

# Youth Violence

**Communities, schools and programs should be safe places for children and youth.** However, sometimes children bully, fight, are aggressive, or even cause physical destruction or assault others. At those times, youth-serving professionals must protect the victims and address the youth perpetrators, taking steps to prevent further violence.

Violence is the act of purposefully hurting someone; in addition to causing physical harm, violence impacts the psychological and social well-being of both the victim and perpetrator, especially when youth are involved.<sup>1</sup> Youth violence comes in many forms and includes a wide range of behaviors. Examples include bullying, physical fighting, fire setting, intentional destruction of property, sexual assault, gun violence and homicide.<sup>2</sup>

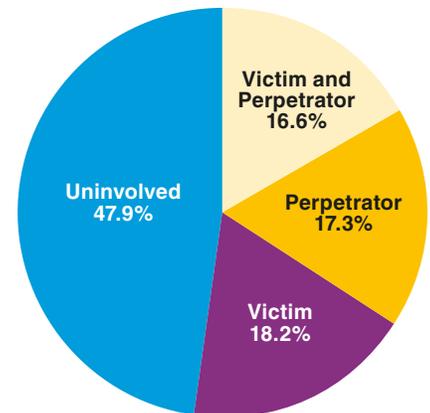
## Prevalence

**Nationally, more than half of young people ages 10-17 are involved with violence and delinquency (52.4%), either as a perpetrator, a victim, or both.** Slightly less than half of young perpetrators of violence also are victims (49.4%).<sup>3</sup>

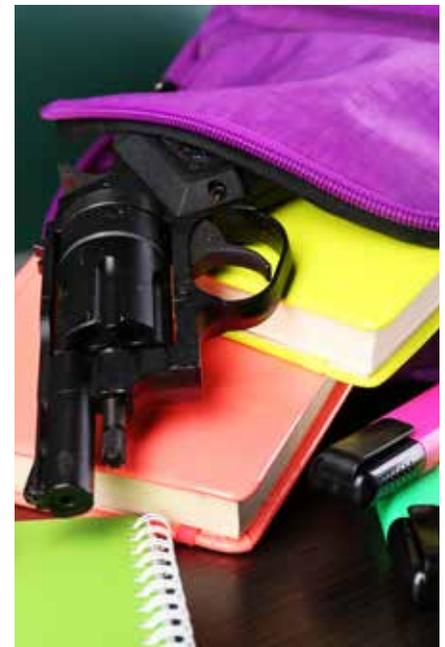
- Parents report that 1 in 5 Indiana children ages 6-11 at least sometimes bully or are cruel or mean to others.<sup>4</sup>
- 29 percent of Indiana high school students were involved in a physical fight at least once in the past year.<sup>5</sup>
- 3.9 percent of Indiana high school students had injuries from a fight that were severe enough they had to be treated by a doctor or nurse.<sup>6</sup>
- 1 in 20 Indiana high school students report carrying a weapon such as a gun, knife or club to school in the last month.<sup>7</sup>
- In Indiana, 11.3 percent of high school students report being hit, slapped or physically hurt on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend.<sup>8</sup>
- Many adults who have experienced intimate partner violence and/or stalking, first experienced it between ages 11 and 17 (22.4% among women and 15.0% among men who had experienced dating violence).<sup>9</sup>

In 2014, there were 15,350 juvenile delinquency cases in Indiana, and 743 juveniles were committed to the department of correction.<sup>10</sup> Of juveniles in correctional facilities in Indiana, 33.5% were committed because of a violent offense, and on average, juveniles confined for a violent offense stayed in a facility for 9.4 months.<sup>11</sup>

Youth Involvement in Violence and Delinquency



Source: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention



- As of July 1, 2015, the four juvenile corrections facilities in Indiana housed 431 youth, and another 56 youth were on parole.<sup>12</sup>

In the most severely violent cases, youth commit homicide. In 2013, Indiana youth ages 12-17 committed 20 homicides. Victims of these homicides varied in age from 12 to older than 50 years of age, and most of the homicides were committed as part of a group rather than one teen acting alone (75.0%).<sup>13</sup>

- 65.0 percent of homicides committed by Indiana teens were committed by black males.<sup>14</sup>
- Of homicides committed by Indiana teens, half of the victims were white, and the other half were black.<sup>15</sup>
- Firearms were used in three quarters of homicides by youth under age 18 in Indiana (76% between 2008 and 2013), followed by knives, personal (hands, fists, feet) and blunt objects.<sup>16</sup>

**Homicides Committed by Youth Ages 12 to 17 by Number of Offenders, Indiana: 2008-2013**



Source: Easy Access to FBI's Supplementary Homicide Reports

## Gang Violence

**Between 2007 and 2012, the number of U.S. gangs increased by 8 percent, the number of gang members increased by 11 percent, and gang-related homicides increased by more than 20 percent.** This increase in gang activity occurred mostly in areas with large populations, while the prevalence rate of gang activity among smaller cities declined to its lowest rate in more than a decade.

- According to the School Survey on Crime and Safety, sixteen percent of U.S. public schools reported that gang activities had occurred during the school year.<sup>17</sup>
- According to the FBI, there are 64 gangs with a presence in Indiana, and many of these gangs involve youth.<sup>18</sup>

Youth who are involved in gangs typically start considering gang membership between ages 12 and 14, and those who join do so around age 15. Despite the perceived benefits of joining a gang, youth who are involved in gangs are more likely to commit crimes, be victims of violence, and have alcohol or other drug problems than their non-gang-affiliated peers. Young gang members also are less likely than their peers to graduate from high school or find stable employment.

- It is more common for boys to be involved in gangs than girls, but girls who are in gangs are more vulnerable to sexual victimization than their non-gang-affiliated peers.<sup>19</sup>

Signs of gang involvement include displaying gang symbols—including wearing specific colored clothing, getting tattoos, or using hand signals or graffiti on books or lockers as a form of communication. Other signs include changing friends; losing interest in school and family; truancy; drug and alcohol use; carrying weapons or large amounts of cash; non-accidental physical injuries; and getting arrested. However, not all youth displaying these signs are gang members.<sup>20</sup>

## Top Five Reasons Youth Cite for Joining a Gang

1. Earning money
2. Increasing their status
3. Showing family, neighborhood or cultural pride
4. Gaining protection
5. Pressure from friends to join

## Risk Factors of Youth Violence

**Children who act out violently are often said to be exhibiting externalizing behaviors—disruptive and harmful behaviors directed at people and/or things.** These behaviors can start as early as age two or occur solely during adolescence.<sup>21</sup>

Youth who act violently may do so for a number of reasons. They may be trying to release anger or frustration when they don't know how else to express their emotions; they may be retaliating against someone who has hurt them; or they may be using violence to manipulate others to get something they want. In fact, many youth who perpetrate violence do so in response to their experiences with violence in their families, peer groups, communities.<sup>22</sup>

Certain individual, family and community factors can make youth more vulnerable to perpetrating violence. The absence or inverse of many of these risk factors in a child's life creates a buffer, serving as a "protective factor" against youth violence. The following risk factors increase the likelihood that a young person will engage in violence.

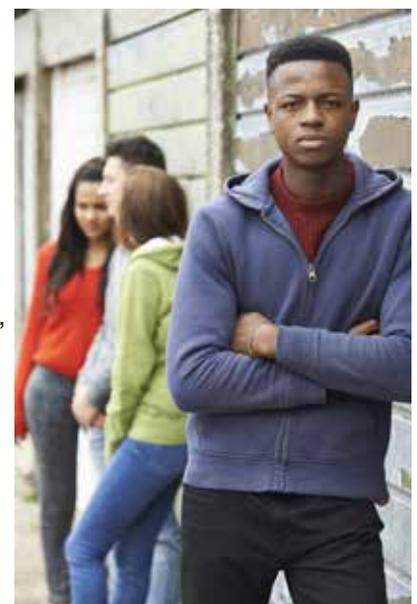
Risk Factors for Youth Violence		
Individual Factors	Family Factors	Community Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Past violent victimization</li> <li>• Early aggressive behavior</li> <li>• Poor behavioral control/hyperactivity</li> <li>• Antisocial behavior</li> <li>• Lack of guilt or empathy</li> <li>• Drug or alcohol abuse</li> <li>• Exposure to family conflict and violence</li> <li>• Exposure to violence in media</li> <li>• Having been a victim of bullying</li> <li>• Difficulty controlling feelings, especially anger</li> <li>• Major mental illness</li> <li>• Parental substance abuse or history of crime</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low parental involvement</li> <li>• Low emotional attachment to parents</li> <li>• Inconsistent disciplinary practices</li> <li>• Poor parental supervision and monitoring</li> <li>• Large family size</li> <li>• Presence of firearms in the home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Association with delinquent peers</li> <li>• Peer rejection</li> <li>• Low school commitment/ involvement</li> <li>• High-crime neighborhoods</li> <li>• Socially disorganized neighborhoods</li> <li>• High concentration of poor residents</li> <li>• Gangs and easy access to firearms</li> </ul>

*Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention*

## Mental Health

**Mental health issues also can contribute to youth violence.** Certain behavioral disorders, such as Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) and Conduct Disorder (CD), are defined by defiant, aggressive or violent behavior towards others.<sup>23</sup> Youth with a conduct disorder often are mislabeled as delinquent, rather than mentally ill. A child should be referred to a mental health professional if the defiant behavior creates a major disturbance at home, school, work or with peers.<sup>24</sup>

- In Indiana, 1 in 19 children ages 2-17 currently have a diagnosis of ODD or CD (5.3%), and another 1.0 percent had the condition at some point but do not currently.<sup>25</sup>
- Indiana children ages 6-11 are more likely to be diagnosed with ODD or CD (8.2%) than younger (2.5%) or older (4.2%) children.<sup>26</sup>
- Approximately 50 to 70 percent of U.S. juvenile offenders have a diagnosable behavioral health disorder.<sup>27</sup>
- If a child with ODD spends time with delinquent friends, he/she is more likely to engage in violent behavior.<sup>28</sup>



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## How to Help Perpetrators of Violence

### **Addressing violence in programs, classrooms and communities**

**begins with prevention.** In a school or program setting, one way to prevent violence is to foster a safe and caring climate where all adults—including teachers, administrators, counselors, and other staff members—are encouraged to model and reinforce positive behavior and anti-bullying messages.<sup>34</sup>

Programs that seek to address youth violence directly should do so early, often and appropriately. The earlier programs are presented to children, the greater impact they can have on youth behaviors.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, long-lasting programs—defined as those that deliver at least 30 sessions—are the most successful at decreasing violent behaviors.<sup>36</sup> Lastly, programs are most effective when they are culturally and linguistically appropriate for the families they serve.<sup>37</sup> Other best practices for programs seeking to reduce violent behavior among youth are below:

### **Reduce Risk Factors and Increase Protective Factors**

**Working to reduce or eliminate risk factors in the lives of at-risk youth can help prevent violent behaviors.** Risk factors to address include exposure to individual, relationship, community and societal violence,<sup>38</sup> including violence in the home and in media.<sup>39</sup>

Additionally, protective factors can serve as a buffer for youth from the risks of becoming violent. Some of these protective factors that youth-serving adults can impact include:<sup>40</sup>

- School or program climates with intensive supervision, clear rules, consistent negative reinforcement in response to aggression, and engagement of parents and teachers
- Involvement in prosocial activities
- Connectedness to positive adult relationships
- Highly developed social skills
- The ability to make and act upon realistic plans

### **Practice Emotion Management and Empathy**

**When children are taught to communicate effectively, they are better able to resolve conflicts and cooperate with their peers without resorting to violence.**<sup>41</sup> Effective programs for reducing violence teach emotion management, interpersonal and social problem-solving skills, and how to accept consequences for their actions.<sup>42</sup>

For serious offenders of violent crime, intervention programs that encourage participants to understand and role play from others' perspectives also have proven effective.<sup>43</sup> One study found that helping youth positively develop their maturity, especially as they transition to adulthood, can help them prevent or outgrow delinquent behaviors.<sup>44</sup>

Structured programs that focus on behavioral and skills-oriented interventions have been shown to be more effective than counseling and other less-structured programming.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, community programs that focus on providing services to individual youth are more effective than those instituting sweeping penalties for juvenile crime and violence.<sup>46</sup>



### **Media and Video Games** **Often, violent behavior in youth is linked to violence portrayed in media or video games.**

Because children learn by observing, imitating and adopting behaviors, media and video game content can influence behavior—both positively and negatively. Young children<sup>29</sup> and children with emotional, behavioral, learning or impulse control problems may be more easily influenced by video or TV violence.<sup>30</sup>

Research on video games has shown that exposure to prosocial games can increase prosocial attitudes and behavior.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, exposure to violent games is related to decreased empathy and increased aggressive behavior.<sup>32</sup> Other research has found that children exposed to violent media may become “immune” or numb to violence, accept violence as a way to solve problems, identify with violent characters, or even imitate the violence they observe.<sup>33</sup>



### **Involve Families**

**Involving parents in programs to reduce violence, bullying and violent behaviors can be helpful to youth.** Parent education, encouraging parents to speak to kids about bullying, and sending guides

home to parents with instructions on how to reinforce what children are learning in program sessions are all ways to engage parents in violence reduction programs.<sup>47</sup> In situations where parents and families also are at risk for violence, teaching effective communication, discipline, supervision and limit-setting skills, as well as taking part in family therapy have been shown to reduce both youth violence and youth victimization.<sup>48</sup>

### **Ask for Help**

**Adults who work with youth must know when to ask for help in responding to violent behaviors.** It is important for adults to act quickly once a child begins to show signs of violence. Contact police immediately if a child is a threat to him/herself or others. If a child needs additional support, contact a mental health professional or call 211 “Connect to Help” for referrals to nearby services.

## **IYI Resources**

### **The latest data is at your fingertips with IYI’s Data Center.**

Search statistics and gather data to improve your program planning and grant writing or, request customized data. Go to [www.iyi.org/data](http://www.iyi.org/data).

Get the most comprehensive overview of children’s well-being in Indiana.

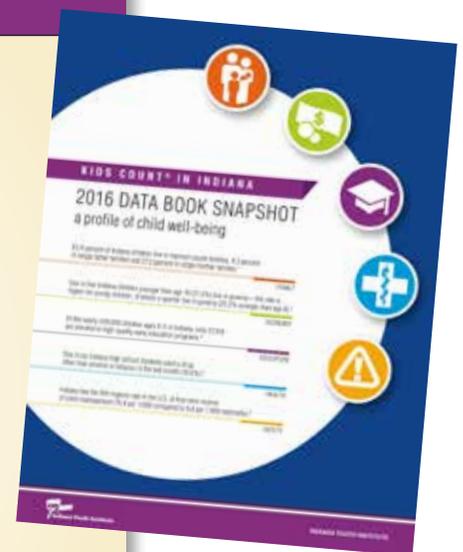
**Download the Kids Count in Indiana Data Book** at [www.iyi.org/databook](http://www.iyi.org/databook).

Want in-depth information on youth? Check out the free resources at **IYI’s Virginia Beall Ball Library**. We will mail you the library materials and include a postage paid return envelope. Go to [www.iyi.org/library](http://www.iyi.org/library) for details.

Have a quick question or want to bounce an idea around? **Contact Ask IYI for free resources and tips:** call 1-855-2ask-IYI or visit [www.iyi.org/ask](http://www.iyi.org/ask).

**Looking for training on youth issues?** IYI provides regional trainings and free webinars on youth development and nonprofit management. Go to [www.iyi.org/trainings](http://www.iyi.org/trainings) for details.

Need one-on-one assistance with planning, evaluating, or expanding your organization? Benefit from IYI’s Consulting Services and receive professional help at affordable hourly rates – discounted far below market value. Go to [www.iyi.org/consulting-services](http://www.iyi.org/consulting-services) for details.



## Resources

### Indiana

**IDOC Division of Youth Services (DYS)** has adopted the Balanced and Restorative Justice Model to serve as the foundation and core beliefs in providing juvenile justice services. DYS attempts to reduce juvenile and adult recidivism rates. <http://www.in.gov/idoc/dys/2336.htm>

**The Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI)** is a public-private partnership being implemented in Indiana and nationwide to promote positive youth development and enhance public safety by eliminating unnecessary or inappropriate confinement. <http://www.in.gov/idoc/dys/2407.htm>

**The Indiana Youth Services Association** promotes programs that reduce youth violence and juvenile delinquency. IYSA supports Youth Service Bureaus around Indiana with professional assistance and training, links to federal and statewide programs, community education and advocacy. <http://www.indysb.org>

**Safe Haven Schools** is a program of the Indiana Safe School Fund, which was established as part of Indiana's commitment to making local schools safer. <http://www.in.gov/cji/2339.htm>

**The Indiana School Safety Specialist Academy** provides ongoing, certified training and information on national and state best practices, as well as exemplary resources for school safety, security, intervention/prevention, and emergency preparedness planning. <http://www.doe.in.gov/safety>

**Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV)** provides resources for prevention and a list of programs and providers for intervention services for domestic violence. ICADV also provides a 24-hour confidential toll free crisis line at 800-332-7385 or the National Hotline 1-800-SAFE (7233). <http://www.icadvinc.org/>

**Indiana Coalition to End Sexual Assault** is a newly formed organization to improve Indiana's response to victims and better train Hoosiers to recognize the warning signs of sexual assault.

### National

**The National Domestic Violence Hotline, Break the Cycle, and Love is Respect** are a trio of national organizations providing comprehensive dating abuse and domestic violence programs. They offer free curricula for high school and college students about dating violence as well as a 24 hour free crisis intervention hotline. Chat at [www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org), text loveis to 22522\*, or call 1-866-331-9474. More information is available at <http://www.thehotline.org/about-us/>, <https://www.breakthecycle.org>, and <http://www.loveisrespect.org/>

**Dating Matters** is the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention's teen dating violence prevention initiative. Provides a free 60-minute, interactive training designed to help educators, youth-serving organizations, and others working with teens understand the risk factors and warning signs associated with teen dating violence. <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/DatingMatters/index.html>

**Striving to Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere (STRYVE)** is a national initiative through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This initiative takes a public health approach to preventing youth violence before it starts. STRYVE offers online training, the latest research and data Resources, and interactive workspaces that communities can use to take action to prevent youth violence. <http://vetoviolenecdc.gov/apps/stryve/resources.html>

**The National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP)** is a source of information about evidence-based approaches that promote mental health, prevent substance abuse, and treat mental health and substance abuse. The registry includes interventions with violence outcomes. <http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/>

**Veto Violence** offers training, tips and tools designed specifically for prevention practitioners. <http://vetoviolenecdc.gov/>

**OJJDP's Comprehensive Gang Model Online** provides a 23-minute overview of the Model for individuals exploring strategies to assess and address their communities' gang problems. <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Comprehensive-Gang-Model/Online-Overview>

**OJJDP's Model Programs Guide** contains information about evidence-based juvenile justice and youth prevention, intervention, and reentry programs. It is a resource for practitioners and communities about what works, what is promising, and what does not work in juvenile justice, delinquency prevention, and child protection and safety. <http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/>

**National Crime Prevention Council** provides many crime and violence prevention resources, programs and trainings. <http://www.ncpc.org/topics>

**The National Institute of Justice** provides a variety of violence prevention information, including

- gun violence prevention programs and strategies <http://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/gun-violence/prevention/Pages/welcome.aspx>,
- gang related gun violence prevention for youth <http://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/gun-violence/youths-gangs-guns/Pages/addressing.aspx>, and
- information on effective prevention and intervention of teen dating violence: <http://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/intimate-partner-violence/teen-dating-violence/Pages/prevention-intervention.aspx>



603 East Washington Street, Suite 800  
Indianapolis, IN 46204  
317.396.2700 or 800.343.7060

[iyi.org](http://iyi.org)

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