

WORKING WITH FAMILIES TO PROMOTE POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND PREVENT YOUTH VIOLENCE

The Chicago Center for Youth Violence Prevention (CCYVP)

YOUTH VIOLENCE



PREVENTION CENTERS

“I think it’s a similar story about communities as it is about families. It’s about accessing and elevating the strengths that already exist. It’s certainly not the case that there isn’t a need for resources and services. But I think we underestimate the human capital that exists within families and with communities.”

— Dr. Deborah Gorman-Smith

Principal Investigator

The Chicago Center for Youth Violence Prevention (CCYVP) uses research to understand the causes and consequences of youth violence. This information guides prevention activities to reduce youth violence by promoting family-focused programs that provide support to residents in Chicago communities.

Strong families are essential to preventing youth violence. But families often need some support, particularly those living in neighborhoods experiencing concentrated disadvantage and high rates of violence.

The CCYVP is unique because its’ work is

based on decades of research about how to strengthen families through programs that provide opportunities for information exchange, knowledge and skills-building, and practice. CCYVP has supported families in two distinct ways:

1. Building informal networks of support for parents who may be experiencing similar disadvantages.
2. Providing a positive experience for people who seek support and assistance so that they are more likely to reach out for help as needed in the future.



Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention
National Center for Injury
Prevention and Control

NEIGHBORHOOD MATTERS

Much of CCYVP's research focuses on the intersection between neighborhoods and families, emphasizing that where a person lives matters in terms of what it takes to promote healthy youth development. Networks of support are particularly important in highly stressed neighborhoods. Families and children in these neighborhoods are likely to face more daily challenges including access to healthy food, parents working multiple jobs, under-employment or unemployment, lack of affordable childcare, unstable housing, lack of transportation, lack of quality education, and community violence. Therefore, additional supports and resources to help alleviate some of the burden on these families is an important strategy to promote healthy families and youth.

“We’re using research to change the narrative about how families who live in high-burden neighborhoods are viewed.”

— Dr. Deborah Gorman-Smith
Principal Investigator

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

CCYVP recognizes that there is no single or one-size-fits-all approach to eliminating youth violence because it is a multi-faceted problem. As such, CCYVP aims to provide a multi-faceted solution, including family-focused programs about improving family relationships and parenting, as these are among the strongest predictors of risk for violent behavior.

CCYVP's past family-centric initiatives focused on strengthening families of youth at high risk for violence. The goals of the programs are to build informal networks of support for families and provide opportunities to learn from each other. Families attend multiple sessions in order to build relationships. Key examples of the types of programs designed and tested by CCYVP include¹:

Schools and Families Educating Children (SAFE Children): Intended for first-graders, the program focuses on helping parents give their children a healthy start in school. It teaches parents how to get more involved in their children's school; develop consistent discipline and monitoring practices; improve family relationships; and use other parents and families for information and support.



Guiding Responsibility and Expectations in Adolescents Today & Tomorrow (GREAT Schools & Families):

As violence typically increases during adolescence, this program is designed to support families of middle school youth who were nominated by their teachers as being both at risk for aggressive behavior and socially influential among their peers. Designed to reduce school violence, the program focuses on promoting children's academic and social competence, improving parental skills such as effective discipline techniques, and promoting parental involvement with schools.

The overarching lesson from from these programs is that **we all benefit when families have the tools to support themselves and the healthy development of their children.**

CCYVP'S IMPACT

Research shows that one way to have sustained impact on limiting risk for serious and violent behavior is to work with and provide support to families.

Previous Evaluation Findings

CCYVP has already achieved success in reducing youth violence and increasing pro-social behaviors, as evidenced by the impact of past family initiatives:



By the time the first graders whose families participated in **SAFE Children** entered high school, they were **50 percent more likely to be on track for graduation and half as likely to have had a violent incident in school**, compared with a control group of students who did not participate in the program¹.



Prior evaluations of the **GREAT Families** program showed that participants saw relative benefits in family cohesion and family problem solving. The **GREAT Families** program also resulted in **reductions in aggressive behavior** among the targeted participants and the overall student population^{2,3}.

The overarching lesson from these programs is that everyone benefits when families have the tools to support themselves and the healthy development of their children. Another lesson is that engaging families who live in challenging environments is difficult and family programs should be considered for inclusion in a comprehensive strategy for youth violence prevention.

CCYVP seeks to disseminate lessons learned and successes from their family-focused programming so that similar communities throughout the United States can apply the best-available evidence to their youth violence prevention approach.



“My vision is that ten years from now the community looks really different - we don’t have a 40% unemployment rate, there’s adequate housing, kids are graduating in the 90% rate instead of the 60% or 70%, families are receiving needed mental health and social services, and that we have significant reductions in violence. That’s what we hope to happen.”

— Dr. Deborah Gorman-Smith

Principal Investigator

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1. Tolan, P., Gorman-Smith, D., & Henry, D. (2004). Supporting families in a high-risk setting: proximal effects of the SAFEChildren preventive intervention. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology, 72*(5), 855.
 2. Multisite Violence Prevention Project. (2013). Targeting high-risk, socially influential middle school students to reduce aggression: universal versus selective preventive intervention effects. *Journal of research on adolescence, 24*(2), 364-382.
 3. Multisite Violence Prevention Project. (2009). The ecological effects of universal and selective violence prevention programs for middle school students: a randomized trial. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology, 77*(3), 526-42.

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ssa.uchicago.edu/CCYVP

Visit CDC’s Youth Violence Prevention Center:

cdc.gov/violenceprevention/yvpc/