Preventing youth violence
What does and doesn’t work and why?
An overview of the evidence on approaches and programs
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An overview of the evidence on approaches and programs

Prepared for the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth by:

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The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)

ARACY is a national non-profit organisation working to create a better future for all Australia’s children and young people.

Despite Australia being a wealthy, developed country, many aspects of the health and wellbeing of our young people have been declining. ARACY was formed to reverse these trends, by preventing and addressing the major problems affecting our children and young people.

ARACY tackles these complex issues through building collaborations with researchers, policy makers and practitioners from a broad range of disciplines. We share knowledge and foster evidence-based solutions.

Contact Us

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“Today’s young people are tomorrow’s partners, parents, workers, citizens. Unless they master the skills required to manage their own emotions, treat others with respect, negotiate points of disagreement and conflict, build their capacity for productive work, and work cooperatively with others, Australian society as a whole will suffer” Professor Fiona Stanley, Chair of the ARACY Board.
ARACY’s ‘Preventing Youth Violence’ project

ARACY’s ‘Preventing Youth Violence’ project is one of a number of collaborative projects aimed at responding more effectively to complex problems affecting the wellbeing of young Australians.

The project seeks to mobilise action across sectors and disciplines in developing collaborative strategies that are grounded in the best available evidence on ‘what works’ to reduce violent and antisocial behaviour in young people.

Unlike many other programs that attempt to control violent and antisocial behaviour in the later adolescent years, this project is directed at young people aged 10–14 years, when major changes in brain development provide a potent opportunity for effective early intervention. The experiences and developmental challenges faced by young people as they move into adolescence are critical to their capacity to achieve their personal potential and to engage constructively with society.

This project was initially focused more broadly on the issue of youth disengagement, about which a review of the evidence was prepared and published. The paper Preventing Youth Disengagement and Promoting Engagement (Burns et al, 2008) summarises and synthesises relevant research on ‘what works best’ across five case studies:

- community violence
- substance abuse
- school disengagement
- civic participation
- youth mental health reform.

The decision to refine the focus of the project to ‘Preventing Youth Violence’ followed a review of relevant policy and program initiatives in the different jurisdictions to determine where an ARACY collaborative project would be likely to yield most benefit.

Further information on the Preventing Youth Violence Project is available on the ARACY website, http://www.aracy.org.au/ or from ARACY:

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Summary

This paper was commissioned by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) to inform the development of strategies aimed at preventing violent and antisocial behaviours among young people. It was prepared by the Centre for Adolescent Health, Department of Paediatrics, The University of Melbourne.

The paper summarises the evidence across disciplines and sectors on:

- the nature and magnitude of youth violence and antisocial behaviour in Australia (incidence, demographic indicators, trends)
- factors that are known to contribute to youth violence and antisocial behaviour together with the strength of the associations with these factors
- policies, programs and strategies that have been proven to work in preventing violent and antisocial behaviour among young people, including the principles upon which they are based and key factors associated with their success.

Section 1 of the paper outlines the nature of the problem of violent and antisocial behaviour among young Australians.

The rates of these behaviours vary depending on the source of the data, but can be as high as 15 per cent.

It is crucial that national time series data on violent and antisocial behaviour across time and within a variety of demographic groups are collected to gain a clearer picture of the extent of, and trends in, these behaviours in young Australians.

Section 2 summarises the individual, social, cultural, and environmental factors that contribute to violent and antisocial behaviour among young people.

There are many factors that influence violent and antisocial behaviour, emphasising that prevention and early intervention approaches need to target multiple factors to reduce these behaviours. This is therefore a problem for the whole community. For the benefit of young people, a coordinated response across communities and government is needed.
Section 3 describes frameworks for addressing the factors associated with violent and antisocial behaviour in young people. These frameworks underline the importance of:

- prevention and early intervention
- intervening across the life span, not just early in the lifespan but throughout life, particularly early in the development of problems
- recognising the multiple influences on a young person’s development of violent and antisocial (and related) behaviours.

Section 4 outlines the pre-requisites for undertaking effective prevention.

- **Data collection and analysis:** Development of data systems for routine monitoring of trends in violent and antisocial behaviour. This should form the basis of prevention efforts at a national and local level.
- **Selection of evidence-based policies and programs:** Programs should have strong empirical evidence for reducing violent and antisocial behaviour with the target population, show sustained effects, and show replication across different sites. They should address the major influential factors in particular communities as indicated by local data.
- **Effective implementation:** The effectiveness of an intervention in a particular setting depends not just on whether it has been demonstrated in the past to be efficacious, but on the quality of implementation.

Section 5 reviews the evidence on effective programs and approaches, including principles of operation and key success factors of effective programs.

The most effective approaches for reducing youth violence and antisocial behaviour are multi-faceted targeting multiple risk and protective factors at multiple levels of influence. They include school-based multi-component strategies targeting the individual child, the family, the peer group, and the school system.

Section 6 reviews the evidence on ineffective approaches, including details of both primary and secondary prevention approaches that are ineffective in reducing or preventing violence. Ineffective or harmful strategies targeting juvenile offenders are also outlined.
Consistently negative effects have been found for prevention approaches that involve grouping high-risk antisocial youth together in groups, programs or classrooms. Young adolescents are most susceptible to antisocial peer influence and such approaches should be particularly avoided for this age group.

Section 7 highlights the key principles of effective implementation. Nine key principles have been identified, relating to:

- characteristics of the program
- matching the program to the target population
- outcome evaluation and staff training.

Section 8 summarises the implications and challenges for policy and practice regarding evidence-based prevention. Three types of investments are particularly important for improving capacity to do violence prevention well:

- Increase research on the effects of different levels and types of implementation of the most promising interventions, evaluating acceptability, effectiveness, safety and costs. It is particularly important to assess the acceptability of promising interventions within different cultural contexts given the diversity that exists among populations at high risk of violence.
- Increase efforts to disseminate what is known about effective youth violence prevention programs, practices, and implementation strategies to communities and agencies on the front lines of violence prevention.
- Develop and broadly apply practical procedures for monitoring the fidelity with which we implement violence prevention programs and practices.

Section 9 outlines the key resources used in this report for identifying and selecting evidence-based approaches and programs.

Research and evaluation on prevention of youth violence and antisocial behaviour is constantly evolving and expanding and evidence for certain approaches or programs changes over time. Therefore, it is imperative that practitioners and policy-makers keep abreast of the most relevant and up-to-date resources.
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Section 1:
Introduction

This section of the report defines violence, describes the costs and consequences of youth violence, and summarises the rates of violence self-reported by young people and collected through official statistics.

1.1 Definitions and dimensions

Most policy definitions of ‘young people’ refer to the population aged 12 to 25, while most policy responses to youth violence are targeted at young people in later adolescence and early adulthood.

In line with ARACY’s primary focus on early intervention, this paper is principally focused on young people aged 10–14 years (ie in the early adolescent years) before violent and antisocial behaviour have become entrenched in young people’s lives.

ARACY has identified this developmental period as a potent opportunity for positive intervention as it is at this time that major changes occur in the adolescent brain that have important implications for behaviour. The 10–14 years period also represents a time of transition in young people’s lives as they move from primary to secondary education and the influence of peer groups assumes greater importance relative to family influences such as parental authority and supervision.

Defining violence

The World Health Organization defines violence as:

‘The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.’

(Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002)

Violence is commonly classified according to the age groups and settings in which it occurs (eg. child abuse, intimate partner violence, youth violence, collective violence).
Some forms of violence may be considered socially acceptable, for example in some sports and in warfare. However, even in these contexts, rules of engagement usually apply, restricting the violent expression considered acceptable.

Violence is most commonly expressed by young people interpersonally and in public places (community violence).

**Antisocial behaviour** is a generic term that refers to many behaviours (including violent behaviour) and also non-violent acts such as rule and norm violations including stealing, wagging school, graffiti, property damage, and the use of alcohol and other drugs.

Whether or not behaviour is classified as ‘antisocial’ may also vary according to age and the setting in which the behaviour takes place. For example, behaviour that may be considered antisocial in a young adolescent may be tolerated or even expected in a toddler.

There is evidence to show that young people who are violent also tend to engage in other forms of antisocial behaviour (Krug et al., 2002).

**Pathways to violent and antisocial behaviour**

A young person’s engagement in violent and antisocial behaviour may start at different times during the life course. Some adolescents who engage in violent behaviour have manifested problem behaviours since early childhood (early onset), while for others the behaviours do not manifest until late childhood or during the adolescent years (late onset) (eg. Moffitt, Caspi, Harrington, & Milne, 2002). Recent research (Odgers et al., 2007) analysed data for participants in a New Zealand study, who were followed from age 7 to 26 years, and found:

- 10.5% had antisocial behaviours that manifested in early childhood and persisted over time
- 19.6% showed adolescent onset of antisocial behaviour
- 24.3% engaged in antisocial behaviour only in childhood
- 45.6% showed low levels of antisocial behaviour across time.

Typically children with persistent problems have the worst outcomes as adults. Young people who engage in antisocial behaviour only during adolescence have also been shown to have some negative outcomes as adults (eg. relationship difficulties, unemployment). Children with antisocial behaviour only during childhood do not show health problems as adults (Odgers et al., 2007).
1.2 Costs and consequences

The direct and indirect costs of violence committed by and against young people are a major drain on Australia's medical, health and justice services, while the personal, family and social consequences take an enormous toll on individual and family wellbeing, social cohesion and harmony, and ultimately, economic productivity and prosperity.

Costs

According to an Australian Institute of Criminology report (Rollings, 2008):

- Crime costs Australian society $36 billion per annum
- The costs of assaults alone are $1.4 billion per annum, with an average of $1700 per assault
- The cost of homicide is $950 million per annum.

The figures cited above include medical costs, lost output, and intangible costs such as pain and suffering and fear.

The costs specifically relating to crimes committed by young people are not reported separately. However, due to the over-representation of young people in the statistics on violent crime, it may be assumed that a sizeable component of these costs is attributable to young people.

Consequences

The consequences of violence are experienced by both the victim and the perpetrator, with implications that permeate out into their personal and interpersonal lives, and social relationships and roles.

- The physical and psychological harm resulting from violence impacts on personal capacity and economic and social participation (Rollings, 2008).
- Violent behaviour impacts on the capacity to form healthy relationships, coupled with an increased potential for family violence (including partner abuse and child abuse) (Herrenkohl, Kosterman, Mason, & Hawkins, 2007; Odgers et al., 2007).
- Young people who are chronic offenders or who show late increases in youth violence are more likely to engage in intimate partner violence in young adulthood. Herrenkohl et al (2007) found that:
27% of ‘chronic’ youth offenders (those who maintained moderate levels of violence throughout adolescence) engaged in intimate partner violence (IPV) at 24 years of age.

26% of youth who displayed no violence until age 14 but gradually increased to low levels of violence by age 18 engaged in IPV at 24 years of age.

19% of youth who engaged in violence in early adolescence and then desisted in later adolescence engaged in IPV at 24 years of age.

15% of youth who did not engage in violence during adolescence engaged in IPV at 24 years of age.

It follows that effective programs to prevent youth violence will have multiple benefits for individuals, families, communities and Australian society as a whole.

1.3 Quantifying youth violence

Accurately gauging the extent of violent behaviour among young Australians is problematic due to the limited availability of quality, time-series data.

Regular media portrayals of violence and the expansion of electronic communication, on the other hand, may be contributing to a community perception that violent behaviour engaged in by young people is common, and increasing.

The 2004 International Crime Victimisation Survey showed that 29 per cent of Australian respondents reported having experienced personal crime (assault, threats, personal theft, robbery) in the previous five years, and 9 per cent in the previous year (Johnson, 2005).

However, in the 2004 survey, most Australian respondents also reported feeling safe in their local environment: 72 per cent reported feeling fairly safe or very safe while walking alone in their local area after dark (compared to 64% in 2000).

The introduction of routine collection of reliable Australian data will enable the extent of violent and antisocial behaviour among young people to be accurately quantified and trends to be monitored over time. Reliable time-series data and longitudinal data (repeated collection of data from the same respondents across time) will also enable better monitoring of the effectiveness of different approaches to violence prevention.
The level of youth violence can be measured according to:

- **prevalence** – the percentage of the population that is affected by a particular problem at a given point in time

- **incidence** – the number of newly diagnosed cases in a specified period of time in a particular population or area.

**Data sources (advantages and limitations)**

There are two main sources of data on the rates of violent and antisocial behaviour in young people:

- self-reports from young people
- official statistics from police and other government sources such as schools, courts and hospital emergency departments.

Young people’s own **self-reports** are widely accepted as the most reliable source of data for behaviour problems such as antisocial behaviour (Huizinga & Elliott, 1986; Jolliffe et al., 2003; Rutter & Giller, 1983).

**Official statistics** are generally conservative estimates given that there may be acts of violence and crime that are not seen by police while even reported incidents may not proceed to be counted as an official ‘case’. Errors can also occur in the processing of offences affecting the reliability of the rates reported. Changes in the definition of certain behaviours will also affect the rate at which the behaviour is recorded. For example, changes to the age definitions (where children are now classified as aged 18 years or less compared to 17 years or less previously) can be expected to lead to an increase in the rates of crimes recorded in the children’s court.

**Self report data**

Rates of violent and antisocial behaviour in Australian young people aged 10 to 14 years vary across research projects depending on the definitions used.

The **Healthy Neighbourhoods Project** is a cross-sectional survey of over 8000 students in year 6 and year 8 across Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia (Williams, Toumbourou, Williamson, Hemphill, & Patton, 2009). Table 1 shows rates of violent and antisocial behaviour for all students from the Healthy Neighbourhoods Project.
Table 1: Rates (%) of violent and antisocial behaviours in students from the Healthy Neighbourhoods Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Year 6 (11-12 years)</th>
<th>Year 8 (13-14 years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attacked and/or beaten someone (violent)</td>
<td>15 3</td>
<td>12 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antisocial behaviour (non-violent)</td>
<td>9 4</td>
<td>11 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: (Williams et al., 2009)
Attacked someone = attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting them
Beaten someone = beaten up someone so badly that they probably needed to see a doctor or nurse
Antisocial behaviour (non-violent) = a range of non-violent antisocial behaviours, from stealing, to selling drugs, to being drunk or high at school

Official statistics

The prevalence rate of violent and antisocial behaviour recorded in official statistics peaks at 15–19 years of age for girls and boys, with an offender rate in 2006–2007 of 8.8 per 100 for males.¹

Young people are the most likely age group to be victims of violent crime, with over 7000 young people hospitalised each year due to injuries caused by violence (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2007). This latter figure has increased in recent years and injuries are more common from mid-adolescence to young adulthood (Krug et al., 2002).

Severity

The severity of violent and antisocial behaviour among young people ranges across the continuum from minor rule-breaking behaviours to serious criminal behaviour. The most severe forms of violence are relatively uncommon, as reflected in official statistics but have a large impact in terms of their costs to the community and their consequences for victims.

Approximately 50 per cent of young people who engage in the most serious behaviours are likely to reoffend (Victorian Auditor-General, 2008). In Victoria, 60 per cent of clients who received an initial community-based order of probation did not receive further court orders, compared with 44 per cent of those who received initial custodial Youth Training Centre orders (Department of Human Services, 2001).

¹ Source: Australian Institute of Criminology:
Trends
Some data suggest that violent and antisocial behaviour among young people is increasing. For example, official statistics in some states show increasing rates of assault and violence as a proportion of all youth offending is increasing (Mazerolle, 2007). In addition, anecdotally there are reports of more extreme forms of violent and antisocial behaviour (Youth Violence Taskforce, 2007). However, caution needs to be exercised in interpreting these figures given the limitations of official statistics and the influence that any changes in the definition of behaviours can have on the rates reported.

Variation between communities
A report by Williams et al (2009) found considerable differences in the level of problem behaviours across 30 communities surveyed in Victoria, Queensland, and Western Australia.

- For Year 6 boys (approximately 11 years old), violence varied between communities from 1.8% to 28.1% and for Year 8 boys (around 13 years of age), from 3.2% to 30.0%
- For Year 8 boys, antisocial behaviour varied from a low of 1.6% to 33.3%.

The variation in rates of problem behaviours reported between communities highlights the importance of local data to identify factors that may be contributing to an increase or decrease in violence at the local level.
Section 2:  
Risk and protective factors associated with youth violence and antisocial behaviour

The research on youth violence confirms that multiple factors in multiple contexts are implicated. There is no simple cause and no simple solution.

However, many of the factors associated with violent and antisocial behaviour among young people are modifiable which means that effective prevention and early intervention can prevent or substantially reduce these behaviours and the personal, family and social consequences that flow from them.

This section of the report provides a brief overview of the evidence on the factors associated with violence and antisocial behaviour among young people, and concludes by drawing implications of the evidence for policies and practices aimed at addressing these behaviours.

2.1 Behavioural implications of changes to the brain at adolescence

Animal studies and human studies using brain imaging technologies such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) have increased understanding of how the brain develops over time including changes occurring during adolescence and into adulthood.

During adolescence the parts of the brain that are continuing to grow and change are:

- the cortex and prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain where rational thinking, reason and logic originate
- the cerebellum, which controls voluntary motor movement, balance and muscle tone (Feinstein, 2009).
The cognitive, psychological and behavioural consequences of these neurological changes may also place young people at heightened risk of violent and antisocial behaviour because they may be:

- experiencing difficulty in prioritising and organising tasks and making decisions (Feinstein, 2009)
- overwhelmed by complex instructions (Chamberlain, 2009)
- more sensitive to stress (Feinstein, 2009)
- seeking novelty and stimulation (Feinstein, 2009)
- going to sleep later and needing to sleep longer, and experiencing symptoms similar to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), depression and being less able to control their emotions (Chamberlain, 2009) if they are sleep deprived
- particularly vulnerable to the effects of alcohol and other drugs on their developing brains (Chambers, Taylor, & Potenza, 2003; Winters, 2008).

2.2 Risk factors

**Risk factors** are individual and social factors that increase the likelihood of individuals (or groups of individuals) subsequently developing health or social problems. Risk factors are prospective (or long term) predictors identifying the probability that an individual or group of individuals will eventually engage in a particular behaviour (eg. violent behaviour, antisocial behaviour).

Risk factors are classified according to the source, or domain, of the risk factor and the characteristics of that domain that may influence positive or negative outcomes. For example, risk factors may derive from characteristics of:

- **the individual** (such as gender, age, temperament, engagement in other risk-taking behaviours, attitudes to social norms and typical behaviour patterns)
- **the young person’s social environment** (such as the influence and quality of relationships with the family, peer group, school or community environment).

For those individual factors that are not modifiable (eg. gender, age), understanding the characteristics that may be associated with heightened risk provides an opportunity to focus on compensating for the behavioural consequences of those characteristics. In addition, there is opportunity to reduce the risk factors at an individual level that can be modified.

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2 This description of risk factors has been adapted from Williams et al (2009).
Most of the risk factors operating in the social environment are able to be modified and therefore offer a rich field of opportunity for prevention and early intervention.

Common risk factors have been identified that predict the increased likelihood of problems such as violent behaviours, antisocial behaviours, harmful drug use, school dropout and mental health problems (See: Bond et al., 2000; Brewer, Hawkins, Catalano, & Neckerman, 1995; Hawkins, Arthur, & Catalano, 1995; Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; Lipsey & Derzon, 1998).

Reducing risk factors for violent and antisocial behaviour is therefore likely to reduce other adverse developmental outcomes.

2.2.1 Risk factors for the development of violent and antisocial behaviour among young people

Comprehensive reviews have identified risk factors that increase the likelihood of young people engaging in violent and antisocial behaviour (Hawkins et al., 2000; Hemphill et al., 2009; Vassallo et al., 2002; World Health Organization, 2002).

Risk factors may operate at multiple levels — for example individual, peer, family, school and community — and exert greater or lesser influence at different life stages.

Figure 1 below summarises risk factors operating at different levels of influence. The figure underlines the importance of the social contexts in a young person’s life including the family, peer groups, schools and the broader community, as well as the young person’s own problem-solving and communication skills.
As highlighted in Figure 1, findings from the research have established that risk factors for adolescent violent behaviour can emerge at different stages throughout the developmental process. Risk factors may occur prior to birth and/or throughout childhood and adolescence (Bor, McGee, & Fagan, 2004; Smart et al., 2005).

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The research evidence also shows that the relative importance of different risk factors varies with age (Hawkins et al., 2000; Lipsey & Derzon, 1998).

Table 2: Predictors for violent behaviour or serious delinquency at age 6–11 years and 12–14 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength of predictors at 6–11 years</th>
<th>Strength of predictors at 12–14 years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>engaging in other offences (0.38)</td>
<td>lack of social ties (0.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>using substances (0.30)</td>
<td>interacting with antisocial peers (0.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being male (0.26)</td>
<td>engaging in offences (0.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low family socioeconomic status (0.24)</td>
<td>engaging in aggression (0.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>having antisocial parents (0.23)</td>
<td>poor attitude to and performance at school (0.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engaging in aggression (0.21)</td>
<td>poor parent-child relationships (0.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ethnicity (generally in US studies, ethnic minority groups are reported to be more likely to engage in violent behaviour) (0.20)</td>
<td>psychological factors such as restlessness, difficulty concentrating and risk-taking (0.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being male (0.19)</td>
<td>engaging in physical violence (0.18)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2.2 Situational risk factors

Situational risk factors refer to the external circumstances associated with a violent or antisocial event that may influence what happens at the event. A situational analysis in a given situation explains the interactions between the potential perpetrator and victim and describes how the potential for violence can develop into actual violence.

To date, longitudinal studies that examine the contribution of these factors in violent versus non-violent events have not been conducted (Hawkins et al., 2000). However, studies suggest that the following situational factors are likely to be important.

* The presence of a weapon in the situation increases the likelihood that a minor incident becomes violent, although the presence of a gun, as in the case of robbery, has been associated with a lower risk of injury (perhaps because victims are less likely to resist a perpetrator with a gun). The relative importance of this factor compared with the intent of the perpetrator to do harm is unclear (Sampson & Lauristen, 1994).

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4 The number in parentheses is the mean correlation between the factor and violent behaviour or serious delinquency at 15–25 years of age. Correlations range between 0 and 1.00. Correlations below 0.20 are small, above 0.80 are very high and correlations between 0.20 and 0.80 are medium sized. Correlations give an indication of the strength of the relationship between the factor and violent behaviour or serious delinquency.
• **Alcohol or other drug consumption by the offender or victim** triggers violent behaviour (Farrington, 1993; Wikström, 1985). For example, according to a Swedish study, about 75% of violent offenders and 50% of victims were intoxicated at the time of the violent incident (Wikström, 1985).

• **The presence of onlookers** is likely to influence the violent event although there is limited research on this topic (Sampson & Lauristen, 1994).

• **The behaviour of onlookers** (e.g., whether or not they intervene) is also an important factor, the impact of which varies depending on other factors such as how many onlookers there are (Farrington & Loeber, 1999; Hawkins et al., 2000; Sampson & Lauristen, 1994).

• **The motive of the perpetrator**, which changes with age, is a contributing factor. For adolescents about 50 per cent of violent incidents are motivated by seeking out excitement, often with peers, while the other 50 per cent are motivated by rational or utilitarian goals. For young people in their twenties, the main motivation is utilitarian and characterised by prior planning, psychological intimidation and weapon use (LeBlanc, 1989).

• **The relationship of the perpetrator to the victim** is important. For some offences like robbery, the perpetrator and victim are likely to be strangers, in contrast to homicides which tend to be committed between friends, family members and acquaintances (Sampson & Lauristen, 1994).

• **The behaviour of the victim** and in particular the extent of resistance shown by the victim may influence the extent of violent behaviour from the perpetrator (Farrington & Loeber, 1999; Hawkins et al., 2000; Sampson & Lauristen, 1994).

• Violence is more likely if **other actions (such as burglary) are involved** that could be conducive to violent behaviour. Young violent offenders do not specialise in particular crimes; they also commit non-violent crimes (at higher rates than violent crimes). Because they are more likely to be involved in crime situations that could lead to violence, young people become involved in a broad range of crimes (Krug et al., 2002).

### 2.2.3 Cultural risk factors

Cultural factors include ‘the inherited norms and values of a society’ (Krug et al., 2002).
Violent behaviour is more common in societies where violence is endorsed as an accepted method to resolve conflicts and young people are taught norms and values supporting the use of violent behaviour.

Young people growing up in Australia today are experiencing multiple influences in their social environment that differ to the experiences of previous generations. These include the changes in the labour market (Wyn, 2009); expectations that young people remain in education to the end of secondary school and beyond; living in sole parent families; growing up in smaller families with less contact with extended family members; living at home for longer periods of time (related to longer periods of study) and hence remaining financially dependent for longer; as well as delays in marriage and having children. The effects of such changes on young people's behaviour are still under investigation.

The development of a strong youth culture that includes underage drinking and other drug use and the party scene is also a feature of modern Australian life. Australia's strong sporting culture and the association of violence and binge drinking with some sports are also important cultural influences on young people's behaviour.

2.2.4 Media violence

In contemporary Australian society, the media (including television, video games, the internet) exerts a potent influence on the norms and values of young people (Krug et al., 2002) also exposing them to unprecedented levels of media violence. The effects of newer forms of so-called social media are, as yet, unknown.

Although research on the impact of the media on violent and aggressive behaviour has been conducted for more than 40 years, the only conclusive evidence so far is that media violence produces short-term increases in violence toward others in children and young people (Krug et al., 2002). There are no data to show media violence leads to more serious forms of violence such as homicide and assault.

Longitudinal research is required to determine the long-term effects of media violence on serious forms of violent behaviour, as well as on interpersonal relations and individual characteristics such as lack of respect, hostility, indifference and the inability to relate to other people's feelings (Krug et al., 2002).
2.3 Protective factors

**Protective factors** may work to mediate, or moderate, the influence of risk factors (Rutter, 1985) and, in some instances, may operate independently to directly decrease the likelihood of antisocial behaviour (Jessor, Turbin, & Costa, 1998).5

Identified protective factors include:

- **strong bonding** to family, school, community and peers
- **healthy beliefs** (such as consideration for others and understanding the consequences of unacceptable behaviour and substance use)
- **clear standards for behaviour** (ie standards that are considered to be socially appropriate according to prevailing social norms).

For bonding to be a protective influence, it must occur through involvement with peers and adults who communicate healthy values or beliefs and set clear standards for socially acceptable behaviour.

2.3.1 Protective factors for the development of violent and antisocial behaviour among young people

As for risk factors, comprehensive reviews have identified protective factors for young people against the development of violent and antisocial behaviour (Hawkins et al., 2000; Hemphill et al., 2009; Vassallo et al., 2002; World Health Organization, 2002).

Figure 2 describes the protective factors that can influence the behaviour of young people. This model underlines the importance of supportive environments including families, schools, and parents' work places, as well as the young person's own skills for emotion regulation and academic, communication and problem-solving skills.

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5 This description of protective factors has been adapted from Williams et al (2009).
Based on the extensive research on risk and protective factors for violent and antisocial behaviour in young people, models have been developed to describe how these factors affect young people's behaviour. These models are described in Section 3.

6 Adapted from Zubrick SR, Silburn SR & Prior M (2005)
Section 3: A framework for addressing factors associated with youth violence

The primary focus of this report is on reviewing the evidence on approaches and programs that aim to prevent violent and antisocial behaviour among young people with a particular focus on the early adolescent years (10–14).

ARACY’s approach to complex problems affecting the healthy development and wellbeing of young Australians is based on a framework that:

- prioritises prevention and early intervention — promoting and supporting evidence-based prevention and early intervention to enhance the wellbeing of Australian children and young people
- focuses on developmental pathways — taking account of the developmental stage of the child or young person and the influences to which they are subject at different life stages
- recognises multiple influences — requiring careful consideration of the complex and interrelated individual, social, environmental, economic, political and cultural factors impacting on a young person’s development and wellbeing.

This section of the report describes these frameworks that informed the review of the evidence on approaches and programs to prevent violent and antisocial behaviour in young people.

3.1 Prevention and early intervention

The public health framework applied to population health issues reinforces the effectiveness of prevention and early intervention in reducing the extent of health problems in the community, as well as offering costs savings over more expensive treatment options (Aos, Lieb, Mayfield, Miller, & Pennucci, 2004).

Application of the public health framework to social problems requires:

- a clear definition of the problem (in this case violent and antisocial behaviour)
• an evidence-informed understanding of the multiple factors that influence the development of the problem

• trials and evaluations of potential prevention and early intervention approaches

• disseminating the evidence on effective preventive or early intervention programs.

3.2 Developmental pathways

Research from different disciplines and methodologies (including life-course development research, community epidemiology and preventive intervention trials) has supported the value of applying a developmental pathways approach to the prevention of violent and antisocial behaviour among young people (eg. Coie et al., 1993; Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994).

The aim is to intervene early before problems manifest or become entrenched in the young person’s life by modifying factors that:

• are appropriate to the young person’s physical and psycho-social developmental stage

• reduce influences that may lead to the development of violent and antisocial behaviours

• reduce the likelihood of the young person engaging in behaviours that may negatively impact their future prospects in life.

Two key concepts in this approach are the risk and protective factors described in Section 2 above.

3.2.1 The Social Development Model

Using a developmental pathways approach, Catalano and Hawkins (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996) put forward a Social Development Model (SDM) that integrates the available knowledge of risk and protective factors for youth antisocial behaviour (including violence). The SDM has been supported by research showing evidence for the pathways described in the model (eg. Hawkins et al., 1998; Herrenkohl et al., 2000).

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7 The description of the developmental pathways approach and the Social Development Model in this section has been adapted from Williams et al (2009).
The SDM incorporates the main features of various theories by which individuals learn to behave in socially acceptable or unacceptable ways, including theories of:

- **social control** (by which social norms are enforced, reinforced and internalised)
- **social learning** (involving the interaction between environmental and psychological influences by which individuals learn the personal and social consequences of their actions)
- **differential association** (focusing on the learning of criminal behaviour via social interactions with others).

According to the SDM, three conditions must be present in the domains of family, school, community and peer group for young people to develop strong bonds to these social units. The three conditions interact with the young person’s individual characteristics to promote healthy development and behaviours.

Under this model, the three conditions are described as:

- **opportunities** for active involvement and contribution at home, at school, with friends and in the community (eg. taking part in shared activities with other people through sport, youth groups, volunteering)
- **skills** to be successful in meeting the opportunities provided (eg. assisting a young person to develop the skills required to enable them to engage positively in a sporting activity)
- consistent recognition or reinforcement of effort and accomplishments by parents, teachers and community members.

### 3.3 Multiple influences (ecological systems)

Efforts to prevent violent and antisocial behaviour encompass a diverse range of programs and strategies that differ along multiple dimensions, including:

- the population on which they focus
- the specific risk and protective factors they address
- the theories underlying how they bring about change.
Typically prevention approaches for reducing youth violence and antisocial behaviour are organised according to the level of influence they attempt to change within the social-ecological framework, ie individual, close interpersonal relationships (family and peers), proximal social settings (school and community), and broader society (Farrell & Flannery, 2006; Krug et al., 2002).

The diagram below shows the inter-relationship between these multiple levels of the socio-ecological environment.

*Figure 3: The social-ecological model*

**Individual-level approaches** address individual behaviours or characteristics that affect a young person's risk of, or resistance to, engaging in violent and antisocial behaviour. In general, prevention approaches targeted at the individual aim to increase the level of protective factors associated with individual skills, attitudes and beliefs.

**Relationship-level approaches** influence the relationships that young people have with others with whom they regularly interact, ie family and peers.

**Proximal social settings** approaches address both systemic and non-systemic factors within social environments in which young people interact with each other such as school or the community.

**Societal macro-level approaches** address social and cultural factors such as economic and social barriers to development, social norms and values that promote violent and antisocial behaviour, the impact of the media, and policy and legal decisions.

3.4 Summary of implications for policy and practice

The developmental needs of young people, and the complex problems that result when their developmental needs are not met, do not fit neatly into any one area of public, private or family level of influence or responsibility.

Influences that impact on the healthy (or unhealthy) social and emotional development of young people cross over multiple domains of the young person's life indicating a need for holistic responses that integrate responses at a family and community level and across whole of government service provision.

Effective action to reduce violent and antisocial behaviour in young people requires:

• prioritisation of prevention and early intervention
• adoption of a developmental pathways approach
• multi-level approaches that address influences across the different contexts of a young person's life
• identification of factors that are most important in particular communities (based on local data to inform targets for prevention and early intervention).
Section 4

Pre-requisites for effective prevention

The evidence base of ways to prevent youth violence and antisocial behaviour has expanded rapidly over the past decade and has shown that prevention is effective and worth doing. Systematic reviews of the research have identified a broad range of effective prevention programs and policies that can reduce the likelihood of youth involvement in violent or antisocial behaviour or, for those already involved, reduce the rate and seriousness of further problem behaviour (Mercy & Hammond, 2001).

This paper proposes the integration of three key activities to effectively prevent violent and antisocial behaviour:

- **Data collection and analysis**: Development of data systems for routine monitoring of trends in violent and antisocial behaviour. This should form the basis of prevention efforts at a national and local level.

- **Selection of evidence-based policies and programs**: Programs should have strong empirical evidence for reducing violent and antisocial behaviour with the target population, show sustained effects, and show replication across different sites. They should address the major influential factors in particular communities as indicated by local data.

- **Effective implementation**: The effectiveness of an intervention in a particular setting depends not just on whether it has been demonstrated in the past to be efficacious, but on the quality of implementation. Section 7 outlines key principles of effective implementation.

4.1 Data collection and analysis

Effective responses to youth violence and antisocial behaviour are data and knowledge dependent (Mazerolle, 2007).

Developing the capacity to routinely collect data on risk and protective factors associated with violent and antisocial behaviour contributes to prevention at both national and local levels by:

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9 Adapted from: Preventing violence: a guide to implementing the recommendations of the World report on violence and health. (Butchart, Pinney, Check, & Villaveces, 2004)
ensuring that a common definition of the problem is applied across government departments and sectors

providing ongoing and systematic information on the incidence, causes and consequences of youth violent and antisocial behaviour at local, regional and national levels

enabling the early identification of new trends in youth violence and antisocial behaviour and emerging problem areas so that appropriate and timely interventions can be implemented

identifying prevention priorities among those at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence and antisocial behaviour, and priorities for addressing the associated socio-environmental risk and protective factors

providing information by which to evaluate prevention efforts that are either direct (eg. increased monitoring of ‘hot spots’ of antisocial behaviour) or indirect (eg. enhanced teacher training)

monitoring seasonal and longitudinal trends in the magnitude and characteristics of violence and antisocial behaviour and associated risk and protective factors.

Data such as these provide essential information both for formulating and evaluating policies and programs aimed at preventing youth violence and antisocial behaviour at local and national levels.

Access to and interpretation of relevant Australian data is currently very limited due to:

restricted availability of crime data (data are not made publicly available)

differences across jurisdictions in data gathering methods

national self-report monitoring surveys, which include data on violent and antisocial behaviour, not being routinely or consistently collected.

Both self-report and official datasets are required and represent an area for greater investment.
4.2 Selection of evidence-based programs

Demand for effective prevention programs for violent and antisocial behaviour has intensified over the past decade, resulting in a proliferation of programs and strategies at local, state and national levels targeting these behaviours. However, very few of these approaches have strong evidence demonstrating their effectiveness and, despite good aims and intentions, a number are either ineffective or do more harm than good.

Given resource limitations, it is imperative that prevention efforts draw on the evidence on approaches and programs that have been demonstrated to be effective, while avoiding those that have not.

Program evaluation

In best practice, four levels of scientific standards are applied to evaluate the effectiveness of prevention programs for violent and antisocial behaviour (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001):

- **rigorous experimental design**: research designs that allow reasonable confidence in the findings such as random assignment studies (randomised trials) or quasi-experimental designs with matched control groups
- **evidence of reduction in violence and/or antisocial behaviour (onset or prevalence)**, or the risk and protective factors associated with them
- **sustainability of effects**: long-term changes in individual competencies, environmental conditions, and patterns of behaviour
- **replication of these effects at multiple sites**: positive results in a wide range of community settings (on the proviso that the program has been implemented with fidelity and with the appropriate population).

Based on these criteria, a number of research bodies, professional groups and private agencies have developed processes for evaluating specific programs and identifying effective programs and approaches.
Meta-analyses
Meta-analyses use statistical techniques to compare similar programs from different studies. In addition to evaluating specific programs, this method of analysis can identify specific strategies and methods that are more likely to be effective than others, as well as particular characteristics of programs that are important (see recent reviews in Section 9).

Criteria for program classification in this report
This report draws on the information sources cited above to identify and review the evidence on broad approaches and specific programs that are targeted at, or encompass, young people aged 10–14 years.

The evidence-based criteria for assessing the relative effectiveness of these programs are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>rigorously evaluated; consistently demonstrated significant positive effects in reducing violence and antisocial behaviour; showing replication across sites with demonstrated results; showing sustainability of effects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promising</td>
<td>rigorously evaluated; positive effects in reducing violence and/or antisocial behaviour in at least one site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requiring more research</td>
<td>includes common approaches to prevention of violent and antisocial behaviour and/or approaches that target known risk and protective factors for which the evidence on effectiveness is limited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective</td>
<td>rigorously evaluated; negative or null effects.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The key resources consulted in reviewing the evidence for this report (including a brief description and weblinks to the source) are listed in Section 9 of this report.

4.3 Effective implementation
One of the biggest challenges in the field of implementation science is how to ‘do’ prevention well, particularly as:

- the effectiveness of an intervention in any given setting depends not just on whether it has been demonstrated in the past to be effective, but on the fidelity and quality of the implementation (Mercy & Hammond, 2001)
- programs that produce positive effects in one setting do not always produce similar effects in others.

These implementation challenges underscore the importance of incorporating evaluation into any program implementation plan (Farrell & Flannery, 2006). Section 7 outlines the key principles of effective implementation.
Section 5:
The evidence on effective prevention programs

The focus of this report is on prevention efforts that are most likely to prevent violent and antisocial behaviour before it starts, particularly targeting young adolescents (i.e., in the 10–14 years age group).

Prevention approaches may operate at the level of primary prevention including all young people in the target group, and secondary prevention aimed at young people who have been identified as being at higher risk of engaging in problem behaviours.

Tertiary prevention programs are aimed at providing corrective treatment and/or rehabilitation for young people who are already manifesting the behaviours of concern.

This section of the report provides details of evidence-based programs operating at the primary and secondary prevention level, addressing risk and protective factors at different levels of the ecological framework. The key features of effective programs are also highlighted.

Most of the prevention evaluation research to date has been undertaken in the United States. Research has shown that risk and protective factors for violent and antisocial behaviour work in similar ways in developed or Western countries (see for example Hemphill et al., 2009). Therefore, some of the work that has been carried out in the US may apply internationally. However, efforts to establish rigorous evaluation of prevention efforts currently underway in Australia must be pursued.

The list of prevention approaches outlined in the following sections is not exhaustive (refer to key resources in section 9). However, it represents the broad spectrum of possible approaches (and those to avoid) which have the strongest evidence to date, and highlights the need for a range of different strategies targeting different levels of influence in a young person’s life.

Research and evaluation relating to prevention of violence and antisocial behaviour is constantly evolving and expanding so evidence for certain approaches or programs changes over time. End users need to source information about effective prevention approaches that are current at the time of planning. Section 9 lists relevant prevention resources, including links to research and government bodies that regularly evaluate prevention approaches. These sources provide an evidence base for planning policies and programs aimed at preventing violence and antisocial behaviour among young people.
5.1 Individual level approaches

Individual-level approaches address individual behaviours or characteristics that affect a young person’s risk of, or resistance to, engaging in violent and antisocial behaviour. In general, prevention approaches targeted at the individual aim to increase the level of protective factors associated with individual skills, attitudes and beliefs.

5.1.1 Social development training

Social development or social skills programs aim to reduce violence and antisocial behaviour at the individual level by improving competency and social skills with peers and promoting behaviour that is positive, friendly and cooperative. Such programs can be provided to all students or targeted toward high-risk youth and are most commonly carried out in school settings. Programs typically focus on:

- managing anger
- modifying behaviour
- adopting a social perspective
- moral development
- building social skills
- social problem solving and conflict resolution.

**Core elements of effective social development programs**

Effective social development programs typically incorporate the following key elements:

- classroom curriculum is focussed on improving behaviour, minimising aggression and enhancing interpersonal and conflict resolution skills, e.g. social/cognitive problem solving, conflict resolution skills, anger management, effective communication skills, building social skills and reinforcing the benefits of being a positive family and community role model
- teaching and skill building is sequential at each grade level with developmentally appropriate curricula
opportunities are provided for real life skill-building such as peer mediation or cooperative learning

• students, families and the school are involved in using program components

• optimal dosage is defined, ie length of lessons and number of lessons per week for each age group.

Program: **Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways (RIPP) (US)** *(primary prevention)*

Evidence: Effective

Description: A school-based violence prevention program for middle school students designed to be implemented with a peer mediation program. Students practice using a social-cognitive problem-solving model to identify and choose non-violent strategies for dealing with conflict.

Results: Significant reductions in rates of being injured in a fight; rates of threatening to hurt a teacher (girls only); violent behaviour at 6-month follow-up (7th grade participants); frequency of physical aggression; rates of bringing a weapon to school, threatening someone with a weapon and sustaining fight-related injuries in the past 30 days.

**Weblink (evaluation):**

Program: **Too Good for Violence (US)** *(primary prevention)*

Evidence: Effective

Details: A school-based violence prevention and character education program for students in kindergarten through to 12th grade. It is designed to enhance pro-social behaviours and skills and improve protective factors related to conflict and violence.

Results: Significant improvement in students' emotional competence, communication skills, and social and conflict resolution skills; significantly more frequent use of pro-social personal and social skills and behaviours; 45 per cent reduction in intention to fight among high school students.

**Weblink (evaluation):**
5.1.2 Violence prevention curriculum

Violence prevention curriculum programs are aimed at all students and are included as part of core school education (eg. as part of the health curriculum) for adolescents. Violence prevention curricula provide students with information on risk factors for interpersonal violence and skills for choosing alternatives to violence.

**Core elements of violence prevention curriculum programs**

Effective violence prevention curriculum programs typically:

- reinforce that violence is preventable
- teach students that anger is a normal part of life and that anger can be expressed in healthy, constructive ways
- help students understand that controlling anger and violence is part of maturing
- identify positive ways for students to express their anger
- help students think about and use alternatives to violence in conflict situations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program:</th>
<th>Violence Prevention Curriculum for Adolescents (US) <em>(primary prevention)</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evidence:</td>
<td>Promising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description:</td>
<td>A classroom-based curriculum to be used in health education, social studies, psychology or other areas of instruction targeted at high school level, consisting of ten 50 minute sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results:</td>
<td>Significant effects in reducing frequency of fighting and use of violence, and significant reduction in suspension rates. However, to date, limited evaluation design and some inconsistent findings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.3 Behavioural monitoring and reinforcement

The behavioural monitoring and reinforcement program is a school-based intervention aimed at high-risk youth. It particularly targets students in Grade 7 with low academic motivation, family problems or disciplinary problems.
The program includes behaviour monitoring and reinforcement in the classroom, plus enhanced communication among teachers, students, and parents about school behaviour and attendance (with regular classroom meetings and reports to parents). The program has been shown to have positive effects on several aspects of academic achievement, reduced drug use and reduced risk of having a court record five years after participation.

**Program:** Behavioural Monitoring and Reinforcement (BMRP) (US) *(secondary prevention)*

**Evidence:** Promising

**Description:** A school-based intervention that aims to prevent juvenile delinquency, substance use, and school failure among high-risk adolescents. The two year intervention begins when participants are in seventh grade and includes monitoring student actions, rewarding appropriate behaviour, and increasing communication between teachers, students, and parents.

**Results:** Students showed higher grades and better attendance; less self-reported delinquency, drug abuse, school-based problems and unemployment; less court records at 5-year follow-up.

**Weblink (evaluation):**
www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/promisingprograms/BPP02.html

5.2 Relationship level approaches (family level)

Family-based interventions attempt to reduce risk and enhance protective factors by working with parents to increase their use of effective parenting skills and other strategies to improve family relations overall.

5.2.1 Family therapy

Family therapy approaches are targeted at high risk youth and aim to reduce behaviour problems during adolescence through improved family interaction. Therapy is focussed on changing maladaptive patterns of family interaction and communication. Typically therapy involves a trained therapist working with the adolescent and one or more family members.
Core elements of effective family therapy programs

Effective family therapy programs incorporate the following key elements:

- **engagement**: engaging the family in therapy and the process, designed to emphasise strengths within the family and understand resistances
- **motivation**: changing maladaptive emotional reactions and beliefs, and increasing alliance, trust, hope, and motivation for change
- **assessment**: identifying interaction patterns that increase problem behaviour
- **behaviour change**: changing maladaptive family interaction patterns eg. improving conflict resolution, communication and parenting skills through practice-based learning of skills and specific tasks
- **generalisation**: transfer of skills and effects of treatment to different contexts and systems.

**Program**: Functional Family Therapy (US)  
*secondary and tertiary prevention*

**Evidence**: Effective

**Description**: An outcome-driven prevention/intervention program for youth who have demonstrated the entire range of antisocial behaviours and related syndromes; aimed at high-risk youth aged 11–18 years.

**Results**: Effective treatment of conduct disorders (clinically significant antisocial behaviour); preventing further incidence of presenting problem; preventing adolescents from entering the adult criminal system.

**Weblink (evaluation)**:  
[www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/modelprograms/FFT.html](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/modelprograms/FFT.html)

Program: **Brief strategic family therapy (US)**  
*(secondary and tertiary prevention)*

Evidence: Effective

Description: This program aims to improve youth’s behaviour problems by improving family interactions that are presumed to be directly related to the child’s symptoms. It targets children and adolescents between 8 and 17 years of age displaying or at risk of developing behaviour problems.

Results: Significant reductions in conduct disorder and socialised aggression.

Weblink (evaluation):  
[www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/promisingprograms/BPP03.html](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/promisingprograms/BPP03.html)  

### 5.2.2 Parent training

Parent training approaches may be universally available or targeted at high risk youth and aim to reduce behaviour problems during adolescence through improved skills in parenting and improved interpersonal and personal competencies among youth (in conjunction with parent training).

Typically these approaches combine separate skill-building sessions for parent and adolescents as well as combined supervised family activities.

Sessions for young people concentrate on strengthening goal setting, communication skills, behaviour management techniques, and peer pressure.

Parent sessions focus on the importance of nurturing while simultaneously setting rules, monitoring compliance, and applying appropriate discipline. Topics include developing appropriate rules, encouraging good behaviour, using consequences, building bridges, and protecting against substance abuse.

**Core elements of effective parent training programs**

Effective parent training programs incorporate the following key elements:

- teaching parents to use behaviour management techniques, effective communication, managing strong emotions, establishing clear expectations
- social skills training for the adolescent including managing emotions, effective communication, peer resistance and refusal techniques
- combined parent and child sessions designed to increase family cohesiveness including conflict resolution and communication skills
- practice-based learning of skills.
Program: **Strengthening families program: For parents and youth 10–14 years (US) (primary prevention)**

Evidence: Effective

Description: A universal, family-based intervention which enhances parents’ general child management skills, parent-child affective relationships, and family communication.

Results: Improved child management practices; increased parent-child communication; and, for youth, less substance use, fewer conduct problems and better resistance to peer pressure. Positive changes indicated in the four years following the study pre-test.

Weblink (evaluation):
- [www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/promisingprograms/BPP18.html](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/promisingprograms/BPP18.html)

Program: **Parenting Adolescents: A Creative Experience (PACE) (AUS) (primary prevention)**

Evidence: Promising

Description: PACE is a universally targeted intervention delivered to groups of parents in schools by trained facilitators. The program aims to enhance parenting skills and emotional competencies within families, and to assist parents in learning strategies to raise their children’s self esteem, optimism, hope and problem-solving skills. The philosophy behind PACE is to extend the knowledge of parents about adolescents.

Results: Results from a matched comparison study found students in the intervention schools demonstrated reductions in conflict with parents, reduced substance use, and less delinquency (Toumbourou & Gregg, 2002).

Weblink (evaluation):
Program: Group Teen Triple P (AUS)  
*(primary and secondary prevention)*

Evidence: Requires more research

Description: Group Teen Triple P is a group-format behavioural family intervention program requiring eight hours participation (typically a two-hour session once a week for four weeks). It employs an active skills training process to help parents acquire new knowledge and skills via observation, discussion, practice and feedback.

Results: Reductions in parent-teenager conflict and a range of parent risk factors. Further research required to determine effect on reducing violent and antisocial behaviour among young people (Ralph & Sanders, 2004).

Weblink: [http://www1.triplep.net/](http://www1.triplep.net/)

5.3 Relationship level approaches (other adults)

Relationship level approaches aim to promote positive relationship influences between young people and significant others in their lives — in this case, with other adults.

5.3.1 Mentoring

Mentoring programs aim to provide support to high risk youth in all aspects of their lives through a professionally supported one-to-one relationship with a caring adult. Service delivery is by community-based volunteers who interact regularly with youth in one-to-one relationships and who are supported through a case management approach. The volunteer mentor commits substantial time to the youth, meeting for about four hours, two to four times a month, for at least one year. During their time together, the mentor and youth engage in developmentally appropriate activities that enhance communication skills, develop relationship skills and support positive decision-making.
Core elements of effective mentoring programs

Effective mentoring programs incorporate the following key elements:

- careful screening and matching of youth and mentors
- ongoing and regular case management support and supervision — staff supervision and support are considered critical to ensuring that the mentor and the youth being mentored meet regularly to build positive relationships
- ongoing and regular meetings between youth and mentor
- developmentally appropriate activities.

Program: Big Brothers Big Sisters (US and Aus)  
*(secondary prevention)*

Evidence: Effective

Description: Program provides support and friendship to youth aged 6 to 18, typically from single parent homes. All matches of adult and youth are carefully assessed and supervised.

Results: Reductions in drug and alcohol use and physical violence; improvements in academic behaviour and performance and in parent and peer relationships.

Weblink (US, evaluation):  
www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/modelprograms/BBBS.html

Weblink (AUS):  
www.bigbrothersbigsisters.org.au

Other resources (AUS):  
www.youthmentoring.org

5.4 Proximal level approaches (school level)

Proximal school level approaches address both systemic and non-systemic factors within school environments in which young people interact with each other. Structural changes in the school environment may include enhanced teacher training, implementing school wide reforms to promote a non-violent culture and attempts to promote social and emotional learning through restorative practices.
5.4.1 Teacher training in behaviour management

Training and support of teachers in effective behaviour management practices has been found to reduce problem behaviour (reviewed in Dodge, Dishion, & Lansford, 2006). As well-trained teachers are integral to effective prevention efforts, adequate ongoing training and professional development opportunities throughout teaching careers are essential.

Teacher training is typically incorporated as part of a multi-faceted approach to the prevention of violent and antisocial behaviour.

Core components of effective teacher training and support

Effective teacher training and support programs incorporate the following key elements:

- training in behaviour management practices
- training in self-management techniques
- building positive relationships with students
- effective use of teacher attention
- use of praise and encouragement
- proactive teaching strategies, including learning about empathy, social skills and problem-solving in the classroom.

Program: Incredible Years Teaching (includes parent, student and teacher training) (US) (primary prevention)

Evidence: Effective

Description: This teacher training intervention is focused on strengthening teacher classroom management strategies, promoting children’s pro-social behaviour and school readiness (reading skills), and reducing classroom aggression and non-cooperation with peers and teachers.

Results: When used as part of a multi-faceted approach, results include significant increases in teachers’ use of positive management strategies; increases in children's positive affect and cooperation with teachers and positive interactions with peers and engagement with school activities; reductions in peer aggression in the classroom.

Weblink (evaluation):
www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/modelprograms/IYS.html

Official site: www.incredibleyears.com/program/teacher.asp
5.4.2 School-wide reform
Approaches aimed at school-wide reform include a range of systemic strategies for achieving important social and learning outcomes while preventing problem behaviour among all students. School-wide approaches to problem behaviour recognise that schools require a preventive, whole-school approach. Implementation is structured and long-term and comprises a range of effective practices, interventions and systems change strategies that have empirical support (Dodge et al., 2006).

Core elements of school-wide reform
Effective school-wide reform approaches incorporate the following key elements:

- operationally defined and valued outcomes (e.g., social competence, academic achievement)
- a strong theoretical basis providing fundamental principles for the design of the behavioural support approaches employed
- use of research-validated practices for achieving identified outcomes
- systems change both to enhance the broad quality with which all students are living/learning and to reduce problem behaviours.

In addition the following implementation requirements are needed:

- a committed school leadership team, including staff, parents and community representatives
- training and support to assist the school in implementation
- accurate and consistent implementation of practices by all staff members
- the school principal as an active participant
- reviews of school data to guide decision making and planning.
5.4.3 Restorative practices

Restorative practice (RP) is increasingly used in Australian schools for prevention of and early intervention with violence and is derived from work that originated in the justice system, termed restorative justice (Braithwaite & Strang, 2001; Morrison, 2007; Zehr & Mika, 1997).

Restorative practices refer to processes that view violent and antisocial behaviours as a fundamental violation of people and interpersonal relationships in the community (Morrison, 2002) and seek to repair relationships and ensure perpetrators are held accountable (Shaw, 2007).

Restorative justice intervention has been extensively evaluated in the justice system and shown to lead to reductions in reoffending rates as well as benefits to victims of violent and antisocial behaviour (see review in Youth Justice Board, 2004). However, to date, rigorous evaluation of RP in schools has yet to be undertaken either in Australia or internationally (Morrison, 2002, 2007). Given that there is good evidence for restorative practices in reducing reoffending in the criminal justice system, further research on the effects of RP in schools is warranted to ascertain its effectiveness in reducing violent and antisocial behaviour.
**Approach:**  
Restorative Practices (RP) in Schools  
(*secondary prevention*)

**Evidence:**  
Requires more research

**Description:**  
RP programs in schools typically incorporate the following key elements: training in RP; development of supportive culture; embedded school-wide (a ‘whole-school’ approach) (Thorsborne & Vinegrad, 2004).

**Results:**  
A national evaluation of a RP program in the UK generally did not find any statistically significant differences in attitudes or levels of victimisation between the baseline and follow-up surveys between RP and non-program schools, although there was some indication that overall rates of violent and antisocial behaviour had reduced (Youth Justice Board, 2004). A qualitative study carried out in Australia (Shaw, 2007) found that RP was an effective process for repairing relationships, acknowledging consequences of behaviour, and solving disputes. Further research is required to determine its effect on reducing violent and antisocial behaviour.

**Weblinks:**  
Centre for Restorative Justice, Australian National University  
[http://crj.anu.edu.au/](http://crj.anu.edu.au/)  
Transforming Conflict (UK)  
[www.transformingconflict.org](http://www.transformingconflict.org)  
Safer Saner Schools (US)  
[www.safersanerschools.org](http://www.safersanerschools.org)

### 5.5 Proximal level approaches (community level)

Approaches at the community level address both systemic and non-systemic factors within the community. Community level approaches may include targeted or multi-level community interventions.

#### 5.5.1 Coordinated multi-level community interventions

Coordinated community level approaches that facilitate strong links between agencies and organisations addressing similar youth-based issues and solid partnerships between families, schools and communities aim to reduce youth problem behaviours by mobilising communities. Such approaches have been associated with reduced behavioural problems in young people (see below).
Core elements of effective multi-level community interventions

Coordinated community level interventions that have been shown to be effective incorporate the following key elements (Hawkins et al., 2009):

- the formation of a community ‘coalition’ of key stakeholders
- a process of assessment and prioritisation using local data that identifies the risk and protective factors most in need of attention
- priorities are linked to prevention programs that are proved to work.

Program: Communities that Care (CTC) (US, Aus, UK, Netherlands) (primary and secondary prevention)

Evidence: Effective

Description: CTC involves a coalition-based community prevention operating system that uses a public health approach to prevent youth problem behaviours. The process helps stakeholders in the community to select and implement tested, effective prevention policies and programs to address the most pressing risks facing their youth.

Results: A randomised control trial of this coordinated approach found lower initiation to violence, theft and vandalism among children from participating communities compared with those in a control group (Hawkins et al., 2008), and significantly lower rates of delinquent behaviours for students in grades 5 through 8 (Hawkins et al., 2009).


5.5.2 Structured youth programs and activities

Structured community programs and school-based extracurricular activities that provide opportunities to interact with pro-social peers, learn skills and interact with adults in positive settings (such as volunteering and community service activities) have been found to be associated with reduced antisocial behaviour in high risk youth, with no negative effects on participating low-risk youth (Dodge et al., 2006; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Feldman, Caplinger, & Wodarski, 1983).
Core elements of structured youth programs

Promising youth programs and activities incorporate the following key elements:

- structured programs that provide opportunities to learn skills and interact with adults in positive ways (rather than programs that simply provide a place for young people to hang out) (Dodge et al., 2006)

- integration of high risk youth with a majority of low risk youth – young adolescents at high risk are most susceptible to antisocial peer influence, therefore it is important that these youth are exposed to positive peer influence and pro-social norms (Eccles & Barber, 1999)

- strong adult supervision – active supervision by adults who can monitor behaviour and serve as mentors (Mahoney & Stattin, 2000)

- conducted by experienced group leader or therapist – highly experienced workers able to keep high risk youth from becoming more antisocial (as compared to inexperienced leaders) (Feldman et al., 1983)

- highly structured – a high degree of structure in the group reduces influence of antisocial peers (Feldman et al., 1983).

Approach: Structured youth programs that combine high and low risk youth (primary and secondary prevention)

Evidence: Promising

Description: Programs run by public or private organisations or school-based extracurricular activities that are open to all youth (both ‘high-risk’ and ‘low-risk’) and incorporate the core elements listed above.

Results: Studies of school students have found that those involved in structured pro-social activities such as volunteering and community service show reduced rates of involvement in antisocial behaviour (Eccles & Barber, 1999; O'Donnell et al., 1999) even when accounting for other factors. Results from a randomised trial showed that high-risk boys assigned to groups with a majority of non-deviant peers decreased their rate of antisocial behaviour with no negative consequence on the low-risk boys (Feldman et al., 1983).

References: (Cooper, Lutenbacher, & Faccia, 2000; Dodge et al., 2006)
5.5.4 Reducing the availability of alcohol

Alcohol is an important situational factor that can precipitate violence. According to the World Health Organization’s report on violence prevention (World Health Organization, 2009):

- individuals who start drinking at an early age, drink more frequently and drink in greater quantities and to intoxication have higher risks of violence
- environments where there is a culture of heavy drinking and greater alcohol availability experience higher levels of violence and crime.

Given the strong links between alcohol and violence and antisocial behaviour, efforts to reduce the availability and harmful use of alcohol are important prevention strategies. There is good evidence that reducing the availability of alcohol is associated with reduced violence in adult populations (eg. World Health Organization, 2009).

However, research on the effect of reducing alcohol availability on young adolescent populations is limited. A recent review (Ogilvie, Gruer, & Haw, 2005) indicated that restricted availability of alcohol may be associated with a decrease in consumption by young people. However, the impact on youth violence and antisocial behaviour has been largely unexplored.

Given that alcohol use among early adolescents in Australia is high — in year 8, 30 per cent of boys and 24 per cent of girls report recent alcohol consumption and 9 per cent of boys and 7 per cent of girls report binge drinking (Williams et al., 2009) — this is likely to be an important strategy in multi-faceted prevention efforts and further research is warranted.

**Approach:** Reducing alcohol availability *(primary prevention)*

**Evidence:** Requires more research

**Description:** To date, efforts to restrict availability of alcohol to young people have involved increasing the price, enforcing the minimum age of purchase and raising the minimum age of purchase (Ogilvie et al., 2005). However, the impact on youth violence and antisocial behaviour has been largely unexplored.

**Reference:** (Ogilvie et al., 2005)
5.6 Societal macro-level approaches

Strategies that aim to influence societal norms and structures are an important part of a multi-faceted approach to prevention.

The following approaches target risk factors at the societal level. For effective prevention of violence and antisocial behaviour they need to be combined with strategies that target risk factors across other domains of influence.

5.6.1 Reducing media violence

Efforts to reduce media violence are likely to be important in a multi-faceted approach to prevention given that exposure to media violence has been identified as a risk factor for later violence (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

However, few preventive efforts targeting media violence have been studied systematically and further research is needed to determine the effect on youth violent and antisocial behaviour. Such efforts have taken various forms, attempting to reduce the amount of media violence and children's access to it including10:

- encouraging and facilitating parental monitoring of children's access to media
- educating parents and children about the potential dangers of media violence
- targeting children's views about violence to reduce the chances that they will imitate the violence they see (for example, through relevant school curricula).

Although many violence prevention programs address a complex array of risk and protective factors in the lives of young people, most do not address the role of the media.

Given that research to date justifies sustained efforts to curb the adverse effects of media violence on young people, rigorous research in this area is warranted.

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**Approach:** Reducing media violence *(primary prevention)*

**Evidence:** Requires more research

**Description:** To date, efforts aimed at reducing exposure to media violence have included parent education on the potential dangers of media violence; efforts aimed at reducing the potential impact of media violence have included school curricula targeting the views of children about violence. However, rigorous research is required to determine the effect on reducing violent and antisocial behaviour in young people.

**Reference:** *Youth violence: A report of the Surgeon General* (US Department of Health and Human Services 2001)

### 5.6.2 Deconcentrating poverty / reducing marginalisation

Policies that reduce the concentration of poverty in urban areas and/or reduce marginalisation may be effective in combating youth violence (WHO 2001). Examples of such efforts include:

- **A housing and mobility experiment ‘Moving to Opportunity’ (US)** (Ludwig, Duncan, & Hirschfield, 2001) found that providing families living in areas with a high concentration of poverty with the opportunity to move to neighbourhoods with lower poverty levels substantially reduced violent behaviour by adolescents.

- In Australia, the **‘Pathways to Prevention’ project** (Homel et al., 2006) addresses underlying determinants of low SES and has shown strong efficacy in decreasing adolescent crime and violence and effectiveness in improving child health outcomes.

- Reducing marginalisation by **improving educational pathways** may also be associated with reductions in crime (Hawkins et al., 2000; Krug et al., 2002).

A better understanding of the mechanisms through which neighbourhoods and peer groups influence youth violence is needed to understand the implications of the results of these approaches and further rigorous research is required (Dodge et al., 2006). Nevertheless, given the breadth of risk factors that have been identified for youth violence and antisocial behaviour, effective prevention efforts need to target multiple risk factors of which low SES is one (Toumbourou et al., 2007).
Approach: Reducing marginalisation (primary prevention)

Evidence: Requires more research

Description: Efforts to reduce marginalisation have included improving educational pathways and addressing the underlying determinants of low socio-economic status (such as unemployment). However, further research is required to better understand the mechanisms through which these efforts exert their influence on young people, and their specific effect on violent and antisocial behaviour.

Reference: Homel et al 2006

5.6.3 Changing cultural norms that support violence

Social marketing to change social norms and promote pro-social behaviour has been identified as an important part of a multi-faceted approach to prevention.

For example, the past decade has seen a significant reduction in smoking prevalence in adolescents, associated with a multi-faceted approach combining public information campaigns with strong legislation and increased taxes aimed at reducing tobacco use.

Social marketing campaigns have been conducted in Australia and elsewhere aimed at changing community attitudes toward crime and violence (eg. domestic violence). However, there has been little systematic research evaluating the impacts of social marketing campaigns aimed at violence and crime prevention (Toumbourou et al., 2000).

Given the large amounts of money spent on social marketing, investment in rigorous evaluation would appear warranted.

5.7 Multi-level approaches

Multi-level approaches target various levels of influence in a young person’s life. The primary aim is to change behaviour, skills and attitudes at the individual level, recognising that effective prevention at the individual level also requires modification of risk and protective factors at all levels within the ecological framework.
Multi-level approaches have consistently been found to be the most effective in reducing youth violence and antisocial behaviour (eg. see review Nation et al., 2003).

5.7.1 Multi-component school-based violence prevention programs

School-based multi-component approaches to violence and antisocial behaviour prevention incorporate a range of strategies that target factors at the individual level, family and peer level, and school system level.

The theoretical basis of multi-component programs indicates that effective prevention needs to address classroom and school risk factors, and family risk factors, including communication between parents and schools. These strategies combine classroom-based prevention curriculum and social skill development, with some or all additional strategies such as parent training, academic skills enhancement, modification of the school and classroom environment.

**Core elements of effective multi-component school-based violence prevention programs**

**Individual level:**

- classroom teaching of conflict resolution skills, interpersonal skills, social and problem solving skills, emotional awareness skills, self-control
- academic skills enhancement for high-risk youth (eg. tutoring to improve children’s reading skills).

**Peer/family level:**

- parent training, including positive reinforcement, discipline, monitoring, problem solving, parent involvement in the school
- peer relations eg. social skills training to actively encourage positive peer relations in the playground.

**School system level:**

- systematic communication between parents and teachers
- improving the classroom management skills of teachers.
5.7.2 Bullying prevention

Bullying prevention programs have been found to be effective in reducing bullying and violent behaviour. Effective bullying prevention programs incorporate multiple strategies designed to influence factors at the level of the individual, relationships (peers) and school system.
Core elements of effective bulling prevention programs

School-wide components:

- assessment of bullying problem and awareness raising — adults at school, and families, must become aware of the extent of bully–victim problems in the given school
- staff engagement — commitment by a majority of the school staff to participate actively in anti-bullying efforts
- formation of a team to coordinate all aspects of the school's program
- policy development
- management of the physical environment eg. increased supervision of bullying ‘hotspots’
- professional development for teachers.

Classroom components:

- establishment and enforcement of rules against bullying
- positive behaviour management
- anti-bullying classroom curriculum
- social skills development
- targeted components for at-risk youth
- interventions with children identified as bullies and victims
- discussions with parents of involved students
- support from counsellors and school-based mental health professionals.
**Program:** Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (US)  
*primary and secondary prevention*

**Evidence:** Effective

**Description:** A universal intervention for the reduction and prevention of bully/victim problems. The main arena for the program is the school, and school staff has the primary responsibility for the introduction and implementation of the program.

**Results:** Substantial reductions in students' reports of bullying and victimisation and of general antisocial behaviour such as vandalism, fighting, theft and truancy; and significant improvements in the 'social climate' of the class, as reflected in students' reports of improved order and discipline, more positive social relationships, and a more positive attitude toward schoolwork and school.

**Weblink (evaluation):**  
www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/modelprograms/BPP.html

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**Program:** Friendly Schools & Families (Aus)  
*primary and secondary prevention*

**Evidence:** Promising

**Description:** A comprehensive whole-school program designed to maximise family involvement. Provides individual, group, family and school community level actions to address and prevent bullying in its social context.

**Results:** Results from a group randomized control trial indicate that intervention students were significantly less likely than comparison students to observe bullying at one, two and three years, and be bullied after one and three years (Cross et al., 2010).

**Weblink:** www.friendlyschools.com.au
5.8 Summary of the evidence on effective approaches and programs

Table 3 summarises violence and antisocial behaviour prevention strategies aimed at 10 to 14 year olds, and groups them according to the ecological context through which these behaviours can be prevented and the efficacy of each approach according to the levels of evidence outlined in Section 4.2.

The level of risk targeted by each type of approach is also indicated, ie primary prevention approaches are designed to prevent a problem from occurring and are aimed at all youth, while secondary prevention approaches are aimed at high-risk youth.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ecological Context</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Promising</th>
<th>Requires more research</th>
<th>Not effective</th>
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<td>Violence prevention curriculum (P&amp;S)</td>
<td>Behavioral monitoring and reinforcement (S)</td>
<td>Programs and therapies restricted to high-risk youth (S&amp;T)</td>
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<td>Societal</td>
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<td></td>
<td>De-concentrate poverty and reduce marginalisation (S)</td>
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<td>Change social norms (P)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from Farrell & Flannery (2006); World Health Organization: World Report on Violence and Health (Krug et al., 2002)


P = Population based primary prevention strategies, aimed at all youth
S = Secondary prevention strategies, aimed at high-risk youth
T = Tertiary level prevention strategies, aimed at antisocial youth or juvenile offenders
Section 6: The evidence on ineffective programs

Doing something is not always better than doing nothing. Research shows that while some prevention approaches show no evidence of a reduction in violence and antisocial behaviour, others have negative effects.

The following section details specific primary and secondary prevention approaches that are ineffective in reducing or preventing violence. Specific examples and key issues are highlighted.

6.1 Ineffective individual and relationship approaches

It is well established that youth at high risk for violent or antisocial behaviour become more antisocial through association with antisocial peers and peer groups (see review Dodge et al., 2006).

Young adolescents (10–14 years) are most susceptible to antisocial peer influence and negative effects are most severe for young people with modest levels of antisocial behaviour.

*Group programs and therapies restricted to high-risk young people*

While grouping antisocial young people together does not increase negative outcomes for already highly antisocial young people, and inclusion of low-risk young people in a group does not make them become antisocial adolescents, for moderately antisocial or high-risk young people, such groups catalyse antisocial development.

Findings from evaluation studies have shown that high-risk young people assigned to high-risk-only groups increase their rate of antisocial behaviour, whereas high-risk young people assigned to groups with low-risk peers decrease their antisocial behaviour rate.
Group programs or therapy that include only high-risk young people have been found to be ineffective or have negative effects in reducing antisocial and/or violent behaviour (Dodge et al., 2006) and include:

- group administered psychotherapy with antisocial young people (Weisz, Weiss, Han, Granger, & Morton, 1995)
- social skills training with only high-risk young people (Ang & Hughes, 2002)
- school-based therapy groups consisting of a majority of adolescents with behaviour problems (Gottfredson, 1987)
- community-based peer group interventions consisting of only high-risk boys (Feldman et al., 1983).

A recent review of antisocial peer influences by Kenneth Dodge (2006), an expert in youth violence and social policy, recommends a number of policies and strategies to reduce the negative impact of prevention approaches that group high-risk young people together:

- early adolescents who are modestly antisocial or at risk for antisocial or violent behaviour should not be placed together in groups as they are most vulnerable to peer influence
- amount of time in a high-risk only group should be minimised
- opportunities for unstructured interaction with antisocial or violent peers should be minimised
- program directors should create and maintain a pro-social peer culture
- groups should be highly structured and led by well-trained leaders.

### 6.2 Ineffective proximal social settings approaches

Proximal social settings such as schools and communities may inadvertently implement policies or strategies for which the evidence shows either (a) no reduction in violence or antisocial behaviour or (b) an increase in the behaviours they are aimed at decreasing. Such approaches and policies include those detailed below.
School policies that aggregate high-risk young people

Policies which group high risk young people with each other exacerbate antisocial and violent behaviour among these students (Dodge et al., 2006).

Research on antisocial and violent behaviour in schools (Jacob & Lefgren, 2003) found that both increased due to the influence of antisocial peers on antisocial young people, through interaction that had been fostered by school policies to group antisocial peers.

School policies and practices that group high-risk students, which are commonly used in Australian schools include:

- academic streaming (or ‘tracking’)
- grade retention
- self-contained classrooms for students with emotional or behavioural disorders
- disciplinary practices that involve suspension, expulsion, or placement into alternative schools.

Academic and behavioural difficulties are highly correlated and therefore one inadvertent effect of academic streaming may be to group students with behaviour problems in the lower academic streams. Antisocial peer ‘contagion’ can occur if students in lower academic streams incorporate disengagement from school into their collective identity (Dodge 2006).

Grade retention can also have negative effects on behaviour, as students who repeat a grade share a common experience that draws them to other students who may also identify themselves as school failures. Therefore grade retention may foster connections among high-risk students who would otherwise not have associated with one another. Students who have been retained are at increased risk for dropping out of school and antisocial behaviour (Dodge et al., 2006; Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002).

Zero tolerance policies

Zero tolerance approaches include policies that mandate the application of predetermined consequences — most often severe, punitive and exclusionary — that are intended to be applied regardless of the seriousness of behaviour, mitigating circumstances, or situational context (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008).
Zero tolerance approaches to violent and antisocial behaviour at school (particularly school suspension and expulsion) seek to reduce challenging behaviours primarily through deterrence — they purport to send a clear message to the school community that certain behaviours will not be tolerated and will incur serious consequences. Proponents claim that in this way the school climate also is improved by removing students engaging in challenging behaviour.

This ‘get tough’ approach to student behaviour may have intuitive appeal for some. However, there is a growing body of research showing that these approaches do not have the anticipated effects and can worsen behaviour.

Much of the research on zero tolerance approaches has focused on school suspensions because they are relatively more common than expulsions. School suspensions can have serious negative consequences for the suspended student.

Correlational studies have found unintended consequences such as:

• intensifying academic difficulties and school drop-out (Arcia, 2006)
• disengagement from school (Butler, Bond, Drew, Krelle, & Seal, 2005)

Recent Australian research (Hemphill et al., 2009; Hemphill, Toumbourou, Herrenkohl, McMorris, & Catalano, 2006) has shown that a student suspended from school is 50 per cent more likely to engage in antisocial behaviour and 70 per cent more likely to engage in violent behaviour at 12 months follow up. This effect of suspension is over and above other recognised risk and protective factors.

There are several ways in which the use of zero tolerance approaches could be modified to minimise negative effects:

• only use these approaches for the most severe behavioural transgressions
• allow greater flexibility in the application of these approaches so that the circumstances of the situation and teacher expertise are taken into account
• work with parents to ensure the student is supervised by an adult while excluded from school
• provide and monitor school work for young people excluded from school
• assist young people to reintegrate back into the school after the suspension has been completed.

Alternatives to the use of zero tolerance approaches include many of the school-based approaches outlined earlier in this report (see Section 5).

6.3 Ineffective (or harmful) strategies targeting juvenile offenders

Although the focus of this report is on primary and secondary prevention approaches, there is strong evidence that a number of tertiary level strategies targeting youth already engaging in violent and/or antisocial behaviour are ineffective or do more harm than good.

Given that ‘adolescent-onset’ violence and antisocial behaviour typically emerges in the early adolescent period covered by this report, these approaches are relevant to this age group. The most well-established of these ineffective approaches are outlined in brief below.

**Boot camps**

Boot camps for young people engaging in antisocial behaviour have been traditionally modelled after military basic training, with a primary focus on discipline.

Research has shown that boot camps produce no significant effects on repeat offending and in some evaluations, harmful effects, with a significant increase in repeat offending (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

Specific aspects of boot camp approaches that have been linked to worse behavioural outcomes include:

• exposure to other antisocial young people, who act as models and positively reinforce antisocial and violent behaviour
• poorly trained adult leaders
• insufficient adult supervision.
Shock probation or parole

Shock probation or parole programs involve brief encounters with prisons or jails in an attempt to shock, or deter, young people from committing crimes.

One well-researched example of this type of program in the US is ‘Scared Straight’. Numerous studies of ‘Scared Straight’ have demonstrated that the program does not deter future criminal activity. In some studies, re-arrest rates were similar between controls and young people who participated in the program. In others, young people exposed to ‘Scared Straight’ actually had higher rates of re-arrest than young people not involved in this intervention.

A Cochrane review of ‘Scared Straight’ and other programs designed to deter participants from future offending through first-hand observation of prison life and interaction with adult inmates found such interventions to be more harmful than doing nothing (Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, & Buehler, 2002). Studies of other shock probation programs have shown similar effects (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

Trying young offenders in adult court

Another justice system approach to deterring youth violence has involved trying young people in adult courts. This approach can have particularly harmful effects on young people.

Evaluations of such strategies suggest that they increase future criminal behaviour rather than deter it. In addition to the negative impact of being tried in an adult court, results from a series of reports indicate that young people placed in adult correctional institutions, compared to those placed in institutions designed for young people, are at much higher risk of experiencing a range of harms including sexual abuse, suicide and physical attacks (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

6.3.1 A note on naming and shaming approaches

The public naming of young offenders by publishing names in the media is an approach that has been introduced in a number of jurisdictions across Australia and internationally. This approach has recently gained further support within some Australian jurisdictions (Chappell & Lincoln, 2008-2009). The aim of this approach is to discourage young people from committing offences or re-offending by knowing they will be publicly ‘named and shamed’.
Although there is no empirical evidence about the specific or general impact of public naming and shaming practices for young offenders (Chappell & Lincoln, 2008-2009) a number of negative effects have been suggested, including:

• stigmatisation, with the potential to increase antisocial behaviour (Braithwaite & Drahos, 2002; Chappell & Lincoln, 2008-2009)

• misuse of the concept of ‘shaming’, where personal shame may be an important dimension of the restorative process versus shame that is publicly degrading or stigmatising (Braithwaite, 1989)

• the potential for vigilante action, eg. recrimination by victims of crime (Chappell & Lincoln, 2008-2009)

• generating a false sense of community protection (Chappell & Lincoln, 2008-2009)

• interference with rehabilitative efforts eg. reduced future opportunities, such as employment (Chappell & Lincoln, 2008-2009).

After an extensive inquiry into the prohibitions on the publication of names of children involved in criminal proceedings, the New South Wales Legislative Council (2008) concluded that “naming and shaming” juvenile offenders may increase the likelihood of their reoffending (p.xi).

Note: this conclusion was based on submissions and public hearings from relevant groups and organisations. Rigorous research and empirical data are required to establish a strong evidence base on the impact of this practice on young offenders, and in particular, its effect on violence and/or antisocial behaviour.
Section 7: Effective implementation of violence prevention programs

One of the biggest challenges in the field of youth violence and antisocial behaviour prevention is how to ‘do’ prevention well. The effectiveness of an intervention in a particular setting depends not just on whether it has been demonstrated in the past to be efficacious, but on the quality of implementation (Mercy & Hammond, 2001).

Successful violence prevention requires an understanding of what characteristics to consider when selecting evidence-based programs, as well as how programs can be effectively implemented. In addition, programs that produce positive effects in one setting do not always produce similar effects in others, underscoring the need to incorporate evaluation into any implementation plan (Farrell & Flannery, 2006).

In recent years, prevention science has begun to analyse the key features of effective prevention planning and implementation (eg. Dodge, 2001; Nation et al., 2003).

7.1 Key principles

A meta-review of prevention studies (Nation et al., 2003) identified nine key principles of effective prevention programming and implementation. These principles can be applied to prevention of youth antisocial and violent behaviour as described below.

7.1.1 Program characteristics

The first five principles relate to the characteristics of effective programs.

Effective programs need to be planned and implemented incorporating the following characteristics:

1. comprehensive - including multi-component prevention strategies that address critical domains (eg. family, peers, school, community) known to influence the development and perpetuation of youth violent and antisocial behaviour
2. varied teaching methods - diverse teaching methods focus on increasing awareness and understanding of the violent/antisocial behaviours and on acquiring or enhancing skills

3. sufficient dosage - programs provide enough intervention to produce the desired effects including follow-up as necessary to maintain effects

4. theory driven - programs have a theoretical justification, are based on accurate information and supported by empirical research

5. positive relationships - programs provide exposure to adults and peers in a way that promotes strong relationships and supports positive outcomes.

7.1.2 Matching programs to target population

Principles 6 and 7 relate to the matching of effective programs to the target population. In particular, programs need to be:

6. appropriately timed - programs need to be started early enough to have an impact on the development of the problem behaviour and be sensitive to the developmental needs of participants.

- For young people aged 10–14 years the school transition period (from primary to secondary school) provides an important window for early intervention that can affect the developmental trajectory of violent and antisocial behaviour.

- Prevention efforts that focus on any one single risk factor may affect some, but not all, high-risk children and young people. Therefore effective prevention must either focus on addressing multiple risk factors simultaneously or target specific children and young people, based on an assessment and matching of an intervention to the young person’s needs (Dodge, 2001).

7. socioculturally relevant - programs need to be tailored to the community and cultural norms of the participants and make efforts to include the target group in program planning and implementation.

7.1.3 Implementing and evaluating prevention programs

Principles 8 and 9 relate to outcome evaluation and implementation of the program by well-trained staff. In particular, effective programs require:

8. outcome evaluation - prevention programs need to have clear goals and objectives and evaluate their results relative to the goals.

9. well-trained staff - prevention program staff need to support the prevention approach and be provided with training to implement the intervention.
Certain evidence-based primary and secondary prevention approaches targeting young people aged 10-14 have been shown to be both:

- effective in reducing violence and antisocial behaviour
- cost effective.

Successful prevention of youth violent and antisocial behaviour requires integration of three key activities:

- development of data systems at national and local levels to collect data on risk and protective factors associated with violent and antisocial behaviour and its consequences
- selection of evidence-based programs and policies
- effective implementation.

There is limited or no empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of many existing programs in reducing violent and/or antisocial behaviour. Of those subject to rigorous evaluation, a number have been shown to be ineffective or, even worse, to do more harm than good. It is imperative that prevention efforts are based on strong empirical evidence.

Research and evaluation on prevention of youth violence and antisocial behaviour is constantly evolving and expanding and evidence for particular approaches or programs changes over time. Therefore, it is crucial that processes be developed that enable practitioners and policy makers to keep abreast of the most relevant and up-to-date resources.

The most effective approaches for reducing youth violence and antisocial behaviour are multi-faceted approaches that target multiple risk and protective factors at multiple levels of influence. They include school-based multi-component strategies that target the individual child, the family and peer group, and the school system (teacher training and improved school-parent communication).

A range of strategies at the broader societal level may be important components of a multi-faceted approach to prevention. These include reducing media violence, reducing poverty and marginalisation and changing cultural norms. However, such strategies are unlikely to be effective on their own.
Consistently negative effects have been found for prevention approaches that involve grouping high-risk antisocial young people together in groups, programs or classrooms. Young adolescents are most susceptible to antisocial peer influence and such approaches should be particularly avoided for this age group.

A range of ineffective or harmful approaches has been identified at the tertiary level and should be avoided. Such approaches target young people already engaging in violent or antisocial behaviour. These include boot camps, shock probation or parole strategies, and trying young offenders in adult courts.

Successful prevention depends on effective implementation programs and strategies. Nine key principles have been identified and these relate to:

- characteristics of the program
- matching the program to the target population
- outcome evaluation and staff training.

Although most of the prevention evaluation research to date has been undertaken in the United States, research has shown that risk and protective factors work in similar ways in developed or Western countries. As such, much of the US work may also be applied internationally. Despite this, rigorous evaluation of prevention efforts currently underway in Australia also needs to be undertaken.

Three types of investments will be particularly important for improving capacity to ‘do’ violence prevention well (Mercy & Hammond, 2001):

- **conduct research** on the effects of different levels and types of implementation of the most promising interventions on their acceptability, effectiveness, safety and costs. It is particularly important to assess the acceptability of promising interventions in different cultural contexts given the diversity that exists among populations at high risk of violence.

- **disseminate the evidence on what is known** about effective youth violence-prevention programs, practices, and implementation strategies to communities and agencies on the front lines of violence prevention.

- **develop and broadly apply practical procedures for monitoring implementation** of evidence based violence-prevention programs and practices.
Section 9: Key resources

The following major sources were used for identifying and selecting evidence-based approaches and programs:

- Blueprints for Violence Prevention: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, University of Colorado (US)
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: Model Programs Guide (US)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: National Registry of Effective Programs (US)
- Various meta-analytic reviews (see below).

The resources above and those listed below provide information on a range of evidence-based policies and programs for the prevention of youth violent and antisocial behaviour.

9.1 International resources

Blueprints for Violence Prevention

Blueprints for Violence Prevention, a project of the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado, aims to identify outstanding violence and drug prevention programs that meet a high scientific standard of effectiveness.

Blueprints for Violence Prevention is widely recognised as among the most rigorous assessments of program effectiveness. A program is certified as ‘model’ if it meets all three of the following criteria:

- demonstrates effects on behaviour using a strong experimental design eg. reduction in the onset, prevalence or individual rates of violent or antisocial behaviour
• **sustained effects** — effects persist after the young person leaves the program

• **multiple site replication** — program can be successfully replicated in at least one other site with demonstrated effects.

Programs identified as ‘promising’ must meet only the first criterion.

The design, research evidence, and implementation requirements for each program are available on the Blueprints website: [www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints)

There are 11 ‘model’ programs certified by Blueprints, meaning that they have a high level of evidence supporting their effectiveness and should be replicated in other communities to prevent violence and drug abuse. In addition, 19 ‘promising’ programs have been identified that have shown good results but require either replication in another community or additional time to demonstrate their effectiveness and sustainability.

**Web link:** [www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints)

**OJJDP Model Programs Guide**

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice has a focus on assisting communities with delinquency prevention strategies. The OJJDP website offers a searchable database of evidence-based programs rated according to four summary dimensions of program effectiveness:

• conceptual framework of the program

• program fidelity

• evaluation design

• empirical evidence demonstrating the prevention or reduction of problem behaviour, the reduction of risk factors related to problem behaviour, or the enhancement of protective factors related to problem behaviour.

**Web link:** [www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/mpg](http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/mpg)

**SAMHSA National Registry of Effective Programs (NREPP)**

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US Department of Health and Human Services) NREPP is a searchable database of interventions for the prevention and treatment of mental and substance use disorders, including youth violence and antisocial behaviour.

**Weblink:** [http://nrepp.samhsa.gov](http://nrepp.samhsa.gov)
Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General

The US Department of Health and Human Services Surgeon General’s report on youth violence reviews a massive body of research on where, when, and how much youth violence occurs, what causes it, and which of today’s many preventive strategies are genuinely effective.

Weblink: www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/youthviolence

World Health Organization (WHO)

The WHO Violence Prevention Alliance promotes an evidence-based public health approach that targets the risk factors leading to violence and promotes multi-sectoral cooperation. Participants in the alliance are committed to implementing the recommendations of the World report on violence and health.

The WHO library of violence prevention includes the following key publications:

- Violence prevention: the evidence
- World report on violence and health
- Best Practices of Youth Violence Prevention: A Sourcebook for Community Action


The WHO searchable evidence base on interventions to prevent violence, including youth violence, is available at www.preventviolence.info

Campbell Collaboration

The Campbell Collaboration is an international research network that produces systematic reviews of the effects of social interventions. The Campbell Collaboration (C2) helps people and policy makers make well-informed decisions by preparing, maintaining and disseminating systematic reviews in education, crime and justice, and social welfare. Relevant recent reviews include:

- Effectiveness of anti-bullying programs
- Effects of correctional boot camps on offending
- Cognitive behavioural treatment for antisocial behaviour in youth
- Multi-systemic therapy for behavioural problems in youth aged 10–17 years.

Weblink: www.campbellcollaboration.org
Meta-analytic reviews on prevention of youth violence and antisocial behaviour

Meta-analytic reviews compare similar programs from different studies using statistical techniques called meta-analysis. Such reviews can identify specific strategies and methods that are more likely to be effective than others, and particular characteristics of programs that are important. Recent reviews include:

- *Effective intervention for serious juvenile offenders: A synthesis of research.* (Lipsey & Wilson, 1998)
- *Youth violence prevention: Are we there yet?* (Farrell & Flannery, 2006)
- *Components of Effective Youth Violence Prevention Programs for 7- to 14-year olds.* (Cooper et al., 2000)
- *Effectiveness of Interventions to Prevent Youth Violence: A Systematic Review.* (Limbos et al., 2007)

9.2 Australian resources

**Australian Institute of Criminology**

The Australian Institute of Criminology is Australia’s national research and knowledge centre on crime and justice. The Institute seeks to promote justice and reduce crime by undertaking and communicating evidence-based research to inform policy and practice.

Relevant research and links include:

- Juvenile diversionary schemes, approaches and programs.
- Young people and crime.
Mental Health and Wellbeing Resources Programs and Research (MindMatters Plus)

This website provides an index of programs, resources, research and case studies that support the mental health and wellbeing of young people. The index was created by the Australian research and development project known as MindMatters Plus, funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.


Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Vic) – Catalogue of Evidence

The catalogue of evidence is organised around key sections that contain indicators of improvement in outcomes for children and adolescents, including behavioural difficulties and underage convictions. Each indicator has up to four recommended strategies (including evidence for each) that can be implemented and adapted to local needs.


Weblink: Strategies for bullying intervention

National Safe Schools Framework (Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations)

The Framework consists of a set of nationally agreed principles for a safe and supportive school environment and includes appropriate responses that schools can adopt to address issues of bullying, violence, harassment, and child abuse and neglect.


National Centre Against Bullying

The National Centre Against Bullying (NCAB) is a peak body working to advise and inform the Australian community on the issue of childhood bullying and the creation of safe schools and communities, including the issue of cybersafety.

Weblink: www.ncab.org.au
References


