



Youth in action

December 1998 NUMBER 03

OJJDP

Shay Bilchik
Administrator

BULLETIN

Stand Up and Start a School Crime Watch!

What Is a School Crime Watch?

Based on the Neighborhood Watch concept, a school crime watch helps youth watch out for each other to make the entire school area safer and more enjoyable. The school crime watch is a student-led effort that helps youth take a share of responsibility for their school community.

Youth who participate in a school crime watch learn how to keep from becoming victims. They also learn the best ways to report suspicious activities or arguments between students before they turn into fights or other disturbances.

How Does a School Crime Watch Prevent or Reduce Crime?

An organized school crime watch program provides youth with a focus, a source of reliable information, and a core of committed youth who will make crime prevention a priority in the school community. The crime watch reminds everyone

of prevention strategies they can use and helps build schoolwide resistance to criminal activities.

Having such a group on campus says “Crime is not tolerated here” and provides a way for students to respond to crime incidents and issues.

You may wonder if a school crime watch really reduces crime. At Carol City High School in Miami, FL, crime dropped 45 percent within a year of the beginning of a school crime watch program.

from the administrator

Friends watching out for friends—that’s basically what a school crime watch program is all about. It’s also about learning how to keep from becoming a victim of crime. It takes only one person to start a school crime watch, and this Bulletin tells you how you can get a program up and running in your school. Keeping an eye out for suspicious activities not only keeps you safe, it sends a message that you and your classmates will not tolerate crime at your school—and that is a powerful message.

What Does It Take To Start a School Crime Watch?

It only takes one person to start a school crime watch. A concerned adult might talk to students about the idea. A group of students may be fed up with bullying or intimidation. An especially violent incident at or near school might have everyone wondering how to stop violence from happening again. A youth might realize that crime, though not a major threat, needs to be addressed before it becomes a problem.

Take the Plunge

Whatever your reason may be for wanting to start a school crime watch, the first task is to gather a group of youth willing to work together to bring the entire student body into a “crime watch” way of life. This group should represent the diversity of the school community. Try to involve as many people as possible. Reach beyond your immediate circle of friends for volunteers.

Planning a Successful Project

For more information on how to plan a successful project, see the National Youth Network’s Planning a Successful Crime Prevention Project. This 28-page workbook explains the five steps of the Success Cycle:

- ◆ *Assessing Your Community’s Needs.*
- ◆ *Planning a Successful Project.*
- ◆ *Lining Up Resources.*
- ◆ *Acting on Your Plans.*
- ◆ *Nurturing, Monitoring, and Evaluating.*

The workbook includes six worksheets for you to take notes on. You can get a copy of this planning workbook from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, listed in the Resources section.

Getting the entire student body to watch out, help out, and report crime is an ongoing task that won’t happen overnight. Your group will need to:

- ◆ Find out which crimes (e.g., vandalism, assault, theft, substance abuse) are most common at school.
- ◆ Determine what other issues you want to address (e.g., arguments, smoking, weapons, bullying).
- ◆ Decide which prevention strategies could prove the most effective.

Much of the information you will need can be obtained from guidance counselors, school security staff, city or county school officials, local law enforcement, and students themselves.

Develop Partnerships

Starting up the program will require a close working relationship with school authorities, including the principal, other officials charged with school security, and local law enforcement (especially the crime prevention staff). Your group should develop a close partnership with these officials and keep them informed of your ideas, plans, and activities.

All partners involved in the crime watch should agree on its mission and objectives. As a group, you may want to discuss whether a student patrol should be incorporated into the crime watch. Representatives of all partner organizations (e.g., school officials and local law enforcement) should be present at the group’s first meeting and should be notified of all developments and progress.

Sponsor a Program Kickoff

Another key issue is deciding how to kick off the program. One way to do this is to plan a schoolwide meeting to introduce the program

and its mission. This could be a school assembly held during class time or an afterschool meeting. You will need to discuss this with your school administrators. Advertise the program's kickoff widely—through the school newspaper, public address (PA) announcements, fliers, posters, e-mail, and Web sites. The more people who know of and attend the kickoff event, the better.

The kickoff event is also an excellent recruiting ground for bringing in more volunteers. Make the kickoff meeting exciting; use music, skits—maybe even a light show. Introduce the program in such a way that everyone will want to be involved.

Educate other students, faculty, and staff on the roles and purposes of the school crime watch, and give them helpful prevention tips relevant to problems they are facing. In addition, teach them how and what to report, and encourage them to view themselves as key members of the effort.

Provide Training

Once you have gathered volunteers to participate in your school crime watch and decided on your specific activities, you will need to provide some training. Training will make sure that all participants understand the goals and objectives of your project, that they have the skills necessary to perform tasks, and that they know how to handle problems. Training also builds teamwork among your volunteers and develops the skills needed for the success of your project. You will need to plan such details as:

- ◆ When and where a training session will take place.
- ◆ Contents and procedures of a training session.
- ◆ What, if any, additional materials will be needed.

Estimated Training Time for Youth Crime Prevention Projects

<i>Project</i>	<i>Number of Training Hours</i>
<i>Community cleanup</i>	1–4
<i>Fairs and displays to educate the public</i>	1–5
<i>Vandalism prevention</i>	2–3
<i>Escort/check-in service for senior citizens</i>	2–3
<i>Shoplifting prevention education</i>	2–4
<i>Neighborhood Watch</i>	4–5
<i>School crime watch</i>	4–6
<i>Home security surveys</i>	4–8
<i>Plays and puppet programs</i>	4–10
<i>Victim/witness assistance</i>	5–20
<i>Teen court</i>	10–120
<i>Teaching child protection</i>	16–20
<i>Counseling of peers or others</i>	20–30
<i>Hotlines</i>	20–30
<i>Mediation</i>	25–30

You may also need to enlist the help of such professionals as law enforcement officers, victim assistance professionals, school security staff, trainers from corporations, lawyers, and community volunteer agencies.

Be sure each specific part of the training is planned. This will do much to ensure the success of your effort. Professional trainers know that preparation and organization are 80 percent of good training. See the chart above for a guideline of training hours for a school crime watch program and other crime prevention projects.

What Are Some Possible School Crime Watch Activities?

Student Patrol Program

A student patrol can be a powerful component of a school crime watch. These groups go beyond traffic safety patrol programs. They look for and report signs of crime and help keep crime off campuses. This moves the program from an informational and teaching posture to one of action.

Patrol activities include monitoring halls and parking lots between classes and during lunch. This alone can reduce the number of crime-related incidents. In schools with active patrols, crime has dropped 20 to 75 percent. Recognize, however, that if the patrol is not accepted by a majority of students, it can easily be seen as a group of “snitches.”

Anonymous Reporting System

Another school crime watch activity is setting up an anonymous reporting system. A reporting system is critical to the success of a school crime watch program. Students should report crime or incidents because they are serious issues, not because they want to get someone they don't like into trouble. If an incident is not reported, it might escalate into a dangerous situation for the students involved.

Reporting should be done on an anonymous basis, and all crime watch reports should be kept confidential. Such a reporting system can produce tips on areas to watch on the school grounds and reveal other issues of concern to students.

Crimestoppers International and Youth Crime Watch of America have worked with schools to implement these kinds of programs and can provide you with more specific information (see the Resources section).

Other Activities

Student crime watch programs can perform a number of other activities to promote the overall health of the school. These include:

- ◆ Hosting drug- and alcohol-free parties.
- ◆ Sponsoring crime prevention fairs.
- ◆ Working with local elementary schools on child safety issues.
- ◆ Writing a column about crime prevention for your local or school newspaper.
- ◆ Presenting daily or weekly crime prevention tips over the PA system during morning announcements.
- ◆ Teaching drug prevention, personal safety, and conflict resolution to peers and younger students.
- ◆ Organizing school cleanups.¹

What Does It Take To Keep a School Crime Watch Going?

A monthly meeting keeps the momentum and energy building for your school crime watch program and keeps you focused on your goals. At these meetings, the group can plan new activities and track the progress of ongoing activities such as the student patrol.

Make a calendar of crime watch events and distribute it at school. This allows all students to be informed of upcoming activities. The calendar can also list other events and act as a resource for prevention news.

¹The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the National Crime Prevention Council publish a series of Youth in Action Bulletins. Some of the topics include cross-age tutoring, cleaning up graffiti and vandalism, and starting a crime prevention project. Contact the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse—listed in the Resources section—to obtain these and other publications.

You may want to purchase T-shirts or baseball caps that identify the school crime watch participants and the student patrol. This will build pride in your program and strengthen its identity as an important part of school life.

Suggest to school officials that information on school safety and on the crime watch program be distributed at the orientation for new students. Members of the school crime watch could present the information, give a brief description of the program, and recruit volunteers.

What Are Some of the Challenges of a School Crime Watch?

Maintaining Interest

In any crime watch program, maintaining interest and excitement is always a challenge. People don't want to simply stand around and watch for trouble to happen; they want to do something. That is why an active, school-linked program is important.

Excluding certain social groups in your school, even unintentionally, is a threat to the success of a school crime watch. A school crime watch must be seen to belong to everyone, not just one or two selected groups. It's not just for athletes, students in school government, or high achievers.

Maintaining Privacy

Another challenge is maintaining the privacy of any reporting system. Crime watch members should understand that sharing the sources of reports with those outside the project can jeopardize the entire program and cannot be tolerated. Stress that if students find out who reported them, it could become dangerous for

those doing the reporting. It could also undermine the integrity of the program and influence students to not participate in the program. Nobody wants to put themselves or others in dangerous situations.

Running a successful crime watch also requires getting participants to understand they are not vigilantes. The term is "watch," not "capture." Students should report trouble quickly, not seek to catch the offenders themselves.

What Are Some of the Rewards of a School Crime Watch?

Active school crime watch programs have helped reduce violence, the presence of guns, drug use, and many other crime-related activities in schools across the country. Schools where these programs are in place report a happier student body and safer campuses with more school spirit. Students and staff feel free to enjoy the school setting instead of fearing crime on campus. Students actively involved in the program gain leadership skills and an understanding of crime prevention and community organizing.

How Can a School Crime Watch Program Be Evaluated?

Evaluating your project can help you learn whether it has met its goals, but only if you decide up front what you want to evaluate and how you will go about doing so. The purpose of conducting an evaluation is "to answer practical questions of decision-makers and program implementors who want to know whether to continue a program, extend it to other sites, modify it, or close it down."² You will want to

²National Crime Prevention Council, *What, me evaluate?* Washington, DC: National Crime Prevention Council, 1986.

be able to show that your project does one or all of the following:

- ◆ Reduces crime.
- ◆ Reduces fear of crime.
- ◆ Is cost effective.
- ◆ Has a lasting impact.
- ◆ Attracts support and resources.
- ◆ Makes people feel safe and better about being in their school or community.

The best way to start evaluating your project is to reflect on your original goals:

- ◆ Was crime reduced in and around your school?
- ◆ Did you reach all the people in the school community you intended to?
- ◆ Did the message of your project reach other youth? Did they learn what you were trying to teach them?
- ◆ Are young people more aware of their surroundings while at school?

Be sure to include an evaluation step in your overall plan. Ask yourself what you can do

better to reach your goals, to involve more people in your project, and to spread your message to a wider audience. Then, make adjustments to your activities to strengthen your project.

The most tangible way to evaluate a school crime watch program is to track the number of incidents or crimes reported. If there is a decrease in incidents while the program is active, the school crime watch can be considered successful, especially if similar schools without crime watches have seen crime increase or stay the same. Surveys about how safe people feel at school can also provide important evaluation data. Tabulating the number of participants, events sponsored, and their success and testing the knowledge of crime prevention among students and staff are also good evaluation measures.

Learning to evaluate the things you do is a good skill, one you can apply to all aspects of your life. Good luck with your project and—Go for it!



Resources

For more information, contact one of the following organizations or visit the U.S. Department of Justice Kids Page Web site at www.usdoj.gov/kidspage. This site includes information for kids, youth, parents, and teachers.

Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse

P.O. Box 6000

Rockville, MD 20849-6000

800-638-8736

301-519-5212 (Fax)

Internet: www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm

National Crime Prevention Council

1700 K Street NW., Second Floor

Washington, DC 20006-3817

202-466-6272

Internet: www.ncpc.org

National School Safety Center

4165 Thousand Oaks Boulevard

Westlake Village, CA 91362

805-373-9977

Internet: www.nssc1.org

Scholastic Crimestoppers Crimestoppers International

Larry Wieda

4441 Prairie Trail Drive

Loveland, CO 80537

303-441-3327

303-441-4327 (Fax)

Internet: www.c-s-i.org

Youth Crime Watch of America

9300 South Dadeland Boulevard, Suite 100

Miami, FL 33156

305-670-2409

305-670-3805 (Fax)

Internet: www.ycwa.org

This Bulletin was produced by the National Crime Prevention Council as part of the National Citizens' Crime Prevention Campaign under a cooperative agreement with the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The National Crime Prevention Council is a nonprofit organization that conducts demonstration and youth-based programs, produces publications and training materials on a variety of subjects, and manages the day-to-day activities of the National Citizens' Crime Prevention Campaign.

Points of view or opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, BJA, or the U.S. Department of Justice.

The National Youth Network, founded and managed by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, consists of diverse youth leaders from across the Nation who are sponsored by youth-serving organizations. The goal of the Network is to recognize and build upon the power and importance of youth leadership by uniting young people and adults, through communication and action, to enable youth organizations and nonaffiliated youth to have a positive, formidable impact in our communities and throughout our Nation.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.

U.S. Department of Justice

Office of Justice Programs

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Washington, DC 20531

Official Business

Penalty for Private Use \$300

PRESORTED STANDARD
POSTAGE & FEES PAID
DOJ/OJJDP
PERMIT NO. G-91

