

# Investing in Kids Now Can Prevent Crime in the Future



## Acknowledgements

**Council for a Strong America** is a national, bipartisan nonprofit that unites five organizations comprised of law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, business executives, pastors, and prominent coaches and athletes who promote solutions that ensure our next generation of Americans will be successful, productive members of society.

### **Fight Crime: Invest in Kids**

Thousands of police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors and violence survivors protecting public safety by promoting solutions that steer kids away from crime

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## Who We Are

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids is a national, nonpartisan, anti-crime organization of over 5,000 law enforcement leaders and crime survivors. Our sheriffs, police chiefs, prosecutors, and crime survivors, armed with research, make the case for investments in evidence-based programs and policies that can cut crime and put kids on the path to success.

Our members know firsthand that one of the most effective ways to prevent crime is to provide young people with a foundation for success from their earliest years. From birth through high school, children need strong parents and effective programs and supports to grow up to reach their potential. The approaches listed below, based on the latest research about what really works, can make all of us safer.

## Four Approaches That Work

1. Make **high-quality early care and education** available to kids from birth to age five from families with low incomes.
2. Offer **voluntary parent coaching** to at-risk parents of young children through home visiting.
3. Provide effective **school day and afterschool programs** to improve school climate and keep kids on track.
4. Help kids who have had contact with the juvenile justice system by providing them and their parents **effective interventions** to steer them away from crime.

## 1. Make high-quality early care and education available to kids from birth to age five from families with low incomes

Law enforcement leaders know that giving kids the right start in life can prevent later crime, as shown by several rigorous studies. In the first few years of life, children's intellect, emotions, and their ability to develop concern for others are building the foundation upon which their later success or failure will greatly depend. Voluntary early education and care for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers can put kids on the path towards success and steer them away from later crime. For example:

- **Chicago's publicly funded Child-Parent Centers** have served over 100,000 three- and four-year-olds since 1967. Researchers followed a sample of participants up until age 28, and found that children who did not participate were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18. Those who

participated had a 29 percent increase in high school graduation rate.<sup>1</sup>

- A recent study of **Oklahoma's universal pre-K program** found the program decreased the likelihood that black children were later charged with a misdemeanor or felony crime at age 18 or 19.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Offer parent coaching to at-risk parents of young children through home visiting

Approximately 678,000 children are abused or neglected in this country each year, which has been found to increase the likelihood of later involvement in crime.<sup>3</sup> To stop child abuse before it starts, we need to provide disadvantaged parents with home visiting programs.

- **The Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP)** provides low-income families with voluntary visits from specially trained nurses who offer coaching in parenting skills and provide emotional support. Beginning during the mother's pregnancy and continuing until the child's second birthday, parents learn to manage stress, understand their newborns' health and nutrition needs, identify the signs of problems, and find resources such as doctors and child care help. Rigorous studies show that the children served by the program were half as likely to be abused and neglected.<sup>4</sup>

Home visiting has also been shown to save nearly \$5,000 over the course of the child's life, through reduced crime and healthcare costs.<sup>5</sup> NFP is expected to significantly reduce welfare spending among participants who enrolled in the program from 1996-2013 by a total of 3 billion dollars in savings by 2031. By comparison, NFP will have cost our nation roughly \$1.6 billion during this time frame, thus the program is estimated to yield \$1.4 billion cost savings nationwide.<sup>6</sup>

“High-quality early learning programs provide kids the foundation they need to grow up to lead productive lives, free of crime.”



**Julia R. Bates**  
Prosecutor,  
Lucas County (OH) Prosecutor's Office

### 3. Provide effective in-school and afterschool programs to school-age children and youth to help keep them on track

Bullying and harsh school discipline systems have been shown to negatively impact youth in both the short- and long-term. At the same time, juvenile crime peaks nationwide in the hours immediately after school, from 2 to 6 PM.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, we can help children steer clear of crime by promoting: 1) effective programs during school hours, especially those that reduce bullying and improve school climate, and 2) high-quality afterschool programs.

- Being bullied in school is positively associated with substance use, and bullies themselves have been found to have a 3.5 times higher likelihood of later having at least one conviction than non-bullies or victims, and a six times increased likelihood of committing at least one violent crime later in life.<sup>8</sup> The Olweus bullying prevention program (OBPP) is one effective intervention to mitigate these outcomes, and has been proven to reduce both instances of being bullied and bullying others.<sup>9</sup>
- The School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) program is a three-tier system for encouraging positive behavior and improving school climate.<sup>10</sup> All students are taught expectations for their behavior (Tier 1). For students who are not successful in Tier 1, more focused, intensive supports are provided in small groups (Tier 2). For the small number of children who are still not able to succeed, Tier 3 offers intensive, individual supports. Studies have shown that SWPBIS reduces suspensions and increases perceived school safety, earning it an “effective” rating from the National Institute of Justice.<sup>11</sup>

- One meta-analysis of afterschool programs across the country found nearly 3 in 5 students who attended such programs had improved behavior in and outside of the classroom, and also performed better in math and reading, had higher GPAs, and were more likely to earn credits toward graduation.<sup>12</sup>

### 4. Help youth who have had contact with the juvenile justice system by providing them and their parents effective interventions

Many children who exhibit behavior problems and are at higher risk of becoming involved in crime later in life can be identified at an early age and helped:

- Becoming a Man is an afterschool program for disadvantaged males aged 15-24 that helps them navigate difficult

“Afterschool programs have a positive impact on young people’s lives, and they target the time of day when kids are most likely to get mixed up in crime.”



**Walter A. McNeil,**  
Sheriff, Leon County (FL)



circumstances that threaten their future. Through large-scale randomized studies, this program was found to reduce arrests by 28 to 35 percent and reduce violent crime by 45 to 50 percent.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, this program increased participants' school engagement and raised graduation rates by an estimated 5 to 9 percentage points<sup>14</sup>

Many youths who have already had contact with the juvenile justice system can get back on track with the right help:

- A few intensive family therapy programs, such as the Multisystemic Therapy or Functional Family Therapy, provide well-tested strategies to the parents or foster parents and work with the youth themselves to reduce problem behaviors.

Research shows that new arrests of youths in these programs have been cut by as much as half compared to similar youths in families not receiving this assistance.<sup>15</sup>

## **Pay Now or Pay Later**

When our country fails to invest effectively in its children, all Americans pay the price—in taxes for criminal justice costs, costs to business, and costs to the victims. Worse, some children and adults will pay with their lives. Investing now in what works not only saves lives and protects Americans, it saves money:

- Researcher Mark Cohen estimated that the average value of preventing a baby from growing up to become a youth who drops out of school, uses drugs and goes on to engage in criminal behavior is at least \$2.5 million per individual<sup>16</sup>

**“We need strong investments in high-quality programs that keep kids on the path towards success so they won’t end up in the backseat of our squad cars as adults.”**



**Art Acevedo**  
Chief of Police,  
Miami (FL) Police Department

## **Who says these approaches are among our most powerful weapons to fight crime?**

The over 5,000 law enforcement leaders and crime survivors who are members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids. Major law enforcement and crime survivor organizations who have endorsed our call to fight crime by investing in kids: The International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National Sheriffs' Association, the National District Attorneys Association, the National Association of Attorneys General, the Fraternal Order of Police, the National Organization for Victim Assistance, and dozens of other national and state law enforcement organizations across America. Helping kids get the right start in life will save money, build a stronger America, and protect our communities. It is time to invest in what works.

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