

Protective Factors

Do you look at the glass half full or half empty? Risk factors – the things that put youth and families at risk – can seem like looking at the glass half empty. But, if you look at the glass as half full, you're looking at the positive behaviors, the things that keep youth and families healthy and safe.

Families, schools, friends and communities are the glue, the strong bonds that protect youth. They help support healthy beliefs and clear standards. And as another school year kicks off, we need them more than ever. Strong support systems provide structure and youth are more likely to follow rules and meet expectations. Do youth have family support; do they live in a caring neighborhood and school environment? All are important and today, prevention professionals look at the entire glass - both the risk factors and protective factors to more accurately predict problems and success for youth and families.

The 2009 Youth Survey found that Lorain County youth were above average with social skills and a belief in a moral order; youth want to do well. While belief in moral order is high, religiosity is not. Youth just aren't attending church the way they used to. Still, youth want to do well and do know right from wrong.

The survey found youth get praise from their families and schools – again, good news. Still, we need to make sure there are enough opportunities and activities for youth and more people applauding their efforts.

As youth age, positive behaviors tend to decline; this means they are more at risk for the negative influences. Older youth are spreading their wings, testing their independence; they're less likely to spend time with their families, be involved in activities together or sit down for family dinners.

Think back about how involved we usually are in the lives of the very youngest – from preschool through grade school. Just about the time youth hit middle school, when they are pulling away establishing their own independence, adults might also be less likely to stay involved.

All this boils down to some simple things. Keep an eye on your kids – no matter how old they are. Know that they want to be involved. So take time to stay involved. Go to their school conferences, academic and athletic events. Be there for them. Tell them what you think. Have a conversation. Stay connected. It's easier said than done. Next month we'll give you one of the best formulas around for protecting your kids. It's as easy as sitting down and having dinner together.

For more information on keeping kids and families healthy and safe go to www.ctcloraincounty.com, the website for Communities That Care of Lorain County, a community-based coalition working to prevent and reduce underage substance abuse.