

Creating a Circle of Support

Fact Sheet

The Ecological Model of youth development demonstrates how influences in a child's life affect the process of growth and development. The ecology of youth development describes the relationship between a young person and his or her environment which includes the individual youth, family, friends, school, work, and the community. Within each environmental level are protective and risk factors that impact a youth's development.

Protective Factors

Protective factors are aspects of a school-age child or teen's life that can increase his or her ability to withstand negative influences and develop healthy life skills.

Individual protective factors that a youth may possess include:

- Strong problem-solving and communication skills
- Positive self-perceptions
- Confidence in oneself and one's abilities
- Responsibility and self-discipline
- Social and interpersonal skills
- Religious commitment

Family protective factors include:

- Close relationship with at least one family member; parents provide guidance, support, and nurturing; parents serve as positive examples of appropriate and healthy behavior

Community protective factors include:

- Opportunities to rely on supportive adults, such as teachers, youth workers, 4-H leaders, and others; a supportive neighborhood or community; opportunity to make meaningful contributions to community-based projects and activities

Risk Factors

Risk factors are aspects of a school-age child or teen's life that can create barriers to the development of healthy life skills and increase susceptibility to negative influences.

Examples of Individual Risk Factors

- A variety of negative attitudes towards self and others; a tendency to engage in problem behaviors; social isolation

Examples of Family Risk Factors

- Distant, uninvolved and inconsistent parenting; unclear family rules, expectations, rewards; severe or inconsistent punishment

Examples of Community Risk Factors

- High levels of violence and crime; media influences; complacent or permissive community norms and standards

"Creating a Circle of Support" illustrates how a series of influences works together to support our youth either positively (protective factors) or negatively (risk factors). The importance of providing a positive relationship with a caring adult cannot be overemphasized!

