



General Instruction on the Use of Balancing Protective vs. Risk Factors

Helping youth understanding the nature of both protective and risk factors present in their lives helps to increase self-awareness and sets the stage for further development of self-regulation skills, building healthy relationships with others, and social problem-solving. As important as this can be with any youth, it is particularly important with youth that appear to be developing patterns of problem behavior. This tool is designed to increase a given youth's awareness of protective and risk factors and to help that youth identify and document protective and risk factors that are present in their life. Engaging the youth in the process sets the stage to help that particular youth to identify ways in which they can further expand the array of protective factors in their life.

Here is a general outline of how to engage the youth in using this tool:

- Target a private time with the youth and orient them to the tool. During this orientation, initially emphasize with the youth that they are not compelled to share or document any information that they prefer to not divulge.
- Have the youth read independently, or read aloud with the youth, the second page that provides a general description of protective and risk factors, as well as the section that addresses how this understanding is relevant. After this initial read, take a few minutes to talk about this understanding emphasizing that the key is having sufficient breadth and depth of protective factors in our lives to help offset and mitigate the risk factors in our lives. Normalize this discussion by emphasizing this is relevant to each and everyone of us, not just this particular youth. Address questions as they arise and check for understanding periodically throughout this conversation.
- Following this conversation, turn to the third page that provides generic examples of both protective and risk factors. Review these examples with the youth drawing attention to the four domains of 1) community, 2) family, 3) school, and 4) Peer/Individual as these represents the essential facets of the youth's daily life. Check for understanding throughout the process eliciting examples through reflection by the youth. Be sure to reiterate that they are not compelled to share examples that they would prefer not to share while encouraging them to engage in the process.
- Following this orientation to these examples highlighted on the third page, proceed to orient the youth the fourth and final page. Highlight that this page is formatted in the same way as the previous examples that you just reviewed with one exception: this template has them reflect upon people, places, and things/activities that represent protective as well as risk factors that are present in their own life. Again, reiterate that they are not compelled to divulge any particular information that they would prefer not to share. Relatedly, provide opportunities as may be needed to step-away or take a break during this phase of the process. Also, clarify with the youth that engagement in this process will help set the stage for you and staff to help them to further build protective factors in their life moving forward. Guide the youth through that reflective process with the understanding that the youth should not feel compelled to divulge or share information that they would not prefer to share or document. Encourage, and provide positive reinforcement for their honesty and effort throughout the process across all phases, with emphasis on this more personal self-reflective phase.
- Upon completion of this final page, thank the youth for their engagement, at whatever level they were comfortable engaging in the process.
- The use of this instructional tool can occur in one instructional setting, or be spread out over multiple instructional blocks of time as needed. Use of this tool sets the stage to engage the youth in focusing on building protective factors (see companion instructional tool by this same name).

Special Note: Please keep in mind your mandated reporter requirements throughout your interactions with the youth as they may divulge information, based on the degree of established trust, that may compel mandated reporting on your part.