

Mental Health Protective Factors

Protective factors can help to reduce the likelihood of developing a mental health problem.

Not all protective factors work in the same way. Some protective factors may help by shielding the child from experiencing a risk factor.

More commonly, protective factors operate to reduce children's exposure to risk.

Positive connections between family and school support children's academic achievement and reduce the likelihood of failure.

Examples of key protective factors that influence children's mental health

Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy temperament • Good social and emotional skills • Positive coping style • Optimistic outlook on life • Good attachment to parents or carers
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family harmony and stability • Supportive parenting • Strong family values • Consistency (firm boundaries and limits)
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive school climate • Sense of belonging and connectedness between family and school • Opportunity for participation in a range of activities • Academic achievement
Life events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement with a caring adult • Support available at critical times
Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in community networks

Resilience: The Capacity to Bounce Back

Though risk factors increase the likelihood of experiencing mental health difficulties, some people who are exposed to significant risk factors do not develop difficulties. Instead they find ways to overcome the particular challenge and, as a result, increase their ability to cope with difficulties. Research into resilience has sought to identify the kinds of things that allow children (and adults) to overcome risk or adversity and 'bounce back' in this way. This has led to a range of approaches that aim to build resilience by promoting the things that strengthen children's mental health and enhance their ability to cope with difficulties.

Many approaches to resilience emphasise the development of social and emotional skills, as advocated by KidsMatter Primary. However, it is important to recognise that resilience is most effectively promoted when children are also connected through supportive relationships with family, friends, school and community, and have access to resources needed to help them succeed and thrive. The factors found to be protective of children's mental health are therefore critical for helping to build resilience.

For further information visit: www.kidsmatter.edu.au
 Thank you for your ongoing support.

