

Creating Protective Community Environments to Support Healthy Youth Development and Prevent Youth Violence



YV
PC

YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION CENTERS

For youth to reach their full health and human potential, they need safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments. Not all youth have an opportunity for this. One way that CDC is supporting the healthy development of youth is through the **National Academic Centers of Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention (YVPCs)**.

YVPCs are applying innovative approaches to reduce youth violence across the nation. Specifically, YVPCs are:

- using effective violence surveillance tools to monitor trends in youth violence;
- partnering with community organizations to build capacity to prevent violence;
- conducting interdisciplinary research to rigorously evaluate prevention strategies; and
- developing community approaches for youth violence prevention that are scalable and can inform national prevention efforts.

Youth violence is preventable. Prevention begins with an understanding of the factors that increase risk or protect youth from violence. One framework for understanding these risks – and how to reduce them – is the social-ecological model.

THE SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL MODEL AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGIES

The social-ecological model considers individual, relationship, community, and societal factors and how they interact and make violence more likely to occur. Prevention strategies that act across multiple levels of the model at the same time are more likely to reduce violence and sustain reductions over time.

Prevention strategies at the community and societal levels have the potential to reach more people and may be more cost-effective and sustainable than individual and relationship-level prevention strategies. However, there is a gap in the evidence about effective approaches to reduce community-level risk factors for youth violence. The YVPCs are addressing this gap.



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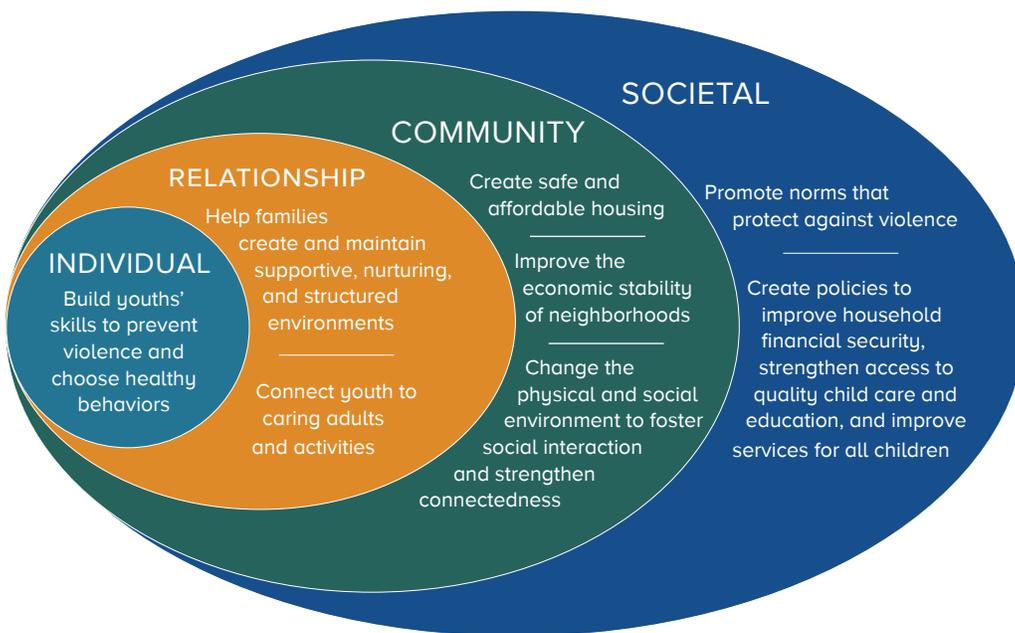
WHY THE FOCUS ON COMMUNITY-LEVEL PREVENTION?

Strategies implemented by YVPCs are focused on prevention activities that can have **community-level** impacts on youth violence. Community-level prevention strategies focus on **changing the community conditions that increase or buffer against risk for violence**. Some of the neighborhood conditions that increase risk for violence include poverty, crowded housing, residential instability, income inequality, high rates of unemployment, the number and location of alcohol outlets, low civic engagement, and lack of access to services and social support.

Current evaluation efforts focus on the impact of community-level prevention strategies on the conditions that support healthy development of youth and prevent youth violence. These conditions include:

- economic investment in local neighborhoods;
- safe and affordable housing;
- neighborhood conditions that foster social interaction, strengthen connectedness, increase shared trust among residents, and improve safety; and
- social norms that promote community pride and positive cultural identity.

Additionally, improving community conditions has the benefit of addressing multiple forms of violence beyond youth violence.



How is a community-level strategy different from a community-based strategy??

Community-based strategies: are implemented in a community setting but seek to change individual, peer, other proximal relationships, or family factors.

Community-level strategies: seek to change community conditions that increase or buffer against the risk for violence, particularly the social, economic, and environmental characteristics of neighborhood, school, workplace, and other organizational settings.



Community-level prevention can help us change the context in which youth develop. It can also help us achieve important reductions in all forms of violence and impact a greater number of people. However, we also need to consider how these contexts are shaped by a wider set of societal factors, including educational, economic, and social policies. Additionally, we need to address how social systems and structures prevent some people from reaching their fullest potential.

Strategies that focus on the community-level such as strengthening household financial security, providing quality childcare and education early in life, ensuring livable wages, and other work-family supports are important to address the contexts where youth live. Addressing these risk factors and providing protective factors foster safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for all children and youth. Community-level prevention strategies not only improve the conditions in which children and youth are born, grow, work, live, and age but can also prevent violence from occurring in the first place.

WHAT KINDS OF COMMUNITY-LEVEL STRATEGIES DO THE YVPCs USE?



Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center (MI-YVPC): Community Engagement & Revitalization

MI-YVPC partners with community members and organizations to address neighborhood conditions that increase the risk of violence. One of their strategies is to improve the safety of neighborhoods by turning vacant properties into clean, attractive, well-lit spaces where neighbors can have positive interactions.

Why it works: This community-level strategy applies the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) to promote healthy youth outcomes. By working with residents to create safe spaces and improve their appeal and use, communities can improve neighborhood conditions. In turn, this strengthens positive social interactions and creates long-term change to the physical environment.



Youth Violence Prevention Research Center at the University of Louisville (UofL YVPRC): “Pride, Peace, Prevention” Social Norming Campaign

The goal of the campaign is to stimulate community dialogue to create new, positive social norms to prevent violence. These new social norms promote community pride, positive racial identity, and nonviolent solutions to conflict. The campaign uses social media, TV and radio ads, bus shelter signs, and billboards to communicate messages and imagery related to Black history and cultural pride.

Why it is innovative: UofL YVPRC engages youth as agents of change in their community. Through a social norms approach, youth are influencing how violence is perceived in the community and helping to change the norms of the broader community. This approach also builds youths’ capacity to address social issues and the root causes of community violence, including historical and structural racism.



WANT TO LEARN MORE?

YVPCs are leading the way to find innovative, community-level solutions to promote healthy youth development and prevent youth violence across the nation.

To learn more about the YVPCs and their work, visit [cdc.gov/violenceprevention/YVPC/](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/YVPC/)

