

PREVENTING JUVENILE CRIME: RISK & PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Thirty years of research has show that the most effective prevention strategies are those that focus on risk and protective factors in five broad categories: the community, the family, the school and the individual and peers (Hawkins, 1995). Over time, these factors tend to accumulate and interact with one another.

RISK FACTORS. There is no single risk factor for delinquency or for violent behavior.

Community related risk factors:

- Availability of drugs
- Availability of firearms
- Community laws and norms favorable toward drug use, firearms, and crime
- Media portrayals of violence
- Transitions and mobility
- Low neighborhood attachment and community disorganization
- Extreme economic deprivation

Family related risk factors:

- Family history of problem behavior
- Family management problems
- Favorable parental attitudes concerning crime and involvement in crime

School related rick factors:

- Early and persistent antisocial behavior
- Academic failure in elementary school
- Lack of commitment to school

Individual and peer related risk factors:

- Alienation and rebelliousness
- Friends who engage in problem behavior
- Favorable attitudes toward problem behavior
- Early initiation of problem behavior
- Constitutional factors – the makeup of an individual, for example a hereditary tendency toward addiction to alcohol.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS. Some young people exposed to multiple risk factors do not become juvenile delinquents, school dropouts, or teen parents. There are important aspects of their lives that protect them against risk factors. Protective factors either reduce the impact of risks or change the way a person responds to them.

- Individual characteristics, such as having a resilient temperament or a positive social orientation.
- Positive relationships that promote close bonds. Warm relationships with family members, teachers, and other adults who encourage and recognize a youth's competence and close friendships with peers.
- Schools, families, and peer groups that teach children healthy beliefs and set clear standards.