

A Guide to Identifying and Strengthening Community & Societal Level Protective Factors

The people, places, schools, neighborhoods, organizations, and policies around us can all influence our health and well-being. When they come in the form of support and conditions that help us feel safe, connected, and valued, and that provide healthy choice options, they are called protective factors. This worksheet is designed to help guide young people in identifying protective factors around them, thinking about what may be missing, and exploring ways they can help strengthen them through everyday actions.

For caring adults, there are no right or wrong answers. You are encouraged to use these questions to start a conversation, listen for the young person's perspective, and explore possibilities together.

1. SUPPORTIVE & SAFE PLACES

This is an important protective factor because young people benefit from having places where they feel physically and emotionally safe - such as schools, parks, libraries, recreation centers, clubs, and faith communities. These spaces create opportunities for connection, belonging, and positive relationships while fostering stronger neighborhoods and a sense of pride in their community.



Think about it: Where are places in your community where you feel welcomed, safe, and comfortable being yourself? Where making health centered choices is the norm and supported?

Explore further: Is there a place you wish felt safer, more welcoming, or more available to young people? What could make a difference?

My thoughts _____

2. CONNECTION & BELONGING

This is an important protective factor because from the time they are born, young people benefit from positive connections with family members, friends, teachers, coaches, mentors, and caring community members. These relationships help young people feel seen, valued, and supported while reminding them they don't have to go it alone. Strong, trusted relationships can help reduce stress, support mental health, and influence how young people approach challenges and make decisions.



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Think about it: Who or what helps young people in your community feel like they belong?

Explore further: If a new student moved into your community this week, what could you or others do to help them feel welcomed, connected and like they belong?

My thoughts _____

3. PROSOCIAL INVOLVEMENT AKA OPPORTUNITIES & POSSIBILITIES

This is an important protective factor because young people need opportunities to learn, grow, have fun, build skills, discover interests, and contribute. These positive activities can create connections and give young people a sense of belonging and purpose.



Think about it: What opportunities are available for young people where you live? Think about clubs, sports, intramurals, volunteering, jobs, arts, camps, after school activities.

Explore further: If you could create one new opportunity for young people in your community, what would it be? Who might benefit from it?

My thoughts _____

4. CIVIC PARTICIPATION, YOUTH VOICE & LEADERSHIP

This is an important protective factor because young people are powerful allies in their communities. They know things about their schools and communities that adults may not see or recognize. They are energized and bring ideas to causes they care about, offering a fresh perspective. They challenge traditional viewpoints and are motivated to create a better, more inclusive world. Young people can make a real difference in their communities.



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Think about it: Where do young people in your community have a chance to share their ideas or help make a difference?

Explore further: What is one change you would like to see in your school or community? Who could you talk with about it? What ideas do you have to help make sure your voice is heard?

My thoughts _____

5. ACCESS TO SUPPORT & RESOURCES

This is an important protective factor because access to supportive resources and services can play an important role in helping young people feel safe, supported, and able to navigate life's challenges. Access to counseling and mental health services, healthcare, mentoring, food assistance, reliable transportation, and crisis support can help address needs before they become greater challenges. When young people know where to turn and can access the help they need, they are better positioned to manage stress, build resilience, stay connected to their communities, and thrive.



Think about it: If a young person in your community needed help with a problem, would they know where to go?

Explore further: What support and resources do you think young people need more of? How could you help another young person learn about the support and resources that are available?

My thoughts _____

6. SUPPORTIVE POLICIES

This is an important protective factor because the decisions made by schools, communities, and governments around rules, policies, and laws can create conditions that either support or make it harder for people to be and stay healthy.



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It is important for young people to know that their voices matter and when they speak out about the things that are important to them – they have the power to make a life-impacting difference.



Think about it: Can you think of a school or community rule or policy that is helpful to young people? What makes it helpful?

Explore further: If you could recommend one policy or change that would make your community healthier and safer for young people, what would it be?

My thoughts _____

7. CARING COMMUNITY NETWORKS

This is an important protective factor because when young people are surrounded by engaged and caring adults, supportive peers, and connected community members, they gain opportunities to build relationships, find encouragement, and access support. Strong community networks help create a sense of belonging and remind young people that they are valued, supported, and not alone.



Think about it: What is one strength your community already has that you would like to see grow?

Explore further: What could young people, caring adults, schools, businesses, or community organizations do together to build that strength?

My thoughts _____

Protective factors are the people, strengths, and supports that help individuals stay healthy, stay connected, and build resilience against life's challenges.

