



# background

## Juvenile Crime When Schools Take a Stand

# Prevention Strategies

## *Deepening Concern Broadens School Choices*

**C**rime prevention strategies for schools have advanced well beyond installing metal detectors at the door.

Interested schools today find a more expansive menu of prevention measures, ranging from behavior modification programs to classroom management strategies.

Studies of school-based crime prevention suggest most interventions fall into two categories: those that focus on changing school or classroom environments, and those that focus on changing the behaviors, knowledge, skills, or attitudes of individual students.

Children don't develop delinquent and criminal behavior as a result of a single psychological characteristic or as a result of a single circumstance in their lives. Effective strategies address more than one risk factor of juvenile delinquency. Research shows that the more comprehensive a school-based program, the more effective it likely will be in steering students away from crime.

### Changing Individuals

One way to curb juvenile crime is to convince children it is the wrong way to go. In schools, several strategies have been used that attempt to form prosocial attitudes and beliefs among students and give them the skills and knowledge that can help them stay out of trouble.

These strategies range from behavior modification to offering instruction on

delinquency or drug use.

- **Cognitive/Behavioral Strategies.** Several effective delinquency prevention programs use a mix of strategies to encourage positive behavior and to develop students' thinking skills. Behavior modification focuses on setting behavioral goals and changing behaviors by rewarding desired behavior and punishing bad behavior. Cognitive-behavioral approaches teach thinking skills that help students adapt socially.
- **Instructing Students.** The most common school-based prevention strategy is the information campaign. Students are taught factual information about drugs or delinquency, what factors influence students to engage in misbehavior, and how to recognize and respond to risky situations.
- **Peer Counseling.** Peer group counseling usually involves an adult leader guiding discussions in which students are encouraged to recognize problems with their behavior, attitudes, and values. In peer mediation programs, students are placed in positions to help resolve disputes among other students.
- **Adult Counseling and Mentoring.** Among high risk students, individually-tailored counseling and tutoring have shown promise in improving test scores, graduation rates, and other academic measures. Mentoring – one-on-one interaction

with an older, more experienced person who provides advice – has helped to improve school attendance.

- **Providing Alternatives.** Some programs offer recreational, enrichment, or leisure activities based on assumptions such as "idle hands are the devil's workshop" and children who are not academically inclined risk low self esteem if they cannot display other competencies. Programs include after-school programs, community service, and recreational activities.

### Alternative Schools

Studies find that between 10% and 15% of students will not respond to primary prevention efforts, including 1% to 7% who will have serious or chronic behavior problems.

Those with serious and chronic problems will need more intensive intervention.

A popular strategy is the alternative school. Some alternative schools focus on behavior modification, while others have a remedial focus and address the student's deficits.

A third type seeks to make school more challenging and fulfilling through innovative school structure and educational practice. This type of alternative learning environment for troubled students has been found to improve behavior, attendance, and academic achievement.

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### Changing the School

Disorder in a school is related to the way the school is operated.

When administrators and faculty collaborate to solve problems or plan for change, the result is usually higher teacher morale and less disorder. And schools are more orderly when students notice clear rules and reward structures, feel they belong, and sense that teachers and peers care about them.

### Building School Capacity

Building the capacity of a school to improve the way programs are developed, implemented, and managed is important to the success of crime prevention. Capacity-building focuses on changing decision-making processes or authority structures and interventions can involve staff, students, community members, and parents in diagnosing problems, determining goals, designing solutions, and monitoring progress.

One method is Program Development Evaluation (PDE), which stresses collaboration and ongoing evaluation. Researchers continuously feed data back to practitioners, enabling both to identify and overcome obstacles to program implementation. Capacity-building efforts are components of programs that report successes ranging from higher staff morale to less delinquent behavior among students.

### Setting Behavior Norms

Some programs seek to establish norms or expectations to help discourage delinquency. These strategies focus on setting and enforcing rules or communicating norms in other ways, such as through campaigns.

In Norway, a campaign to curb bullying reached out to school staff, parents, and students using booklets,

## Common School-Based Prevention Strategies

*For changing individual students:*

- Adult counseling & mentoring
- Alternative activities
- Behavior modification
- Peer counseling
- Special anti-crime instruction

*For changing the school:*

- Building school capacity
- Classroom management
- Regrouping students
- Setting behavior norms

videos, and other methods to redefine bullying as unacceptable behavior. Incidents of harassment fell by 50%.

Adopting norms against drug use has also been an essential element of drug abuse prevention.

### Managing Classes

How classrooms are organized and managed may influence not only the amount of disorderly behavior in the class but also factors that influence delinquency, such as academic

performance and commitment to school.

Strategies for organizing and managing classrooms include methods of engaging students in learning, such as cooperative learning and experiential learning; setting and enforcing rules; use of rewards and punishments; time management to reduce down-time; and using parents and other outside resources as instructors or aides.

These strategies are common in school-based prevention.

### Regrouping Students

Reorganizing classes or grades to create smaller, more tightly-knit units for instruction has shown promise as part of crime prevention initiatives. Strategies include "schools-within-schools" and decreasing class size.

Studies suggest high-risk students may benefit from a school-within-the-school that offers a strong academic program, effective instruction and classroom management, and a supportive staff.

Some prevention strategies help to reduce crime and delinquency. Others, including some very popular ideas, have failed to do the job. In reports 19 and 20, **background** looks at strategies and programs that work and those that don't.

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## references

*This report was based on the following publications:*

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