

Best Practices of Youth Violence Prevention: A Sourcebook for Community Action

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Preface

We see it on the nightly news, read about it in the newspaper, hear about it from our children, and witness it firsthand—young people getting in fistfights and shoot-outs in our neighborhoods, in shopping malls, on the playground, and in school. It's disturbing and frightening, both for our nation's youth and for society as a whole.

If you've wanted to do something to stop this violence, then *Best Practices of Youth Violence Prevention: A Sourcebook for Community Action* is for you. We've pulled together the best practices known for four promising strategies to prevent youth violence, and we've organized them in a way that's easy to follow and use. And because it's often best to get expert advice "straight from the horse's mouth," we've included numerous resources to put you in touch with the people who have implemented these practices and seen the results.

Whether you're part of a grass-roots movement or involved with a large, established organization, you'll find this sourcebook to be a valuable asset to your youth violence prevention effort.

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Table of Contents

Introduction — 1•

Sourcebook Contents — 2•

Chapter 1: •

Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating an
Intervention—An Overview —3•

Chapter 2:•

Strategies to Prevent Youth Violence — 35•

Parent- and Family-Based Strategy — 39•

Home-Visiting Strategy — 79•

Social-Cognitive Strategy — 117•

Mentoring Strategy — 161•

Appendix A:•

Youth Violence Fact Sheet — 211•

Appendix B:•

Public Health Approach — 215•

Introduction

Violence among children and adolescents is a significant public health concern. In 1999,¹ violence claimed the lives of more than 3,200 Americans ages 19 and under—that’s an average of 9 deaths per day—making the homicide rate for young people in the United States the highest among developed countries. Homicide is the second leading cause of death among 15- to 19-year-olds and the third leading cause of death among children ages 10 to 14.

Highly publicized school shootings have sobered communities that may have believed they were immune to youth violence. Once viewed as a problem only in inner-city neighborhoods, youth violence is now perceived as a nationwide crisis, and communities are eager to find ways to stop it.

Experts in youth violence prevention do not have all the answers for solving this public health problem; we must do a lot more research and evaluation. But we know enough to offer the public some insight into what works to prevent violence by children and adolescents. This book—which builds on CDC’s 1993 publication *The Prevention of Youth Violence: A Framework for Community Action*—shares that insight.

We developed this book with input from individuals working to prevent youth violence and from individuals whose positions made them likely to play a role in violence prevention efforts. We interviewed teachers, school administrators, members of community-based organizations, employees and volunteers at social service agencies, health department personnel, program planners and practitioners, and researchers from universities across the country to find out what they would like to see in a sourcebook for preventing violence by children and adolescents. Their responses guided the content and shaped the format of this book.

In addition to gathering information from experts, we conducted an extensive review of the scientific literature on youth violence prevention to collect the most up-to-date information available in the field. This literature review provides the science base on which our recommendations for best practices rest.

¹The latest year for which data are available.

Sourcebook Contents

This sourcebook places at your fingertips the best knowledge available about several strategies designed to prevent youth violence. These strategies are among those with the strongest evidence base for reducing youth violence.

Chapter 1 reviews general principals of intervention planning, implementation, and evaluation. This chapter will be especially helpful to readers who are new to developing prevention efforts. For seasoned program planners, it will be a useful refresher.

Chapter 2, the “meat” of the sourcebook, builds on the experiences of others who have worked to prevent violence by children and adolescents. It discusses in depth the best practices of four key youth prevention strategies and documents the science behind those best practices. Also in Chapter 2, you will find resources for more information about programs that have used these practices. We encourage you to talk with the organizations listed and to review the publications described to find out what worked particularly well and identify potential pitfalls and challenges.

The sourcebook also includes two appendices:

- Appendix A provides a fact sheet on the problem of youth violence. This information will be useful if you need to formulate a convincing appeal for support from organizations and community leaders.
- Appendix B provides an overview of the public health approach, the process by which public health problems are identified and addressed—and the underlying reason for our developing this sourcebook.