EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS AND PROMISING PRACTICES
TO ADDRESS YOUTH VIOLENCE

The following is a list and short description of evidence-based programs and promising practices to address youth violence drawn from the literature and research base. Evidence-based programs are defined as an intervention, practice, or program that, through careful assessment and rigorous research, has been shown to be effective. Promising practices are defined as those built on evidence generated by multiple disciplines and a variety of methods, including findings from research and evaluation as well as case studies, expert opinions, or documented lessons learned from the field.

Evidence-Based Programs

- *Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)*: This therapy is administered individually or in groups, designed to make people more aware of their own thoughts, help them better understand the consequences of their actions and motivate them to adopt new strategies for both. Not all CBT are equally effective. Key drivers of success are focusing on high-risk offenders and including certain programs like anger management and interpersonal problem-solving. It is slightly more effective when combined with other services rather than as a stand-alone intervention. For example, the Chicago program Becoming A Man combines sports, youth engagement, positive masculinity training, and CBT. https://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/patients-and-families/cognitive-behavioral
- *Functional family therapy (FFT)*: This type of therapy is proven to address aggression and violence. Therapists provide intensive therapy to a youth's entire family in order to correct patterns of interaction that contribute to their poor behavior. Together kids and caregivers learn communication, conflict resolution, and problem-solving skills. A modified version called FFT-Gangs has been developed to address youth at risk of involvement in gangs or currently involved in gangs. https://www.fftllc.com/
- *Focused deterrence*: This is a violence reduction strategy in which carefully selected high-risk individuals receive concentrated law enforcement attention and, simultaneously, offers of concentrated social services to address their needs. The goal is to change the behavior and violent lifestyle of these individuals through direct persuasive communication and rigorous follow-up of these commitments. https://cebcp.org/evidence-based-policing/what-works-in-policing/research-evidence-review/focused-deterrence/

Promising Practices
- *Youth Violence Strategy/Vision Development*: Jurisdictions that have developed a youth violence reduction strategy have found the following factors to be key to

making progress. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/105303/a-research-based-practice-guide-to-reduce-youth-gun-and-gang-group-violence.pdf

- o Reducing and preventing youth violence requires a robust community-based plan that includes multiple strategies involving prevention, intervention and/or suppression, no single strategy alone will work. All stakeholder groups --- local government, law enforcement, schools, juvenile justice, service providers, community organizations -- should collaborate on the plan and work toward meeting the agreed upon goals.
- o The community-based plan should be based on a thorough assessment that specifically defines the youth violence problem and local context, the victims and perpetrators of violence, and the locations of violence.
- o Engaging the community is critical to success in violence reduction. This can be done by gathering community perspectives on violence reduction, specifically giving voice to those most impacted by violence and meaningfully including them in the decision-making process for addressing it.
- o Local government should have a formal role in coordinating antiviolence work, promoting community collaboration, and distributing funding and building the capacity of community organizations to do antiviolence work.
- o Attention and resources should be focused on the factors driving the violence including the people and places involved in violence.
- o Calibrate the relationship between law enforcement and non-police antiviolence work. This can be done by developing a clear understanding and delineation of roles, communicating and coordinating at the executive level, and communicating the purpose and value of non-police antiviolence interventions to all law enforcement.
- o Use suppression and enforcement precisely and sparingly, pairing them with more longer-term, supportive strategies for youth. Scale back focused enforcement and surveillance activities when youth reduce their risk through positive engagement in programs.

- *Street Outreach and Violence Interruption*: These programs support people at highest risk of involvement as a victim or perpetrator – or both – in violence. They acknowledge the capacity of people to make different choices and pursue different avenues for addressing and resolving conflict. They employ credible messengers and violence interrupters who are skilled in intervention and supporting people in their change journeys. They reach out to those involved in violence in their communities, build relationships, and work to support healing and address conflict through nonviolent means, and offer other forms of support such as help people find housing

or pursue education and employment opportunities. https://giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/On-the-Front-Lines-Executive-Summary-2.pdf

- *Relationship- and Trust-Building in High Violence Communities*: Cynicism and mistrust concentrate in communities experiencing high levels of crime and violence. Police should improve community relationships in these areas, including with youth, to gain legitimacy, cooperation and trust. If done well, community engagement helps agencies gain legitimacy specifically with marginalized groups and develop the collaborations and partnerships necessary for improving responses to community problems. Positive relationships and greater trust increase community willingness to cooperate and comply with police, leading to more successful investigations, greater case closures and less dangerous situations. (Abt, 2019) https://cebcp.org/evidence-based-policing/what-works-in-policing/research-evidence-review/community-policing/

- *Trauma Informed Care and Healing*: Many children and youth who live in neighborhoods with high levels of violence and gang activity are poly-victimized, meaning they have not only experienced trauma from violence in their neighborhoods but may have also been a victim of violence from child abuse, domestic violence, substance abuse, and/or forms of historical community trauma including discrimination and poor access to healthcare and employment opportunities. Experiencing trauma in childhood is strongly associated with delinquency, criminal and violent behavior in adolescence and adulthood. Trauma informed professionals and service agencies understand the connections between early adversity and the psychological and behavioral responses to it, they work to ameliorate the impact of trauma on development, and support and empower people to develop the skills and capacities to enable healing. https://www.juvenilejusticeresearch.com/sites/default/files/2020-08/GRYD%20Brief%205_Trauma-Informed%20Care%20within%20GRYD%20FCM%20services_6.2020.pdf

- *Key Factors When Working with High-Risk Youth*: Whether youth are currently involved in violence or might become violent in the future, these factors are key: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Jq0rIbOH7U
  - *Work with the family as a whole*: It is essential to work with a youth and their family; the family unit must be healthy in order for those inside it to thrive. Assess the entire family not just the youth, and identify and address underlying issues such as food insecurity, lack of housing or jobs, lack of internet access, etc. Work with youth and their families to develop a youth case plan that builds on strengths and assets. "Family" can be defined broadly, referring to parents, extended relations, or trusted caregivers.

https://www.lisc.org/media/filer_public/93/bd/93bd0261-e91b-450e-9ff1-14561435f7a5/ojjdp_violence_prevention_strategies_for_schools.pdf

https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/43085

- o *Promote attachment to school*: Education is extraordinarily important for positive youth development. Research shows low educational achievement is the most common trait among prison inmates. Keeping youth in school, fostering attachment to school, and completing a high school education are paramount.   https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/ecp.pdf https://johnjayrec.nyc/2020/11/09/av2020/
- o *Build a community of support for youth and families:* This can include places for youth recreation and referrals for services, training for parents of disruptive and delinquent youth, tutoring for students who are performing poorly in school, increasing adult supervision of students after school, providing interpersonal skills training to students to help resolve conflicts peacefully. https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/244146.pdf

- *Investment in High Violence Neighborhoods*: There is considerable research that indicates violence is spatially concentrated in high poverty neighborhoods and structural, place-based modifications may significantly decrease violence. Strategies focusing on the "root causes" of violence—especially accumulated structures of neighborhood poverty—can be implemented in specific geographic areas in ways that help to counter even decades of disinvestment, neglect, racist policies, and violence. By reshaping certain aspects of the physical environment—for example, fixing abandoned buildings, greening vacant lots, and lighting public spaces—we can reduce opportunities for violence, prevent the possession of illegal guns, lower rates of gun violence, and create sustained co-benefits such as reductions in stress, fear, and common nuisances. Recent research indicates that blighted neighborhood environments are strongly tied to gun violence in particular, and intervening upon this context and treating aspects of blight may produce lasting reductions. (Abt, 2019) https://johnjayrec.nyc/2020/11/09/av2020/
- *Public Education Campaigns.* Decades of research on public education campaigns for a range of behaviors such as drunk driving and wearing seat belts reveal that over time, campaigns can produce long-term, systemic behavioral change. These education campaigns rely on community members and organizations, public service announcements, and visual displays like billboards. For violence reduction, education campaigns can communicate antiviolence messages such as gun and group violence will not be tolerated, parents should lock up their guns to keep them from children and teens, or stop the shooting. They are usually paired with other violence reduction strategies such as focused deterrence, CURE Violence, or the US

Department of Justice's Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN). A well-designed public education campaign can make a positive impact on public opinion, target specific audiences, and be a cost-effective way of providing critical information to a large number of people.   https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh176/files/action/sec8.htm

- *Collaboration between Probation and Police*: If perpetrators and victims of violence are on probation or under other forms of supervision, police officers and probation officers can team together to visit the homes of young people at highest risk. This is called intensive supervision and is most effective when agencies collaborate to give strong messages to the probationer and their family members that the probationer is being watched while also supported in their effort to change behavior. (*Decker, Scott H., Pyrooz, David C., Densley, James A. On Gangs, Temple University Press, 2022.*) https://tupress.temple.edu/books/on-gangs

- *Violence Reduction Strategies for Schools*: There are several ways schools can support community-based violence interventions to make both school campuses and their surrounding communities safer places for all and better address youth living in high violence neighborhoods. https://www.lisc.org/media/filer_public/93/bd/93bd0261-e91b-450e-9ff1-14561435f7a5/ojjdp_violence_prevention_strategies_for_schools.pdf
    - *Safe Passage Programs*: Collaborative teams are formed e.g., school leadership, parent organizations, community partners, law enforcement, to identify hot spots of violence surrounding schools and locate reputable adults in those places to ensure that children arrive and depart school in a safe and timely manner. These adults interact with students at specific identified locations where students have been victimized in the past, or where students may not feel safe. Safe Passage teams may be placed at school entry and exit points, bus stops, nearby businesses and other places where students congregate. These consistent interactions allow the teams to develop relationships with students and their parents, engage with them in a supportive and non-punitive manner, serve as a deterrent to incidents of violence and if needed, intervene in and mediate potential conflicts to prevent incidents of violence. Microsoft Word - SRTS-Safe Passage Paper FINAL March 2015 (lacounty.gov)
    - *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports*: This is an evidence-based, school-wide strategy or framework for improving and integrating data, systems and practices effecting student outcomes. The framework aims to establish a social culture within schools in which children, as well as teachers and staff, expect and support appropriate behavior from one another – and thereby create school environments that are consistent, safe and positive. Schools share disaggregated school discipline data with all school

stakeholders creating opportunities to identify student challenges as well as specific locations on and around school campuses where violence may occur. PBIS helps reduce biases in developing strategies to address behaviors that may be rooted in community and/or cultural responses to poverty and lack of opportunity. It focuses on approaches centered on the child and their unique personal circumstances. This approach encourages schools to support children with intervention services rather than punitive measures such as suspensions, expulsions and strong discipline that are not likely to be effective. Schools can integrate community-based organizations into these efforts to provide services. https://www.pbis.org/

o *Collaboration with Credible Messengers*: This approach provides alternatives to supporting students with disciplinary infractions and/or disruptive school behavior. Community outreach workers can be used inside schools helping to support restorative approaches to violence and bullying. Outreach workers have deep relationships in the community and many have family members in the community schools. These connections give them access to information about violence or potential violence at the schools that school administrators may not have and they can bring to the schools the same services they provide high-risk individuals in the community -- trauma informed assistance, supportive counseling, crisis intervention assessment, mediation and referrals and resource information.
https://www.lisc.org/media/filer_public/93/bd/93bd0261-e91b-450e-9ff1-14561435f7a5/ojjdp_violence_prevention_strategies_for_schools.pdf

o *Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools*: This school-based, group and individual intervention uses cognitive-behavioral techniques. It is designed to reduce symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and behavioral problems as well as to improve functioning, grades and attendance, peer and parent support and coping skills. CBITS has been used with students in grades 5-12 who have witnessed violence or experienced traumatic life events, such as community and school violence, accidents and injuries, physical abuse and domestic violence.
https://traumaawareschools.org/index.php/learn-more-cbits/