

A NATIONAL STRATEGY TO PREVENT YOUTH VIOLENCE



Violence destroys quality of life and diminishes the freedom of individuals, families, and communities. Children cannot play if their neighborhoods and playgrounds are unsafe. Young people cannot learn and succeed in life if they are afraid to go to school or work. Communities cannot thrive if violence is increasing health care costs, decreasing property values, disrupting social services, and threatening the viability of businesses.

Violence affects every aspect of the lives of our nation's youth. Young people are both the victims and perpetrators of violence, with homicide being the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10 to 24. An average of 16 young people are murdered each day, and in 2007 more than 668,000 were treated in emergency departments for injuries sustained from violence. The seriousness of the situation has drawn the attention of the nation's mayors, who have deemed youth violence a public health crisis. According to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, "We can't arrest our way out of this problem. Prevention is the key to long-term success."

YOUTH VIOLENCE CAN BE PREVENTED

Youth violence is a complex public health problem, which necessitates a comprehensive approach. Resource limitations require communities to wisely invest in evidence-supported approaches. United and coordinated action is needed on the part of public health, education, justice, public safety, and human service systems and implemented with the support of community leaders, businesses, and faith-based organizations.

The Division of Violence Prevention within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Center for Injury Prevention and Control is the leader of the public health approach to youth violence prevention. CDC's approach is guided by the following principles:

- 1. The prevention of youth violence is cost effective, scientifically supported, and it works.** Numerous evidence-based programs and strategies have been developed that are effective in building youth's skills to avoid violence and in fostering relationships and environments that promote safety and health.
- 2. A comprehensive, public health approach to youth violence prevention increases our nation's chances to stop violence.** This approach includes monitoring youth violence; identifying factors that protect youth or place them at risk for violence; and developing, evaluating, and disseminating effective strategies.
- 3. Effective prevention strategies engage individuals, organizations, and agencies from multiple disciplines and sectors** that have a stake in preventing youth violence or are involved in efforts that reduce risk factors and enhance protective factors.
- 4. Youth violence prevention efforts should begin in early childhood and continue throughout adolescence and early adulthood,** and should address a range of risk and protective factors as young people develop.
- 5. Youth violence prevention efforts must address a wide range of individual, family, and community factors** that keep young people from reaching their full potential by implementing programs and policies that will build healthy environments that allow youth to thrive.
- 6. Youth violence prevention efforts must promote skill building** by fostering youth's development and use of problem solving, conflict resolution, relationship building, and emotional regulation skills.

FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

The CDC is developing *A National Public Health Strategy to Prevent Youth Violence*, aimed at reducing the perpetration of violence by youth ages 10 to 24. This approach, which includes evidence-informed programs, practices, and policies, includes the following themes and strategies:

Strengthen the Personal Capacity of Youth to Resist Violence

- **Social, emotional, and behavioral skill building strategies** that help youth develop healthy, peaceful relationships; enhance positive connections to home, school, and community; and establish or strengthen nonviolent beliefs and attitudes.
- **Youth engagement, development, and leadership strategies** that promote youth involvement in safe and structured opportunities that enable them to build their talents and interests, self-confidence, social relationships, and leadership potential.
- **Human service strategies** that ensure youth exposed to violence and trauma have opportunities to heal; and youth with social, emotional, behavioral, mental health, and substance abuse problems receive appropriate early intervention and treatment services.

Build and Support Positive Relationships between Youth and Adults

- **Family and school-based strategies** that promote good communication skills and safe, stable, and nurturing connections between youth and their parents, other caregivers, teachers, and school personnel, which are established at birth and continued through young adulthood.
- **Mentoring strategies** that provide young people with caring, supportive role models who can provide guidance and advocacy when needed; and create strong bonds between youth and adults in communities.

Promote Thriving, Safer, and More Connected Communities

- **Economic, vocational, and educational strategies** that make available and link youth with opportunities; that ensure youth who have been or are at risk of suspension or expulsion from school are directed to alternative programs and activities; and that help young people graduate from high school.
- **Community-oriented safety strategies** that protect and provide for the safety of all people in the community. Examples include crisis intervention, improved police-community relations, and violence prevention through environmental design.

Create a Safer and Healthier Society

- **Collaborative strategies** that engage multi-sector, multi-disciplinary, national, state, and local entities in developing, investing in, and implementing comprehensive, coordinated youth violence prevention strategies.
- **Evidence-informed policy strategies** that address disparities in wealth, educational and occupational opportunities, and access to services.

BUILDING AND IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGIES

The content of CDC's *National Public Health Strategy to Prevent Youth Violence* is being developed based upon the expertise of numerous stakeholders in youth violence prevention. CDC will be partnering with these groups to design the action steps for communities to implement a comprehensive approach to youth violence prevention. The implementation of these strategies will be aided by promoting connections within and across communities with tools and online resources and with technical assistance to identify and conduct evidence-informed youth violence prevention approaches and to evaluate these efforts.

For further information about the CDC's *National Public Health Strategy to Prevent Youth Violence* and youth violence, please contact: Corinne Ferdon, Ph.D., at CFerdon@cdc.gov and visit: www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/youthviolence/