

Strong Bonds Fact Sheet:

Understanding the Reasons : **What went Wrong? Why?**

Parents often feel a lot of shame when their child has problems. They may feel responsible or feel like they have failed as a parent. They may feel other people are judging them or blaming them.

Yet there are many things that may contribute to a young person having difficulties. Some are within parents' control and others are not.

Risk and Protective Factors

Research¹ has identified factors which may contribute to a young person having more difficulties (risk factors) and factors that may contribute to a young person having fewer difficulties (protective factors).

If there are a lot of risk factors in a young person's life, things may turn out worse for them. Problems can include violence, mental illness, early school leaving, homelessness, crime and/or drug use.

Protective factors can help a young person to avoid difficulties and may make risk factors and environments in the young person's life less damaging. This means that things are more likely to turn out better for them if they have protective factors present.

It is important to say that the presence of any one of the risk factors does not automatically mean that problems will happen. It is when there are multiple risk factors in a young person's life and very few protective factors that serious problems are thought to occur.

area	risk factors	protective factors
individual	birth complications attention problems difficult temperament health problems learning difficulties	empathy optimism easy temperament social skills intelligence
family	family breakdown parental depression parental drug abuse family violence abuse or neglect social isolation	sense of belonging/connection warm relationship with parent good communication with parent good monitoring of child strong family values relationships with other adults
school	low interest in school poor behaviour management at school	attachment to school opportunities to succeed recognition of achievement
peer	bullying/ rejection negative peer influence	friendship with positive peers peer acceptance
community	poverty discrimination violent neighbourhood isolation	access to supports participation in community cultural pride laws and policing etc

1. For example, Promotion, Prevention, and Early Intervention for Mental Health- A Monograph 2000. www.mentalhealth.gov.au ('mental health publications' and look for paper title); Parenting Influences on Adolescent Alcohol Use (2004) Australian Institute of Family Studies (<http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/resreport10/aifsreport10.pdf> ('search' and type in paper title)

Connections with adults are crucial

Strong relationships with parents and other adults are important protective factors in a young person's life.¹ If the connection with parents or other family members is not strong, a bond with another important adult, such as a teacher or coach, can help protect young people.²

Without the protection provided by connections with family, community or school, young people are more likely to behave in ways that affect their health and wellbeing.

What can I do now?

You may feel sad about things your child has had to struggle with or things that they have experienced which were not within their control. You may feel some guilt about things that have happened, which may not have been helpful for your young person. Other things may have been out of your control. (See helpsheet: Feeling Guilty)

At this point, it may be more useful to focus on the things that are still within your control. Continue to support your young person in their current difficulties and help them towards a more positive place by enhancing the protective factors in their life.

For example, you may not be able to change the fact that your young person had difficulty paying attention at school or the fact that their school was not able to support their needs adequately at the time.

What you may be able to work towards now, is improving your relationship and connection with your young person, or supporting them to be connected to others who may provide a positive support system for them now.

You may also be able to increase protective factors for other children, for example, by advocating for better interventions for children with difficulties.

If you are not a parent of the young person, you may support them in their relationships with their family, or involve others who may assist. And you may provide a reliable and supportive relationship for the young person.

All the helpsheets are aimed at supporting families to build connections with young people with complex needs and to support families in their relationships with young people.

The good news is that it is never too late to create and strengthen strong bonds between young people and their families and others who care about them.



Tips from this Help Sheet

- Many things may contribute to a young person having difficulties. Some are within parents' control and others are not.
- If there are a lot of risk factors in a young person's life, things may turn out worse for them. Things are more likely to turn out better for them if they have protective factors present.
- Strong relationships with parents and other adults are important protective factors in a young person's life.
- It is never too late to create and strengthen strong bonds between young people and their families and others who care about them.



Related Help Sheets

- Parenting Styles
- Understanding Drug Use
- Understanding Mental Health
- Feeling Guilty
- Building our Relationship
- Improving Communication

1. Blum, R. & Rinehart, P. (1997) Reducing the Risk: Connections that make a difference in the Lives of Youth. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Division of General Pediatrics, Adolescent Health
2. Communities that Care (1997) Risk and Protective Factor-Focused Prevention using the Social Development Strategy, Developmental Research and Programs, Inc, Seattle, USA.



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