

Factors Which Pose Risks to Healthy Child Development



The presence of one or more risk factors, alongside a cluster of trauma indicators, may greatly increase the risk to the child's wellbeing and should flag the need for further child and family assessment, using the Best Interests case practice model.

The following risk factors can impact on children and families and the caregiving environment:

Child and family risk factors

- family violence, current or past
- mental health issue or disorder, current or past (including self-harm and suicide attempts)
- alcohol/substance abuse, current or past, addictive behaviours
- disability or complex medical needs eg. Intellectual or physical disability, acquired brain injury
- newborn, prematurity, low birth weight, chemically dependent, foetal alcohol syndrome, feeding/sleeping/settling difficulties, prolonged and frequent crying



- unsafe sleeping practices for infants eg. side or tummy sleeping, ill-fitting mattress, cot cluttered with pillows, bedding, or soft toys which can cover infant's face, co-sleeping with sibling or with parent who is on medication, drugs/alcohol or smokes, using other unsafe sleeping place such as a couch, or exposure to cigarette smoke
- disorganised or insecure attachment relationship (child does not seek comfort or affection from caregivers when in need)
- developmental delay
- history of neglect or abuse, state care, child death or placement of child or siblings
- separations from parents or caregivers
- parent, partner, close relative or sibling with a history of assault, prostitution or sexual offences
- experience of intergenerational abuse/trauma
- compounded or unresolved experiences of loss and grief
- chaotic household/lifestyle/problem gambling
- poverty, financial hardship, unemployment
- social isolation (family, extended family, community and cultural isolation)
- inadequate housing/transience/homelessness
- lack of stimulation and learning opportunities, disengagement from school, truanting
- inattention to developmental health needs/poor diet
- disadvantaged community
- racism
- recent refugee experience



Parent risk factors

- parent/carer under 20 years or under 20 years at birth of first child
- lack of willingness or ability to prioritise child's needs above own
- rejection or scapegoating of child
- harsh, inconsistent discipline, neglect or abuse
- inadequate supervision of child or emotional enmeshment
- single parenting/multiple partners
- inadequate antenatal care or alcohol/substance abuse during pregnancy

Wider factors that influence positive outcomes

- sense of belonging to home, family, community and a strong cultural identity
- pro-social peer group
- positive parental expectations, home learning environment and opportunities at major life transitions
- access to child and adult focused services eg. health, mental health, maternal and child health, early intervention, disability, drug and alcohol, family support, family preservation, parenting education,
- recreational facilities and other child and family support and therapeutic services
- accessible and affordable child care and high quality preschool programs
- inclusive community neighbourhoods/settings
- service system's understanding of neglect and abuse.



Reference:

*Australian Victorian State Government Health and Human Services
Adapted for a global audience by Get into Neurodiversity.*