families experiencing caregiving challenges related to children with special needs (for example, disabilities, mental health issues, chronic physical illnesses).[\[1\]](#)
- Children and youth who don't feel close to their parents/caregivers and feel like they can't talk to them about their feelings.[\[2\]](#)
- Youth who start dating early or engaging in sexual activity early.[\[3\]](#)
- Children and youth with few or no friends or with friends who engage in aggressive or delinquent behavior.[\[4\]](#)
- Families with caregivers who have a limited understanding of children's needs or development.[\[5\]](#)
- Families with caregivers who were abused or neglected as children.[\[6\]](#)

- Families with young caregivers or single parents. [\[7\]](#)
- Families with low income. [\[8\]](#)
- Families with adults with low levels of education. [\[9\]](#)
- Families experiencing high levels of parenting stress or economic stress. [\[7\]](#)
- Families with caregivers who use spanking and other forms of corporal punishment for discipline. [\[10\]](#)
- Families with inconsistent discipline and/or low levels of parental monitoring and supervision. [\[11\]](#)
- Families that are isolated from and not connected to other people (extended family, friends, neighbors). [\[12\]](#)
- Families with high conflict and negative communication styles. [\[13\]](#)

Community risk factors

- Communities with high rates of violence and crime. [\[5\]](#)
- Communities with high rates of poverty and limited educational and economic opportunities. [\[14\]](#)
- Communities with high unemployment rates. [\[15\]](#)
- Communities with easy access to drugs and alcohol. [\[16\]](#)
- Communities where neighbors don't know or look out for each other and there is low community involvement among residents. [\[17\]](#)
- Communities with few community activities for young people. [\[18\]](#)
- Communities with unstable housing and where residents move frequently. [\[19\]](#)
- Communities where families frequently experience food insecurity. [\[20\]](#)
- Communities with high levels of social and environmental disorder. [\[21\]](#)

Protective factors

Individual and family protective factors

- Families who create safe, stable, and nurturing relationships, meaning children have a consistent family life where they are safe, taken care of, and supported. [\[22\]](#) [\[23\]](#)
- Children who have positive friendships and peer networks. [\[24\]](#) [\[23\]](#) [\[25\]](#)
- Children who do well in school. [\[26\]](#) [\[27\]](#) [\[28\]](#) [\[25\]](#)
- Children who have caring adults outside the family who serve as mentors or role models. [\[29\]](#) [\[25\]](#)
- Families where caregivers can meet basic needs of food, shelter, and health services for children. [\[28\]](#) [\[25\]](#)
- Families where caregivers have college degrees or higher. [\[30\]](#) [\[31\]](#)
- Families where caregivers have steady employment. [\[28\]](#) [\[31\]](#)
- Families with strong social support networks and positive relationships with the people around them. [\[24\]](#) [\[27\]](#) [\[23\]](#) [\[32\]](#) [\[25\]](#)
- Families where caregivers engage in parental monitoring, supervision, and consistent enforcement of rules. [\[24\]](#) [\[27\]](#) [\[32\]](#) [\[28\]](#)
- Families where caregivers/adults work through conflicts peacefully. [\[27\]](#) [\[32\]](#) [\[30\]](#)
- Families where caregivers help children work through problems. [\[27\]](#) [\[32\]](#) [\[30\]](#)
- Families that engage in fun, positive activities together. [\[32\]](#) [\[30\]](#)
- Families that encourage the importance of school for children. [\[28\]](#)

Community protective factors

- Communities where families have access to economic and financial help. [\[33\]](#) [\[34\]](#) [\[35\]](#) [\[36\]](#)
- Communities where families have access to medical care and mental health services. [\[33\]](#) [\[35\]](#) [\[36\]](#)
- Communities with access to safe, stable housing. [\[33\]](#) [\[34\]](#) [\[36\]](#)
- Communities where families have access to nurturing and safe childcare. [\[33\]](#) [\[36\]](#)

- Communities where families have access to safe, engaging after school programs and activities. [\[34\]](#) [\[35\]](#) [\[36\]](#)
- Communities where families have access to high-quality preschool. [\[36\]](#)
- Communities where adults have work opportunities with family-friendly policies. [\[35\]](#) [\[36\]](#)
- Communities with strong partnerships between the community and business, health care, government, and other sectors. [\[35\]](#) [\[36\]](#)
- Communities where residents feel connected to each other and are involved in the community. [\[25\]](#) [\[35\]](#) [\[36\]](#)
- Communities where violence is not tolerated or accepted. [\[14\]](#) [\[36\]](#)

SOURCES

CONTENT SOURCE:

[National Center for Injury Prevention and Control](#)

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