

At Risk Youth

Who are At-Risk Youth?

The term at-risk youth typically implies a future with less than optimal outcomes.

But what does it mean to be “at-risk”?

Concepts such as ‘risk’ and ‘well-being’ have, as part of their definition, an element of subjective evaluation that need to be kept cognizant in the minds of all who use them. What is perceived as ‘risk’ by one group or school of thought may be seen as ‘opportunity’ or ‘challenge’ by others. We have not begun to reach the point where we can conclusively say that a given factor does or does not institute true risk to an individual’s wellbeing or future. Virtually no factors assure, with certainty that a future outcome is inevitable. ¹

However, statistically there are environments, behaviors and disabilities that have been shown to have a potential negative affect on the future of youth.

At-risk Environments:

- Homeless or transient
- Abuse sexually, physically or emotionally
- Drugs or alcohol are prevalent
- Ethnic or cultural discrimination
- Neglected at home or live in stressful family environments
- Single parent household
- Lack social or emotional supports
- Lack monetary support
- Lack stability of place
- Lack regular routine adult care, direction and love
- Lack access to quality education
- Lack of access to proper medical care
- Live in neighborhood with an ongoing history of violence
- Live in neighborhood which is economically depressed
- Bullying
- Harassment or negative peer pressure

At-risk behavior

- Running away
- Skipping school
- Drinking under age
- Using drugs
- Self-mutilation
- Self-deprecation
- Engaging in sexual behavior
- Displaying disruptive behavior
- Involved with delinquent peers
- Bullying/harassment
- Fighting
- Committing acts of vandalism

The above behaviors can be precursors to dropping out of school, acquiring low paying jobs and/or unemployment, adult criminal behavior, incarceration, death and suicide.

At-risk Disabilities

- Cognitive disabilities
- Physical disabilities
- Sensory disabilities
- Medical disabilities
- Mental Illness

Helping At-risk Youth

Needed services include:

- Drug/alcohol treatment
- Family/individual therapy
- Anger management groups
- Tutoring
- Character education
- Safe places
- Vocational training
- Church community

Needed external developmental assets include:²

- Support
- Empowerment
- Boundaries and Expectations
- Constructive use of time

Needed internal developmental assets include:

- Commitment to learning
- Positive values
- Social competencies
- Positive identity

Determining if a Grant Application is aimed at reaching and helping at-risk youth

1. Is the program aimed at youth who:
 - a. Are in at-risk environments?
 - b. Exhibit at-risk behavior?
 - c. Are disabled or diagnosed as mentally ill?
2. Does the program provide:
 - a. A specific needed service?
 - b. Specific external and or internal assets

¹ At-Risk Conditions of U.S. School-Age Children 2001; By Robert Kominski, Amie Jamieson, and Gladys Martinez, Population Division U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C. 20233

² Developmental assets from search Institutes 40 developmental assets;
<http://www.search-institute.org/developmental-assets/lists>

Very High Risk (10%) – youth who have multiple behavioral problems committing serious offences, drop out of school, have heavy drug use, and are sexually active without contraception.

High Risk Youth (15%) – Youth who participate in two or three problem behaviors but at a slightly lower frequency and with less deleterious consequences.

Moderate Risk (25%) – Youth who tend to experiment in committing minor delinquent offenses, using substances occasionally but not hard drugs, are sexually active but use contraception

Low Risk (50%) – Youth who do not commit any serious delinquent acts, do not abuse substances, and are not yet sexually active, but are in environments where they are encouraged to use drugs, become sexually active, and educational pursuits are discouraged by peers.