

Children’s mental health is influenced by many factors

Some of the important influences include children’s physical, social and emotional development, family circumstances, sense of belonging to school, and access to resources and support services. These influences that have been found to increase the likelihood that children will experience mental health problems are known as ‘risk factors’.

This article provides information about the kinds of risk factors that can affect children’s mental health. In our next article, we will look at protective factors that can support children and help to reduce the risk of mental health difficulties.

What are mental health risk factors?

The idea that certain risk factors make it more likely that children will experience poor mental health is based on research findings that show how frequently, and under what conditions, children’s mental health difficulties occur.

This table shows examples of risk factors that often contribute to the development of mental health difficulties in children.

It is important to note that the presence of a risk factor does not mean that an individual child will necessarily develop a mental health difficulty.

Examples of key risk factors that influence children’s mental health

Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complications during birth and early infancy • Difficult temperament (overly shy or aggressive) • Low self-esteem • Low intelligence • Poor bonding with parent/s
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family disharmony, instability or breakup • Harsh or inconsistent discipline style • Parent/s with mental illness or substance abuse • Siblings with a serious illness or disability
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer rejection and/or bullying • Academic failure • Poor attendance • Poor connection between family and school
Life events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult school transition • Death of a family member • Emotional trauma • Experience of physical or sexual abuse
Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination • Isolation • Socioeconomic disadvantage • Lack of access to support services

How risk factors affect children

While risk factors often indicate circumstances that may severely challenge children’s mental and emotional wellbeing, predicting whether or not an individual child develops a mental health difficulty is not straightforward.

Sometimes risk factors result from isolated events, such as a death in the family. Often, however, several risk factors are related to one another, and it is their combined effect that leads to difficulties. When several risk factors are present there is a greater likelihood that children will experience mental health difficulties.

This information has been sourced from KidsMatter Primary.
 For further information visit: www.kidsmatter.edu.au

Thank you for your ongoing support.

