

# Investing in Kids Now Can Prevent Crime and Violence 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 victims, 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 productive lives.

Our members know firsthand that there are several critical moments during a child's life that can lead him or her down a path of crime. From birth through high school, children—particularly children from disadvantaged families—need strong parents and effective programs and supports to grow up to be good neighbors and responsible adults. While we cannot prevent every violent act, 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 disadvantaged families with kids from birth to age five.
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 reduce crime.
4. Identify and help troubled and delinquent kids by providing them and their parents **effective interventions** to steer them away from crime.

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

Law enforcement leaders know that giving kids the right start in life can prevent later violence and 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 that a child will later commit crime.<sup>3</sup> To stop child abuse before it starts, we need to provide at-risk parents with home visiting programs.

- **The Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP)** provides at-risk 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, 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>
- Restorative Justice focuses on repairing the harm caused by conflict by bringing together the harmed, those who caused the harm, and the community in a circle to respectfully share their perspectives, and concerns.<sup>10</sup> The program has been found to result in decreased suspension rates, particularly for students of color, as well as reductions in the number of students who were chronically absent and student dropout rates.<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. Identify and help troubled and delinquent youth by providing them and their parents effective interventions that help avoid a life of crime

Many children who are overly aggressive and at higher risk of becoming involved in violent crime later in life can be identified at an early age and helped:

- Becoming a Man is an afterschool program for minority males aged 15-24 that helps them navigate difficult circumstances that threaten their future. Through large-scale randomized studies, this program was found to reduce arrests by 28 to 35 percent



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."



**Benny Napoleon**  
Sheriff,  
Wayne County (MI) Sheriff's Office

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 are already offenders can become productive citizens 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 of serious juvenile offenders and work with the young offenders themselves to reduce kids' problem behaviors. Research shows that new arrests of youths in these programs have been cut by as much as half compared to similar troubled 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 found 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 become a career criminal is at least \$2.5 million per individual<sup>16</sup>

### **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.

**“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,  
Houston (TX) Police Department

## Endnotes

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