

Community Education Series

The Recovery Village and Advanced Recovery Systems





Presentation Topic:

Life Skills Training for at-risk Youth

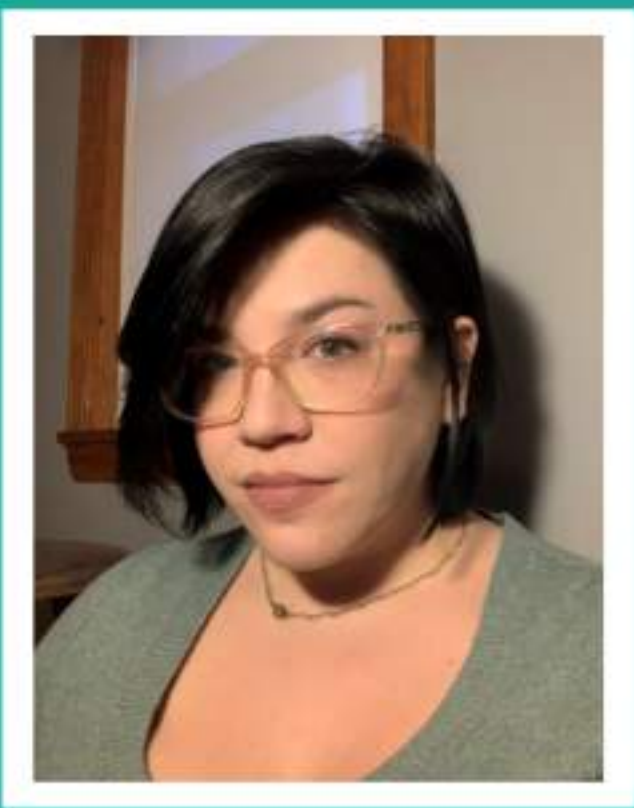


Speaker:

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About the Speaker:

Allison Dickens,
LPC, LCADC, ACS



- Allison Dickens, LPC, LCADC, has worked in the field of addictions and mental health treatment for the past 15 years. In that time, she has worked at all levels of care with adults, adolescents, and families. She has been working at Care Plus for the past 5 years, overseeing the substance abuse outpatient services. In this time, she has developed a passion for an appreciation of prevention and treatment of substance abuse from a person centered and motivationally based perspective.

WHAT ARE LIFE SKILLS?

“Abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable humans to deal effective with the demands and challenges of life” (WHO, 2020)

Consists of competencies in various life areas, including:

- **Communication skills**
- **Healthy recreational activities**
- **Self-care and hygiene**
- **Study and employment skills**
- **Physical and mental health support and management**
- **Social skills**

Who is “at-risk”?

ANYONE can be at risk for substance use, but risk factors associated with increased risk include:

- Trauma history (witnessing or experiencing anything the individual considers traumatic)
- Family history of substance use
- Family history of mental health concerns
- Lack of parental supervision
- Early signs of aggression towards self or towards others, lack of self control
- Drug availability; schools or neighborhoods with high numbers of substance users
- Peer or social influences to use

The more risk factors a child is exposed to, the more likely they are to abuse drugs.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

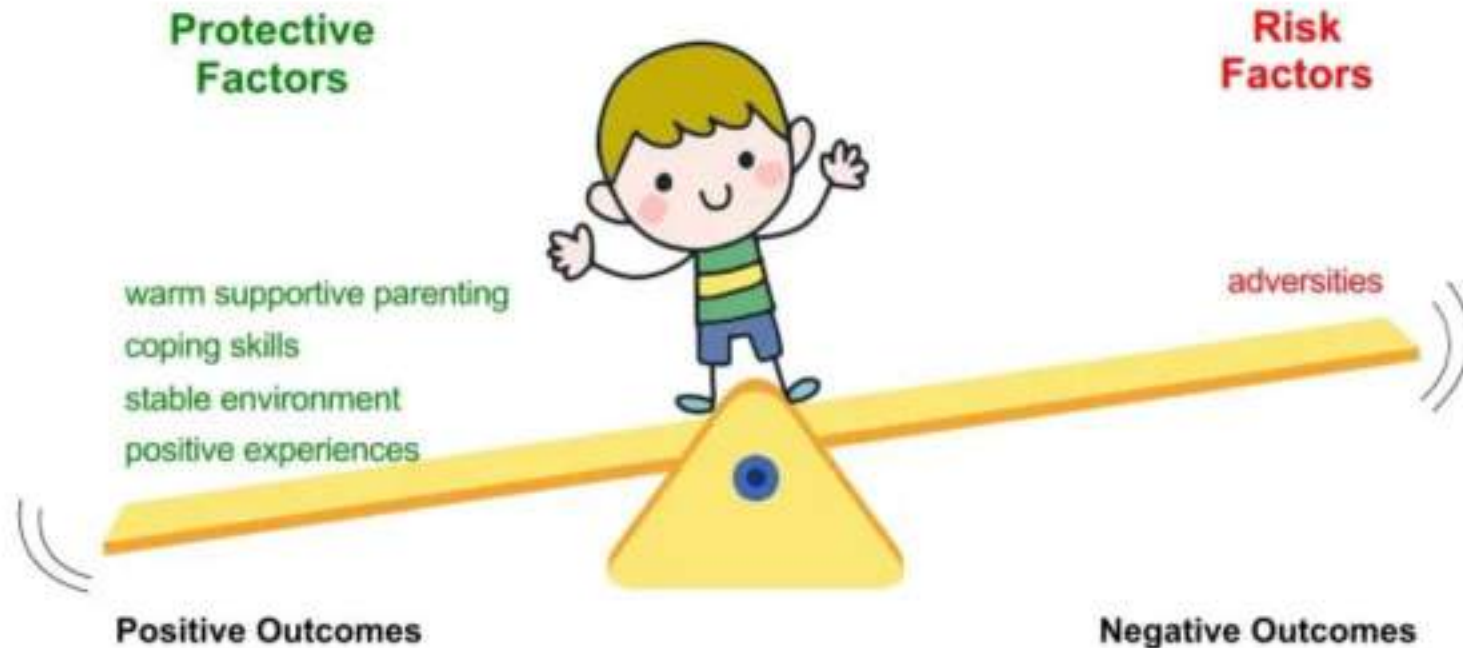
Protective factors are positive influences in an individual's life that decrease the influence of risk factors. These can include:

- Good conflict resolution/communication skills
- Good self-esteem and self-concept
- Positive parental influence and good supervision
- Strong positive social supports
- Positive adult role models (i.e., teachers, sports coaches, etc.)
- Success in academics
- Positive community engagement

Risk and protective factors work together to determine the level of risk in an individual.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Minimizing risk factors and maximizing protective factors gives an individual the best ability to live a healthy life and make good, positive choices in regards to health.



So, Theoretically...

If we build up protective factors in our at-risk youth, we can tip the scale towards positive outcomes and build healthy adults.

Often, we cannot control for risk factors... but we may be able to build protective factors in youth to help balance and manage these risks.

Life Skills Training for at Risk Youth

Evidence suggests that incorporating life skills training along with psychoeducation about the risks of substance use has a positive effect on self-esteem, mood, community connection, and other risk factors.

Youth are also more likely to report less desire to use harmful substances in the future when exposed to a life skills curriculum when compared to youth who do not have this education.

What is it?

Traditionally, substance use prevention education focuses solely on the harmful effects of substance use and how to “say no to drugs.”

While life skills training may incorporate this information into the curriculum, the focus is more on building skills associated with the ability to refuse, self-esteem, and other protective factors that will assist the youth in enhancing personal and social competence and building social resistance skills.

In brief – this training assists not only with building knowledge about drugs but incorporates real-world competencies in maintaining sobriety and feeling confident in doing so.

What is it?

A sample lesson may consist of the following:

- A brief description of the life skill in question
- A questionnaire about the individual's existing skills in this area
- An activity to assist with development of this skill
- A discussion about the activity and how to incorporate these skills into daily life.

An example: stress management

How it's Implemented

The most common way to implement skills training is peer groups.

- School groups, run by an educator and consisting of class groups, can be effective
- Equally effective can be groups run in facilities such as outpatient or inpatient mental health and/or substance abuse facilities, community centers, or after-school facilities can also be used.

Alternate options include individual therapy to build skills, electronic forms of communication such as text messages and discussions boards, and other alternate communication methods likely to best engage youth.

Conclusion

- **Incorporating life skills training into a substance use prevention curriculum is critical to the development of healthy personal and interpersonal skills needed to build critical skills needed for resisting influence to use.**
- **Life skills training also assists in building necessary protective factors which support self-efficacy and self-esteem, working to balance out risk factors which may be present in the youth's life.**
- **Life skills can be presented in group or individual modalities and can be administered in person or electronically, whichever seems like may best engage the youth.**

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