

**PREVENTION STRATEGIES
RELATED TO DELINQUENCY AND YOUTH VIOLENCE
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Successful prevention and early intervention strategies related to delinquency and youth violence vary depending on the focus of the prevention/intervention effort, the age of the youth, and the setting in which the strategy is delivered. As with other areas of prevention, the best research in preventing youth violence and delinquency can be found within the fields of reducing risk factors and enhancing protective factors, increasing developmental assets in youth, and in fundamental youth development approaches. However, principles of effective prevention and early intervention efforts may be aggregated to meet one or more of the following goals:

- Strengthening the family’s ability to provide support, direction, and positive role modeling for the child. This begins in the natal-years and continues for the duration of the child’s formative years.
- Building and enhancing supportive relationships with positive adults and peers. The nature and focus of these relationships may change over time (i.e. from more family focused in the early years to more community-focused in later years), but fundamentally provide (a) the support and encouragement necessary for youth to become productive members of a social community, (b) guidance and support through basic stages of moral development, and (c) safety and support in meeting basic human needs.
- Enhancing a youth’s individual capabilities, skills, and interests to better meet the challenges of life in educational, vocational, and social situations. While some programs may be “remedial” in nature, more productive efforts appear to be built on a youth development model in which the interests, aptitudes, and strengths of youth form the basis on which to build future changes and experiences.
- Therapeutic interventions that focus on the multiple dimensions of a youth’s/family’s life and successfully enhance the family’s/youth’s ability to resolve problems, make constructive choices about the future, and become independent and contributing community members.
- Enhancing the health and wellness of a neighborhood/community in which youth live. Risk and protective factors that influence youth violence and delinquency abound in the neighborhood(s) and communities in which they live. Strategies that support the ability of core social institutions (e.g. schools, neighborhood centers, recreation programs, churches, civic groups, etc.) to promote positive youth development and relationships are effective in improving the ability and interest of youth in becoming positive resources in our communities.

There are additionally, some core principles that should be considered in assessing the application of prevention/early intervention strategies and programs, including:



- The strategy must be developmentally appropriate. That is, the underlying rationale and concepts of the strategy must be applicable to the age group selected for implementation. That inherently means, for example, that strategies that might be effective with youth ages 8-10 are not the same as may be effective with teenagers.
- The strategy must be culturally appropriate and relevant. While model programs exist, application of models must vary depending on the cultural context and population on which they are applied. Individuals implementing programs must consider and attend to cultural differences that may impact the delivery and effectiveness of the program(s).
- The program(s) must be strategic. That is, individuals implementing the program(s) must have an understanding of fundamental prevention research, including attending to various risk-protective factor, asset development, or social development research models. Tying prevention and early intervention strategies to sound research makes it more likely that the effects of the program(s) will be sustained over time.

Successful prevention early intervention efforts meet the **SMART** goal acronym of being:

- **S**pecific, focusing on strategic changes and enhancements in relationships, skills, or attitudes that have been shown to lead to positive outcomes
- **M**easurable, identifying means to evaluate changes over time
- **A**chievable, building on successful steps over time
- **R**esults-oriented, requiring periodic quality improvement efforts to analyze progress and make necessary modifications in the program/strategy
- **T**ime-bound, setting standards to meet within specific periods of time and ensuring that key decision-makers and implementers understand what their goals and time frames are

Following **SMART** goals does not guarantee success or mean that everything will work as planned, but they do provide a framework in which to implement the variety of promising and proven prevention and early intervention efforts in this area.

Examples of Successful Violence/Delinquency Prevention Programs

There are many sources (see source section at the end of this document) of informational successful and promising prevention and early intervention strategies in this area. Two sources, the OJJDP Blueprints for Violence Prevention Initiative and the American Youth Policy Forum, provide some examples of successful and promising prevention and early intervention strategies and programs, including:

Family-Strengthening Strategies

- **Prenatal and Infancy Home Visitation** in which efforts are made to reduce the likelihood of three key risk factors: (1) adverse maternal health-related behaviors, (2) child abuse and neglect, and (3) troubled maternal life course decisions.



- **The Incredible Years Series**, a set of three comprehensive, multi-faceted, and developmentally based curriculums for parents, teachers, and children designed to promote child emotional and social competence for children ages 2-8.
- **Families and Schools Together (FAST)**, most often a school-based but family focused program that reduces children's anti-social behavior through parent training, home visitation, social skills training in conjunction with enhancing a child's school curriculum.
- **Iowa Strengthening Families Program** in which a variety of family-based programs enhance parents' general management skills, parent affective relationships, and family communication.
- **The Perry Preschool Program** in which disadvantaged children were provided with two years of high-quality early education with high levels of parental involvement and sensitivity to the child's non-educational needs.
- **Family Resource Centers** located in neighborhoods and accessible to at-risk parents in which parents may obtain basic child-rearing information and support and connect with other parents.

Building Positive Relationships with Adults and Peers

- **Big Brothers Big Sisters of America**, one of the oldest and best-known mentoring program, often serving youth ages 6-18 from single-parent households, providing responsible adults to act as a mentor and role-model for youth.
- **Boy Scouts and Girls Scouts** in which youth are participants in group and individual activities that develop skills, promote positive relationships, and provide opportunities for youth to contribute to the welfare of the community.
- **Safe and constructive community recreational programs** such as those studied by Columbia University in which they found a 13% lower crime rate and 22% lower drug use rate in neighborhoods that provided non-school hour, organized recreational opportunities for youth.
- **Restorative Justice programs** (e.g. victim-offender conferencing, restitution, community service) that work with youthful offenders, victims, and the community to provide opportunities for youth to make amends for their behavior while at the same time reconnecting them with the community and responsible adults in meeting the victim's and community's needs.



Enhancing a youth's individual capabilities, skills, and interests

- **Social Problem-Solving** activities in which a variety of cognitive-behavioral techniques may be applied to work with youth showing signs of violent, aggressive behavior. These programs have been demonstrated to be effective with youth both early signs as well as those who may be more deeply involved in the juvenile justice system.
- **Cognitive and Behavioral Skills Training** in which youth learn how to assess situations they face, generate alternatives for behavior, identify potential outcomes of various behaviors, choose the most appropriate behavior, and practice implementing that behavior in a variety of situations.
- **Life Skills Training**, often used in drug prevention settings but applicable in issues of violence prevention as well in which middle school students are taught resistance skills and other strategies that promote making positive life choices.
- **Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)** for elementary age children designed to promote emotional competence, including the expression, understanding, and regulation of emotions.
- **Positive Adolescent Choices Training (PACT)**, a program in which high-risk youth were provided 20 one-hour training sessions on negotiation, compromise, and giving and taking criticisms calmly. Significant differences between youth assigned to the PACT program and comparable youth not involved were noted as it relates to subsequent involvement in juvenile court.

Therapeutic interventions

- **Multisystemic Therapy** that targets chronic and violent juvenile offenders and specific factors in each youth's family environment, with a goal of helping parents deal effectively with their youth's behavior problems including problems with deviant peer associations and poor school performance.
- **Functional Family Therapy**, a short-term program designed to engage and motivate youth and families to develop more effective communication/interaction patterns and help families better deal with and utilize outside resources.

Enhancing the health and wellness of a neighborhood/community

- **Joining Forces for Families**, a Dane County initiative to develop collaborative relationships within neighborhoods and communities among law enforcement, human services, public health, and schools to address the needs and issues of the neighborhood and to promote positive pro-social activities and relationships within those neighborhoods.



- **Community Policing**, by providing a preventive law enforcement presence in targeted neighborhoods or communities. In community policing, law enforcement officials become involved in forming positive relationships with community leaders and members and developing pro-social norms and activities. Similarly, placing law enforcement officials in schools has proven to be an effective preventive measure as they form new relationships with students and staff and contribute to the overall health and safety of the school setting.

In sum, these are but a few examples of the diversity of prevention and early intervention programs and strategies that are proving to be effective and/or show promising results in preventing violence and delinquency in youth. For more information about these and other programs that are proving to be effective, the following sources of additional information are recommended:

Mendel, Richard. *Prevention or Pork: A Hard-Headed Look at Youth-Oriented Anti-Crime Programs*. American Youth Policy Forum. <http://www.aypf.org/>

Mihalic, Sharon, et. al. *Blueprints for Violence Prevention*. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. July 2001.
<http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/index.html>

Mendel, Richard. *Less Hype, More Help: Reducing Juvenile Crime, What Works and What Doesn't*. American Youth Policy Forum. <http://www.aypf.org/>

Montgomery, Imogene M., et. al. *What Works: Promising Interventions in Juvenile Justice*. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. October, 1994.
<http://virlib.ncjrs.org/JuvenileJustice.asp#W>

Delinquency Prevention Works. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. November, 1995.

The National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center: a web-site with numerous links to other violence prevention sites. www.safeyouth.org

The National Campaign Against Youth Violence: <http://www.noviolence.net/index.html>

The Center for Youth as Resources: <http://www.cyar.org/>

