



## Healthy Kids Colorado Survey: Interpreting Risk and Protective Factors

### *What is a risk factor?*

Prevention according to the risk factors/protective factors theory is based on a simple premise: To prevent a problem, we need to identify the factors that increase the risk that the problem will develop and then find ways to reduce the risk. At the same time, we must identify those protective factors that buffer individuals from the risk factors in their environments and then find ways to increase the protection. Risk-and protective-factor-focused prevention is based on the work of J. David Hawkins, Ph.D., Richard F. Catalano, Ph.D., and a team of researchers at the University of Washington in Seattle. In the early 1980s, they conducted a review of 30 years of youth substance abuse and delinquency research and identified risk factors for adolescent drug abuse and delinquency.

### *What is a protective factor?*

Some young people who are exposed to multiple risk factors do not become substance abusers, juvenile delinquents, school dropouts, or teen parents. Balancing the risk factors are factors that protect young people from exposure to risk, either by reducing the impact of risk factors or by changing the way young people respond to risks. The importance of protective factors cannot be overstated because they promote positive behavior, health, well-being, and personal success. Research has identified protective factors that fall into three basic categories: individual characteristics, bonding, and healthy beliefs and clear standards.

### Key Considerations.....

- **Risks exist in multiple domains.**

Risk factors exist in all areas of life—community, family, school, and individual/peer relations. If a single risk factor is addressed in a single area, problem behaviors may not be significantly reduced. Communities should focus on reducing risks in multiple areas.

- **The more risk factors are present, the greater is the risk.**

While exposure to one risk does not condemn a child to problems later in life, exposure to a greater number of risk factors can increase a young person's risk. Even if a community cannot eliminate all the risk factors, reducing or eliminating even a few risk factors may significantly decrease problem behaviors of young people in that community.

- **Common risk factors predict diverse problem behaviors.**

Since many individual risk factors predict multiple problems, the reduction of risk factors is likely to reduce a number of different problems in the community.

- **Risk factors appear to consistently affect different races and cultures.**

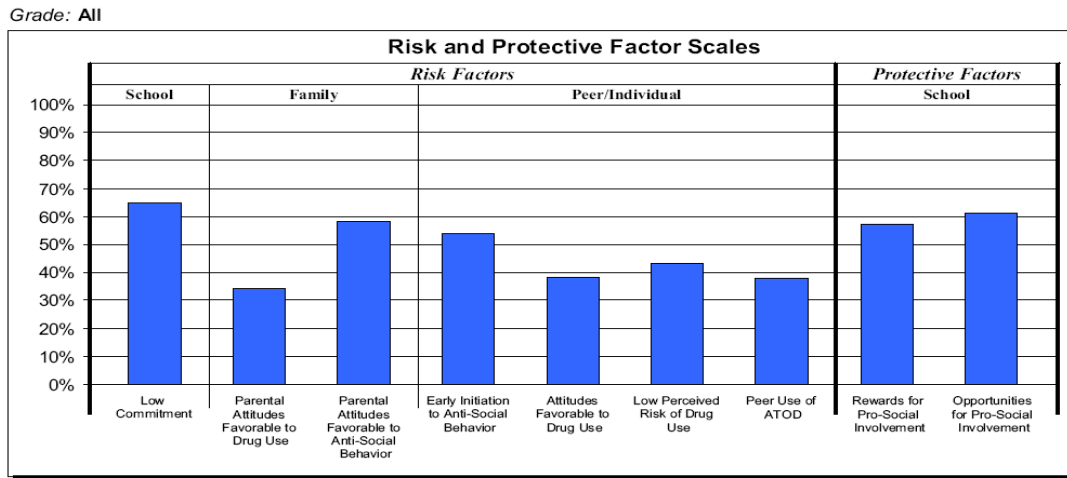
While levels of risk may vary in different racial or cultural groups, the way these risk factors work does not appear to vary. One implication for community prevention is to prioritize prevention efforts for groups with higher levels of risk exposure.

- **Protective factors may buffer exposure to risk.**

Protective factors are conditions that buffer young people from the negative consequences of exposure to risks by either reducing the impact of the risk or changing the way a person responds to the risk. Consequently, enhancing protective factors can reduce the likelihood that problem behaviors will arise.

*How do I interpret this data from the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey Report?*

The results of the Risk and Protective Factors are presented in the eighth and final section of your Healthy Kids Colorado Results Report. In this section, the data will be presented in two formats, graph form and table form. In the graphical format, a bar graph displays the percentage of students (in the given grade) who “have” the risk or protective factors titled below the graph, as indicated by their responses to the survey. For example, the following graph illustrates that approximately 65% of all students surveyed are “at risk” for the Low Commitment to School Factor (see the 1<sup>st</sup> bar). Alternatively, approximately 55% of students are “protected” by the presence of the Rewards for Pro-Social Involvement Protective Factor (see the 8<sup>th</sup> bar).



See Introduction for explanation of Risk and Protective Factors. See Appendix D for a detailed description of each of the Risk and Protective Factors.

This data can also be complemented by the review of the data tables that are provided immediately following the graphs. In this section, the reader can determine the exact percentage of students that have the noted factor (above cut-point) as well as the number of students who do not have the noted factor (below cut-point). In other words, students will only fall “above the cut-point” if their pattern of responses indicates that they experience the specific risk or protection. Therefore, it cannot be determined that it is always positive or negative to be above a cut-point.

For example, in the report below, 38% of students surveyed are at risk for the Peer Use of ATOD Factor. Relative to the other risk factors, this percentage is relatively low; therefore this may be interpreted as a lower priority risk factor. In this case, the lower percentage of students “at risk” is a good thing. However, 57% of students surveyed are protected by the Rewards for Pro-Social Involvement Factor. While this number is similar to the percentage of the other school protective factor, ideally, we would want 100% of the youth in the community to be experiencing this protective factor, since it is a positive measure.

Therefore, the lower percentage of students “protected” by this factor is not as good as it can be. Hopefully, these two examples help illustrate how being above the cut-point is important, but that interpretation is dependent on whether the factor itself is risk or protective.

Peer-Individual: Peer Use of ATOD (Risk)									
Item response rate greater than 60%: Yes									
Response	Sex	Grade							
		Total	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Below Cutpoint	Total	62%	57%	66%	56%	67%	57%	73%	-
	Female	58%	56%	61%	43%	64%	59%	72%	-
	Male	66%	58%	70%	69%	71%	55%	75%	-
Above Cutpoint	Total	38%	43%	34%	44%	33%	43%	27%	-
	Female	42%	44%	39%	57%	36%	41%	28%	-
	Male	34%	42%	30%	31%	29%	45%	25%	-

School: Rewards for Pro-Social Involvement (Protective)									
Item response rate greater than 60%: Yes									
Response	Sex	Grade							
		Total	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Below Cutpoint	Total	43%	47%	38%	36%	49%	48%	38%	-
	Female	37%	39%	25%	36%	43%	38%	43%	-
	Male	48%	53%	49%	36%	56%	57%	34%	-
Above Cutpoint	Total	57%	53%	62%	64%	51%	52%	62%	-
	Female	63%	61%	75%	64%	57%	62%	57%	-
	Male	52%	47%	51%	64%	44%	43%	66%	-

### *Healthy Kids Colorado Survey Risk and Protective Factor Interpretation Summary*

While the information provided in both of these data forms does not indicate whether individual students have specific risks or protections, general percentages can help determine how widespread a risk or protective factor may be in a community. Risk factors with higher percentages may help guide communities on the prioritization of reducing particular risks. However, remember that the protective factors with the highest percentages are also the most common, which would be positive for the community. In this case, addressing the protective factors with the smallest percentages may be ways to increase the “protection” of youth.