

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS

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From America's Front Line Against Crime: A School and Youth Violence Prevention Plan

AS AN ORGANIZATION OF HUNDREDS OF POLICE CHIEFS, SHERIFFS, PROSECUTORS, CRIME SURVIVORS AND LEADERS OF POLICE OFFICER ORGANIZATIONS, we are determined to see that dangerous criminals are put behind bars. But anyone who thinks that jailing a criminal undoes the agony crime leaves in its wake hasn't seen crime up close.

America's anti-crime arsenal contains no weapons more powerful than the proven programs that help kids get the right start — like quality educational child care, youth development programs for the after-school and summer hours, child abuse prevention, and intervention programs proven to help get troubled kids back on track.

Yet today, inadequate funding for Head Start, educational child care, after-school youth development programs and counseling for troubled kids leaves millions of children at needless risk of becoming violent or delinquent teens and adult criminals — and leaves every American at needless risk of becoming a victim.

We call on all public officials to adopt a four-part plan to dramatically reduce crime and violence and adult crime, and help young people learn the skills and values they need to become good neighbors and responsible adults. While no plan can prevent every violent act, this common-sense plan — based on our experience and the latest research about what really works to fight crime — can make all of us safer.

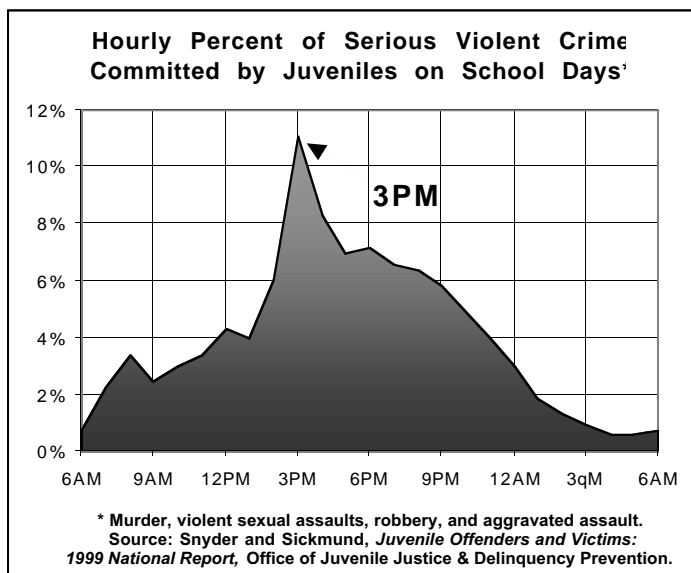
Four Steps to Dramatically Reduce School and Youth Violence

1. Assure all school-age children and teens access to after-school, weekend and summer youth development programs to shut down the "Prime Time for Juvenile Crime."

In the hour after the school bell rings, turning millions of children and teens out on the street with neither constructive activities nor adult supervision, violent juvenile crime suddenly *triples and*

prime time for juvenile crime begins. On school days, the peak hours for such crime are from 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM. These are also the hours when kids are most likely to become victims of crime.¹

They are the peak hours for teen sex, and being unsupervised after school doubles the risk that 8th-graders will smoke, drink alcohol or use drugs.²



Quality youth development programs can cut crime immediately and transform this Prime Time for Juvenile Crime into hours of academic enrichment, wholesome fun and community service. They protect both kids and adults from becoming victims of crime, and cut teen pregnancy, smoking, and drug use, while they help youngsters develop the values and skills they need to become contributing citizens. For example:

“When the peak hours of violent juvenile crime are between the end of school and 8:00 P.M., it’s just common sense to provide the after-school programs that give kids the values and skills they need to say ‘no’ to crime and violence.”

— Sheriff Patrick Sullivan (R-Arapahoe County, CO)

- When a public housing project intensively recruited youths to join in a new after-school program, *arrests among its teen residents plummeted to one-fourth of their previous level*, while those among the teens who lived in a nearby comparison project were actually going up by two-thirds.³
- High school freshmen boys randomly selected from welfare households to participate in the Quantum Opportunities after-school program were *only one-sixth as likely to be convicted of a crime* during the high school years as those not selected. Together, the boys and girls who participated in the program were *50% more likely to graduate high school on time*.⁴
- Young people who received a Big Brothers/Big Sisters mentor were *half as likely to begin illegal drug use or to hit someone* as applicants randomly assigned to a waiting list.⁵

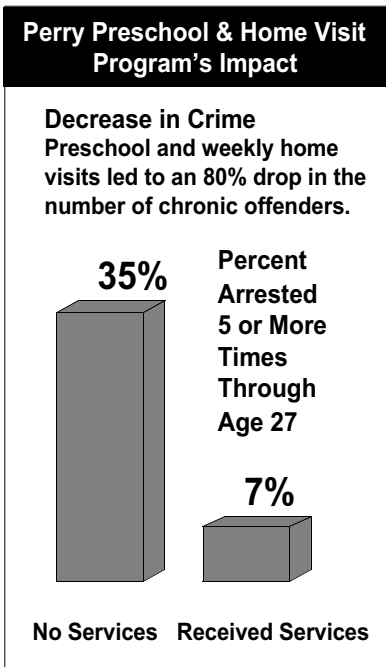
In short, failing to provide programs like these can multiply by as much as four times your family’s risk that at-risk kids will become delinquent.

“America’s fight against violence must begin in the high chair, not the electric chair. Anything less leaves America’s police fighting with one hand tied behind our backs.”

— George Sweat, Director, Office of Juvenile Justice (North Carolina): former Chief of Police, Winston-Salem (NC)

2. Assure all babies and preschool children access to the quality educational child care programs proven to cut crime.

Rigorous studies, hard experience, and brain pictures from modern medical equipment tell the same story: In the first few years of life, children’s intellects and emotions, and even their ability to feel concern for others — a prerequisite to “conscience”— are being permanently shaped. When parents are at work trying to make ends meet, programs providing nurturing, stimulating, educational child care for babies and toddlers can not only prepare children to succeed in school but also dramatically reduce crime.⁶ For example:



- In Ypsilanti, Michigan, low-income three- and four-year-olds randomly assigned to be in the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation’s preschool program were *only one-fifth as likely* to have become chronic lawbreakers at age 27, compared to similar children who did without this educational child care.⁷
- In Syracuse, at-risk infants and toddlers enrolled in a quality child development program, with parenting support for their mothers, were *only one-tenth as likely* as similar children to be delinquent ten years later.⁸

In other words, failing to make sure that at-risk kids have access to quality child care and development programs like these can multiply by five to ten times the risk that they will grow up to lead a life of crime. When millions of struggling parents are forced to leave their children in inadequate child care, we all pay a terrible price.

3. Help schools identify troubled and disruptive children at an early age, and provide children and their parents with the counseling and training that can help kids get back on track.

When elementary school children display disruptive behavior, it is a warning signal that it is time to start looking for the causes of the problem, and to provide the proven social skills training, counseling, and other help for the children and their families that can lead them back to a healthier path. For example:

- A Montreal study showed that providing disruptive first- and second-grade boys with services like these **cut in half** the odds that they would later be in special classes, rated highly disruptive by a teacher or by peers, or have been required to repeat a grade in school — all signs that the risk of future violence has been sharply reduced.⁹
- Five years after randomly selected disruptive, low-achieving seventh-grade students completed a three-year program involving behavioral therapy and rewards, they were only one-third as likely to have a juvenile record as those who did not receive these services.¹⁰

4. Improve deficient parenting and prevent child abuse and neglect by: a) Offering high-risk parents in-home parenting-coaching; and b) making sure child protective, foster care and adoption services have policies and enough well-trained staff to protect and heal abused and neglected children.

Being abused or neglected multiplies the risk that a child will grow up to be violent. Almost three million children are reported abused or neglected each year. Child protective and foster care services in most states lack adequate staff, and often the training or policy support, to protect children and to see that those who have been maltreated get the nurturing care and treatment needed to help them heal. We must also act *before* abuse takes place to expand parenting-coaching and family support programs that prevent children from being abused and neglected, prevent subsequent delinquency, and improve other outcomes for children. For example:

- The Prenatal and Early Infancy Project randomly assigned half of a group of at-risk mothers to receive visits by specially trained nurses who provide coaching in parenting skills and other advice and support. Rigorous studies show the program not only *reduced child abuse by 80%* in the first two years, but that fifteen years after the services ended, *these mothers had only one-third as many arrests, and their children were only half as likely to be delinquent.*¹¹

The Bottom Line: Investing in Kids Saves Lives and Money

When America fails to invest in its children and youth, we pay far more later — not just in lives and fear, but also in tax dollars. The federal treasury will actually have *more* money to dedicate to other uses a few years from now — whether for social security, paying off the accumulated national debt, or tax cuts — if we invest *today* in programs to help kids get the right start. For example:

- Economist Steven Barnett found that the High/Scope Foundation's Perry Preschool study *saved \$150,000 per participant in crime costs alone*. Even after subtracting the interest that could have been earned by investing the program's funding in financial markets, the project produced a *net savings of \$7.16* — including more than six dollars in crime savings — for every dollar invested.

"We could be saving thousands of lives — and sparing thousands of families unimaginable heartbreak — by investing up front in the proven early childhood care and youth development programs that can turn kids away from crime."

— Jean Lewis, President, National Organization of Parents of Murdered Children

“Early childhood and youth development programs can lead us to a stunning victory against violence. When these investments are proven to save lives and tax dollars, why shouldn't policy-makers provide the funding that will enable communities to get the job done?”

— former U.S. Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson

- Barnett estimates that the cost, including increased crime and welfare costs, of *failing* to provide at least two years of quality educational child care to low-income children is approximately \$100,000 per child. That's a total of about \$400 billion for all poor children now under age five.¹²
- A recent study by Professor Mark A. Cohen of Vanderbilt University estimates that for each high-risk youth prevented from adopting a life of crime, the country would *save \$1.7 million*.¹³
- A recent Rand Corporation report shows that, even without counting the savings to crime victims and society, the resulting *savings to government* alone from effective early childhood programs *exceeds by two to four times the cost of the programs*.¹⁴

Law Enforcement United in Calling for Crime-Prevention Investments in Kids

Who says these four steps are among our most powerful weapons to fight crime?

- The hundreds of law enforcement leaders and crime victims who make up FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS.
- Virtually every major national law enforcement organization — including the **Major Cities [Police] Chiefs' Organization**, the **Police Executive Research Forum**, the **National Sheriffs' Association**, and the **National District Attorneys' Association** — have adopted forceful calls for boosting critical crime prevention investments like these.
- In a George Mason University poll, 86 percent of police chiefs nationwide said, "expanding after-school and child care programs like Head Start will greatly reduce youth crime and violence." Nine out of ten chiefs agreed with the statement, "If America does not make greater investments in after-school and educational child care programs to help children and youth now, we will pay far more later in crime, welfare and other costs."¹⁵

“Police leaders know America's commitment to putting criminals in jail must be matched by its commitment to keeping kids from becoming criminals in the first place.”

— Los Angeles (CA) Chief of Police Bernard Parks

For citations of studies referred to above, visit www.fightcrime.org



Launched in 1996, FIGHT CRIME is led by hundreds of America's leading police chiefs, prosecutors, sheriffs, crime victims, and leaders of police officer organizations. Major funding for its operations is provided by:

William T. Grant Foundation* • Edna McConnell Clark Foundation • John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation • DeWitt Wallace Reader's Digest Fund* • David and Lucille Packard Foundation • Ford Foundation • Public Welfare Foundation • Naomi and Nehemiah Cohen Foundation • Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation • Rockefeller Family Fund • Woods Fund of Illinois • McCormick-Tribune Foundation • The Stern Family Fund • Nathan Cummings Foundation • Butler Family Fund • Irving B. Harris Foundation • Institute for Civil Society • Neisser Fund. • American Income Life Insurance Co. • New Prospect Foundation • William C. Graustein Memorial Fund

*Indicates that funding is for research dissemination.

Footnotes:

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