

Understanding risk and protective factors

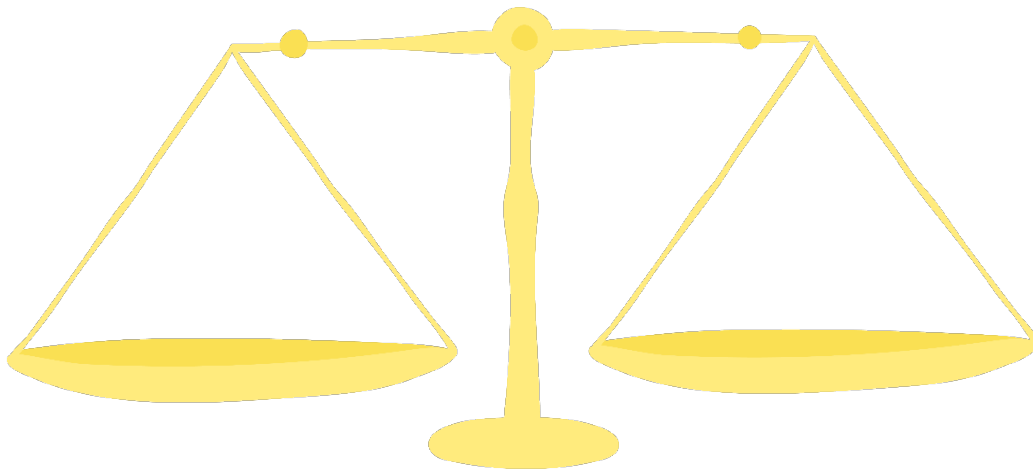
Like a set of scales, our mental health can move from side to side depending on what is happening in our life. Factors that tip the scales towards poor mental health are known as **risk factors**, while factors tipping the scales towards good mental health are **protective factors**. The weight of each factor can vary depending on how significant it is to you. Sometimes things that seem very small can tip the scales because it is already so heavily weighted on one side.

Protective factors for mental health include:

- Access to mental health support
- Good coping strategies such as asking for support
- Confidence in own abilities
- Positive and optimistic mindset
- Healthy diet and good physical health
- Regular physical activity and exercise
- Strong social support network
- Healthy relationships and social life

Risk factors for mental health include:

- Stressful situations like tight deadlines
- Low self-esteem or perceived incompetence
- Poor coping strategies such as negative self-talk
- A history of mental health issues
- Smoking, alcohol, and drug use
- Poor nutrition and physical health
- Insecure employment
- Poor social support network or loneliness



Ideally, our scales are heavily weighted towards good mental health, so when a risk factor does present itself, our scales will not tip all the way towards poor mental health.

It's important you think about what you can remove from your risk factors and add to your protective factors to ensure your scales are tipped towards good mental health and wellbeing.