Risk Factors for Addiction

Participant Workbook | The Hand You're Dealt

We do not choose every circumstance in our lives. But many people can build strengths, connections, and resources over time. Risk is not destiny. You may use fictional examples or skip any question.

Part 1 — What can influence risk?

Genetics and family history: Inherited factors contribute to vulnerability, but family history does not determine a person's future. Genetic influences interact with experiences and environments.

Home and family environment: Chronic conflict, inconsistent support, substance exposure, and instability may increase risk. Safe, reliable relationships can be protective across many family structures.

Trauma and adversity: Adverse experiences can increase vulnerability for some people. Trauma is not a prerequisite for substance-use disorder, and survivors are not responsible for harm done to them.

Mental health and co-occurring concerns: Anxiety, depression, ADHD, and other conditions may coexist with substance-use disorders. Connections vary; integrated, individualized support can help.

Early substance use: Starting alcohol or drug use earlier in life is associated with increased later risk, although it does not guarantee a disorder.

Method of use and substance effects: Rapid delivery routes, potency, frequency, and other substance characteristics can influence risk. All substances carry different risks; simple rankings of "most addictive" are misleading.

Individual sensitivity and response: People differ in how substances affect them, including sensitivity, tolerance, and response to stress. These differences alone cannot predict addiction.

Reflection: Which factors might be relevant to a fictional character?

_____

_____

Part 2 — Protective factors

Resilience and flexible coping: Practice responding to stress, asking for help, and recovering from setbacks.

Supportive relationships: Build connections with reliable friends, peers, mentors, family members, or professionals.

Spirituality or personal meaning: Faith, values, creativity, service, or other sources of meaning can support some people; participation is optional.

Self-respect and problem-solving: Practice assertiveness, realistic goals, self-compassion, and asking for assistance.

Supportive caregiving and mentorship: Consistent care, safe adults, and constructive guidance matter more than a particular household structure.

Positive involvement and opportunities: Explore groups, learning, employment, recreation, exercise, and meaningful community activities.

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Recognition of progress: Notice small efforts and strengths without treating setbacks as personal failure.

Clear expectations and safety plans: Use achievable goals, boundaries, and plans for high-risk situations.

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Risk to Resource — Group Design Challenge

Scenario: Jordan recently moved, has difficulty sleeping, feels isolated, and has started spending time with people who regularly drink. Jordan also enjoys drawing, has a supportive cousin, and wants to enroll in a class.

1. Identify two possible risk factors.

_____

_____

2. Identify two existing strengths or protective factors.

_____

_____

3. Design one realistic action Jordan could take this week.

_____

_____

4. What could make the plan difficult? What is a backup?

_____

_____

5. What support could Jordan seek?

_____

_____

Personal protective-factor plan (optional)

One strength I already have:

_____

One supportive connection or resource:

_____

One protective factor I want to build:

_____

A small step I can take within seven days:

_____

My backup plan if that step becomes difficult:

_____

Discussion and reflection

• What is the difference between risk and inevitability?

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- Which protective factors do not require money or a particular family structure?
- How might a person ask for help without feeling judged?

Educational resource for group reflection, not a risk assessment or substitute for treatment. You can ask a trusted professional for individualized support.

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