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ARE ANY OF YOUR CHILDREN “AT RISK”?

We hear so much about “at risk” youth. How do you know if any of your children are in this category?

Consider the following list of characteristics. The more of these characteristics that your children have or develop, the **less** likely they are to be “at risk”.

- **Support system of friends.** Exhibits team skills and shows compassion towards others.
- **Valued by peers.** Group settings have provided opportunities for them to contribute to others and achieve new challenges.
- **Assumes responsibility for others.** Responsibilities generate greater status among peers. The responsibility could range from caring for a pet to being a camp counselor.
- **Models significant adult.** This may be a family member of someone else that the child admires. Significant adults may not even know the impact they have made on a child’s life.
- **Plans for success.** A sense of accomplishment and control of one’s life is attained by learning to set and achieve realistic goals.
- **Demonstrates coping strategies and problem solving skills.** The ability to deal with stress and examine alternatives and consequences to resolve problems.
- **Sense of control in life.** Rather than feeling victimized and powerless, he/she feels a sense of power or control in his/her life. This is usually the result of having successful experiences.
- **Reflective rather than reactive.** This is the ability to think through situations, rather than responding on impulse. Decision-making skills can be effectively implemented.
- **Motivated by challenges.** Rather than being motivated by prizes, awards, and recognition, the child possesses internal motivation.
- **Sense of personal identity.** The child feels they make a difference and are important.
- **Ability to distance self from stressful situations.** The ability to identify what he/she is capable of dealing with and those areas in which he/she has no control and is not responsible. Being able to know that he/she cannot “fix” everything and when it is necessary to get away from a stressful situation.

The more of these characteristics a child has, the less likely he/she will be tempted by dangerous or illegal actions.

Adults are very instrumental in providing opportunities for children to gain these skills. Help them learn to make friends, work cooperatively with others, set

and achieve goals, cope with anger and stress, and solve problems systematically. Model these skills and give children a chance to practice. These are the building blocks for the development of productive adults.