



What are Protective Factors?

Protective factors are conditions or attributes (skills, strengths, resources, supports or coping strategies) in individuals, families, communities or the larger society that help people deal more effectively with stressful events and mitigate or eliminate risk in families and communities. - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protective_factor

- ▶ In simple terms, when it comes to individuals, protective factors prevent or limit negative situations, circumstances and outcomes. The more protective factors that are in place in a person's life, the increased likelihood there will be a better, more positive outcome.
- ▶ Protective factors are the opposite of **Risk Factors** which increase the chance of a negative outcome.

There are many protective factors that may be beyond our control such as various genetic factors as well as issues from childhood and upbringing that can impact outcomes later in life. Since the focus of this exercise is about self-improvement today, we will only discuss protective factors which individuals may have some control or influence over. For example, having a supportive family is a protective factor for many life issues, however not everyone is blessed with that circumstance in life. However things such as your social group and coping skills are protective issues an individual can work on and improve

Inspect, Reflect, & Protect

Just about every reasonable person wants to improve their chances to succeed at their goals. Protective factors can be likened to the armor a soldier would wear in a battle. The stronger the protective factors, the better the chances of successfully getting through difficult struggles in life which would include being able to effectively cope with a substance use or mental health issue. Consider the following three stage process for identifying and enhancing protective factors which help us stay out of harm's way and help us to keep up the good fight for self-improvement and positive change:

Inspect – verb: *to look at something closely to assess its condition or to discover any shortcomings* - It all starts with looking at or inspecting your own situation. If you can be honest with yourself about where you stand today, then that opens the doorway to self-improvement. Try to take an objective look at your situation with a view toward strengths and also potential weaknesses which will lead to an accurate inspection of what positive things you have to work with, and which areas you need to work on.

Reflect – verb: *Think deeply and carefully about* - This requires more honesty and insight. After you have done a self-inspection of your strengths and areas of need, then it is time to honestly reflect on what you are willing to do at this time. For example rather than just saying that you will work on all of your issues at once, it is better to reflect and think about just a few important areas that you are willing to get started with. Questions for self-reflection such as “What am I willing to work on now?” and “What am I not ready yet to change” can help you identify which areas to focus on. Start with what you are ready to work on

Protect – verb: *to cover or shield from exposure, injury, damage or destruction* - One you have identified a few areas that you are willing to work on then it is time to get a plan started to protect yourself in these areas. What can you do to increase these identified protective factors in your life? It's worth the effort

Protective Factors and Positive Change – Self Assessment:

Hopefully the goal for everyone reading this is to make positive changes in life. When it comes to substance use and mental health, this often requires an ongoing effort to establish and then maintain progress. Below are some protective factors that can improve the chances for progress when it comes to substance use and mental health. Under each protective factor is a short self-assessment. Try to answer each section as honestly as possible by choosing one answer for each section (**Circle 1, 2 or 3 which best describes you**)



Protective Factors Self-Assessment

A. Self-Regulation and self-control

1. I tend to be impulsive and I sometimes have difficulty stopping myself when I need to
2. Sometimes I think before I act or speak but not as often as I should
3. For the most part, I think before I act and speak

B. Ability to cope with stress, anxiety and fear

1. I feel either anxious, stressed out, worried or afraid much more often than I would like to be
2. I experience some anxiety and stress but I am pretty good at calming myself when I need too
3. I am proficient at using coping skills, supports and other strategies to reduce stress and anxiety in my life

C. Positive social relationships

1. I don't have enough people in my life whom I would consider to be positive, supportive, loyal and trustworthy
2. I have some positive and caring friends and other supports but they aren't always around or available
3. I have a positive, supportive and overall healthy network of people who I can turn too whenever I need too

D. Properly managing physical health including sleep, diet and exercise

1. I definitely don't take care of my health like I should be
2. I try to do some healthy things but I definitely still need improvement
3. I am health conscious and overall I try to take good care of myself physically

E. Effective problem solving skills

1. When trouble comes up, I often don't know what to do or I just avoid the problem altogether when I can
2. I struggle sometimes with dealing with life's problems as they come up, and sometimes I come up with a good plan but not as often as I would like to
3. I feel like I can strategize and plan effectively for most problems that come up in life and then carry out that plan

F. Employment/Education

1. I am unemployed and not in school and not getting any job training
2. I have a job right now it is still a flawed situation (For example - I don't like it, not enough hours, poor pay, overwhelming work stress, negative environment, etc.) – Or, I am in school but I am performing poorly
3. I currently have a job that overall is meeting my needs for now – or I am enrolled in an educational program and passing

G. Structured routine

1. Either my life is chaotic and unpredictable OR every day is the same with little to do of any real importance on most days
2. On some days I have places to go or things to take responsibility for but I still have more dead time than I would like
3. Overall I have a fulfilling schedule with meaningful activities and plans throughout the week

H. Future orientation and drive

1. I am pretty much "day to day" right now with very little in terms of real plans for the future
2. I have some future plans and goals but I need improvement when it comes to working toward them
3. I am currently striving toward multiple life goals across several different life areas

I. Positive values, morals and norms

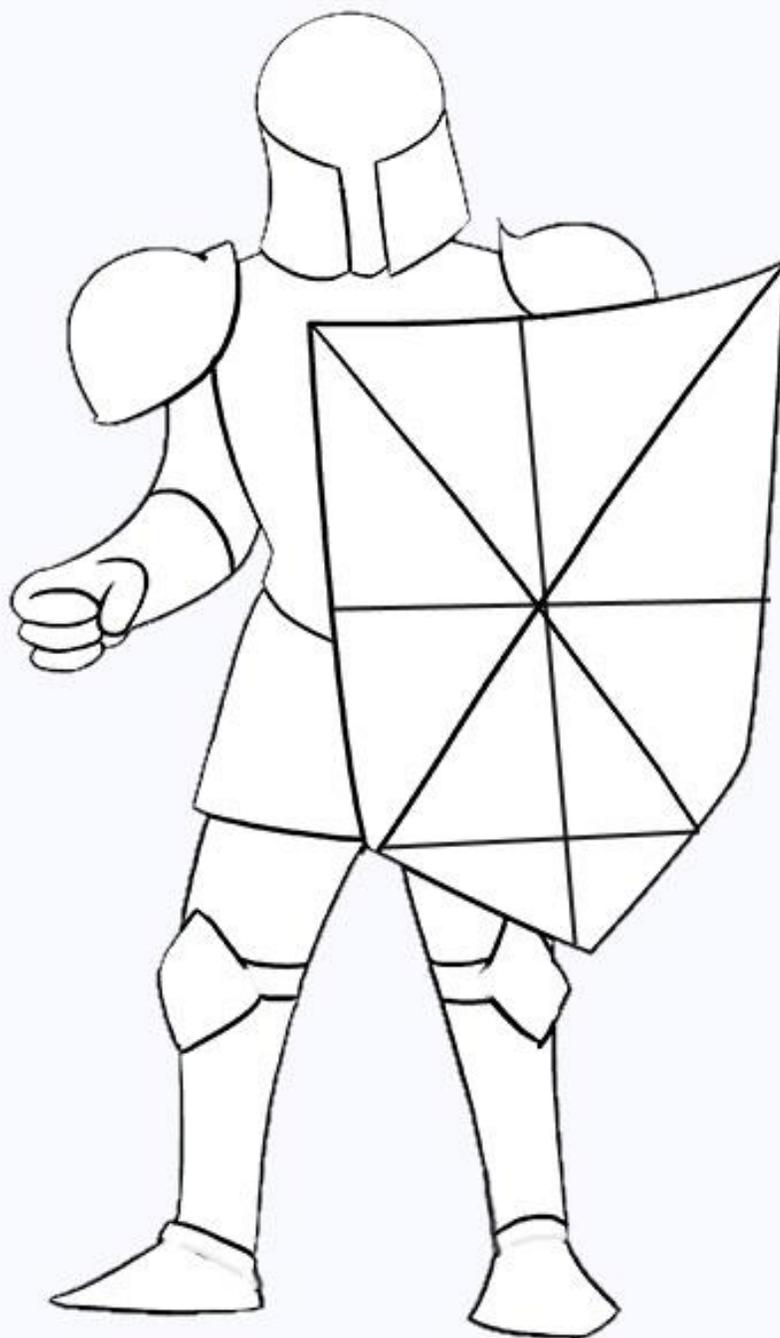
1. I pretty much just try to do what I want, when I want to
2. I take time to think about how my choices affect others but I still do some things that I have to hide from others for fear of getting caught
3. For the most part, my life is "on the level" as there is little that I have to hide because it is illegal or unethical or could hurt other people or get me into trouble if others found out or knew



Process - Add up your score by totaling up all of your 1's, 2's and 3's. (Your total score should be anywhere from 9 to 27)

My final protective factors score: _____

Fill in one piece of protective armor below for each point of your score





Discussion:

- ▶ What are 1 or 2 areas that stood out to you that you need to start to improve in order to effectively enhance your protective factors?
 - What is a good plan to try to make these needed improvements? – Discuss this with the group, possibly seeking suggestions from others in the group who may be doing well in this area.
- ▶ What are 2 or 3 of your areas of strength? Share them with the group:
 - How can you continue to use and expand on these strengths to make progress?

Conclusion: My Protective Factors Plan: Complete:

- ▶ ***“I plan to improve my chances for success by working on these protective factors according to the following plan:”***

Protective Factor	Action Plan – (What I will do to improve)
1.	
2.	
3.	

“Inspect for safety and protect your progress”