



# From America's Front Line Against Crime: Proven investments in kids will prevent crime and violence

As an organization of more than 5,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, attorneys general, other law enforcement leaders, and violence survivors, we are committed to putting dangerous criminals behind bars. But by the time law enforcement get involved, the damage is already done and lives are changed forever.

America's anti-crime arsenal contains no weapons more powerful than the effective programs that help kids get the right start in life. A number of high-quality programs are proven to prevent crime, reduce child abuse and neglect, and help troubled kids get back on track. Yet, despite decades of growing research proving what works, inadequate investments leave millions of children needlessly at risk of becoming delinquent teens and violent adults while putting every American at greater risk of becoming a victim of crime.

We call on all federal, state and local officials to implement this four-part plan to cut crime and violence. Doing so will help America's children learn the values and skills they'll need to become good neighbors and responsible adults. Across all ages there are effective programs. Some start before birth, others

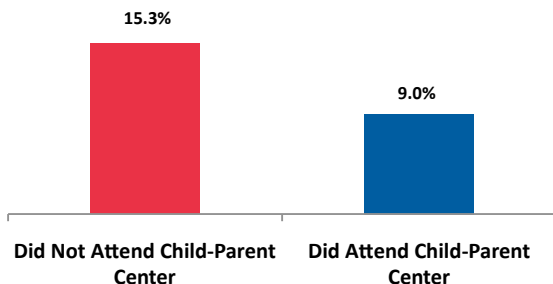
are proven to work with older kids, even serious juvenile offenders. While no plan can prevent every violent act, this common-sense approach, based on our experience and the latest research about what really works, can make all of us safer.

## Four Steps that Work

1. Provide all families access to high-quality early care and education for kids from birth to age five.
2. Offer voluntary parent coaching to at-risk parents of young children through home visiting or other options proven to prevent child abuse and neglect.
3. Ensure all school-age children and youth have access to effective programs during school hours and after school to help keep them on track.
4. Identify troubled and delinquent kids and provide them and their parents effective interventions so the children will avoid a life of crime.

## 70% more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18

An Arrest for Violence by Age 18



Source: Reynolds 2001

## 1. Provide all families access to high-quality early care and education for kids from birth to age five

Law enforcement leaders have long known that giving kids the right start in life is the best way to prevent violence and crime. Rigorous social science and neuroscience research now backs that up. In the first few years of life, children's intellects and emotions, and even their ability to develop concern for others (the beginnings of conscience), are building the foundation upon which their later success or failure will greatly depend. As parents are at work trying to make ends meet, voluntary early education and care for babies, toddlers and preschoolers can begin preparing kids for a successful life rather than a life of repeated contacts with law enforcement. For example:

- Chicago's publicly funded Child-Parent Centers have served almost 100,000 three- and four-year-olds since 1967. For 14 years, researchers tracked 989 of those children and 550 similar children not in the program. The children who did not participate were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18.<sup>1</sup>
- In Ypsilanti, Michigan, three- and four-year-olds from low-income families who did not participate in the Perry Preschool program were five times more likely to be chronic lawbreakers by age 27 than those who were randomly assigned to the program. The children in the preschool program were 44 percent more likely to graduate from high school.<sup>2</sup>

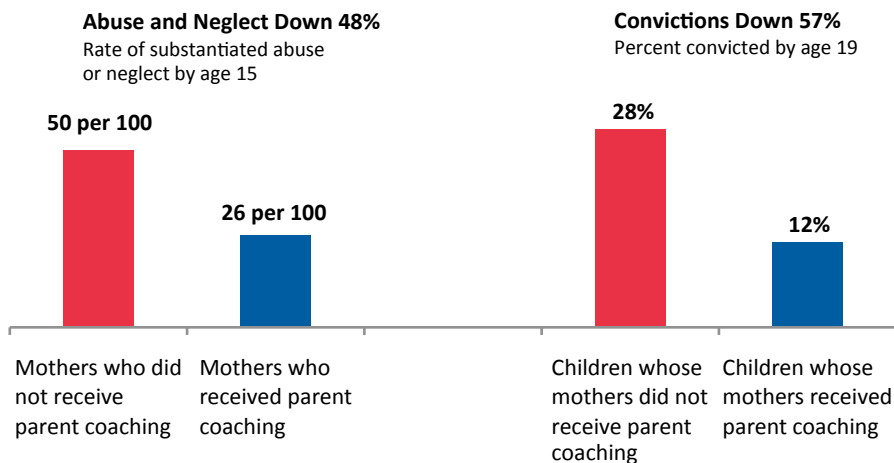
## 2. Offer voluntary parent coaching to at-risk parents of young children through home visiting or other options proven to prevent child abuse and neglect

Almost 800,000 children are abused or neglected in this country each year.<sup>3</sup> Studies show that being abused or neglected multiplies the risk that a child will grow up to be a violent criminal.<sup>4</sup> Public safety demands that we offer at-risk parents home visiting and parent support programs that prevent children from being abused and neglected, prevent subsequent delinquency, and improve other outcomes for children. Research shows what works:

- The Nurse-Family Partnership randomly assigned half of a group of at-risk families to voluntary visits by specially trained nurses who offered coaching in parenting skills and other advice and support. Beginning during the mother's pregnancy and continuing until the child's second birthday, parents learned to manage stress, understand the health and nutrition needs of newborns, identify the signs of problems, make their home safe, and find resources such as doctors and child care help. Rigorous studies showed that the children served by the program were half as likely to be abused and neglected, and by age 19 they were half as likely to have been convicted of a crime.<sup>5</sup>
- Chicago's Child-Parent Centers preschool program for three- and four-year olds from low-income neighborhoods, already cited above, included a strong parent coaching component with staffed parent-resource rooms in the centers. Children in the program were half as likely to experience repeated abuse or neglect and nearly half as likely to be placed in foster care as the similar children *not* in the program.<sup>6</sup>

- Triple P, the Positive Parenting Program, is a system for delivering age-appropriate tools and techniques for parents to help their children behave responsibly. It lets parents pick what help they want, ranging from newsletter articles, to brief consultations, to ten weeks of parent coaching for parents with especially challenging children. The Triple P system was tested

### The Nurse-Family Partnership Cut Abuse and Neglect and Convictions for Crimes in Half Among the At-risk Kids Served



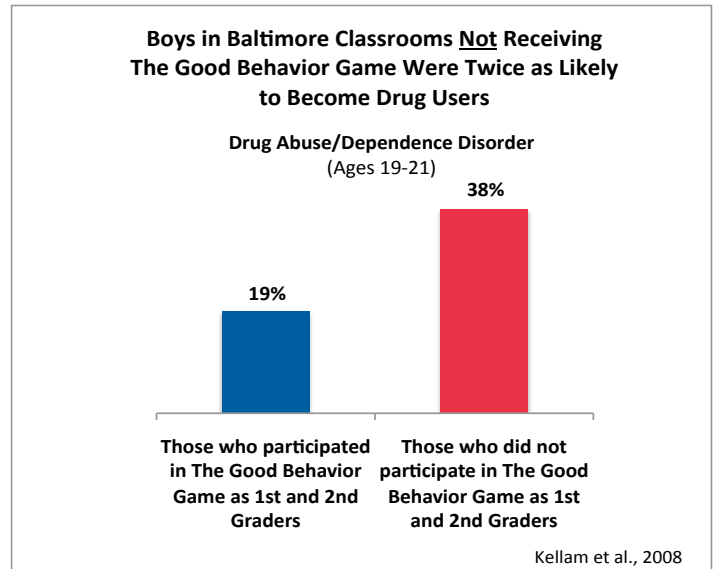
Sources: Olds 2006, Eckenrode 2010

in counties throughout South Carolina with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For the thousands of children served in the counties randomly assigned to receive the efforts compared to the counties left out, Triple P counties averaged 25 percent reductions in abuse and neglect, 33 percent reductions in foster care placements, and 35 percent reductions in emergency room visits or hospitalizations for abuse.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Ensure all school-age children and youth have access to effective programs during school hours and after school to help keep them on track

Two approaches are needed to help school-aged kids steer clear of crime: 1) effective programs during the school day, and 2) high-quality after-school programs.

- The Good Behavior Game is an example of a simple, effective school-based program for all kids. In the game, kids are divided into two teams that compete to behave well and follow class rules. The winning team receives simple rewards, such as lining up first for recess. In the process, the students acquire life-long lessons on how to effectively manage their own behaviors. In one trial, first graders were randomly assigned to participate or not in the game. By the sixth grade, non-participants were more than twice as likely as participants to suffer from clinical levels of conduct disorder – a mental health diagnosis associated with out-of-control behavior and delinquency.<sup>8</sup> In another randomized trial, by the time the male non-participants were age 19 through 21, they were twice as likely to suffer from a drug abuse/dependence disorder.<sup>9</sup>
- Studies have found that 40 percent of school bullies had three or more criminal convictions as adults, and bullies are more likely to carry a weapon to school.<sup>10</sup> Rigorously tested anti-bullying programs that enlist the whole school – everyone from bus drivers to principals – have cut bullying by as much as half.<sup>11</sup>
- On school days, the after-school hours are the prime time for juvenile crime.<sup>12</sup> Developing ways to attract at-risk middle- and high-school age children into after-school programs, and to effectively coach them on how to avoid troubling behaviors, can be challenging, but the Boys & Girls Clubs have shown they can deliver. For example, in a study conducted in several U.S. cities, five housing projects without Boys & Girls Clubs were compared to five projects receiving new clubs. At the beginning, drug activity and vandalism were the same. But by the time the



study ended, the projects without the programs had 50 percent more vandalism and scored 37 percent worse on a combined measure of drug activity.<sup>13</sup>

### 4. Identify troubled and delinquent kids and provide them and their parents effective interventions so the children will 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:

- The Incredible Years provides training in problem solving and social issues for families of young children suffering from aggressive behavior problems. The researchers studying this program report that it has been able to stop the cycle of aggression for approximately two-thirds of the families served.<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 help.<sup>15</sup>

*"We need to step up and invest in what works to keep America's most vulnerable children from becoming America's most-wanted adults."*

– Sheriff Leroy Baca,  
Los Angeles County, CA  
Board Chairman,  
FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS

### The bottom line: investing in kids saves lives and money

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>
- Economist Steven Barnett found that the Perry Preschool program produced a net savings of \$16 for every dollar invested. Total savings averaged \$245,000 per child and more than two-thirds of the savings came from reduced crime costs.<sup>17</sup>
- The Washington State Institute for Public Policy concluded that the Nurse-Family Partnership produced over \$20,000

in crime savings per family served; and, for troubled youth already in the juvenile justice system, three effective family therapy programs cut future crimes so much their average savings ranged from \$18,000 to \$89,000 per child.<sup>18</sup> States have immediately cut the costs of housing juvenile delinquents by shifting eligible youth from expensive facilities to those more effective family therapy programs.<sup>19</sup>

### Law enforcement is united in calling for crime-prevention investments in kids

Who says these four steps are among our most powerful weapons to fight crime?

- The more than 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.

The prestigious National Academy of Sciences has further confirmed that the research on what works to keep kids out of trouble is solid.<sup>20</sup>

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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## Endnotes

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