

GANG AND YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Georgia law states a “criminal street gang” is any organization, association, or group of three or more persons who engage in criminal gang activity (e.g., rape, racketeering, criminal trespass, or any offense that involves violence, use of a weapon, or possession of a weapon, among others).

A gang can be established by a common name or identifying signs, symbols, tattoos, graffiti, attire, or other distinguishing characteristics.¹

WHAT IS YOUTH VIOLENCE?

Youth violence is the intentional use of physical force or power by 10- to 24-year-olds to threaten or harm others. The estimated cost of youth violence is almost **\$122 billion per year**.² Committing youth violence increases the risk for:³



Substance use



Depression



Suicide



Academic challenges
and school drop-out



Future violence
and victimization

FACTORS THAT IMPACT YOUTH VIOLENCE AND GANG MEMBERSHIP

The more risk factors a young person experiences, the greater their chance of committing youth violence, including through gang membership;⁴ however, exposure to protective factors reduces this chance.⁵ Given this, prevention strategies are aimed at increasing crucial supports in a youth's life, including security, connectedness, and safety.



Risk Factors:

- History of violent victimization
- Developmental disabilities or behavioral health conditions
- Substance abuse
- Poor behavioral control
- Exposure to family violence/conflict
- Extreme or inconsistent disciplinary practices
- Parental substance abuse or criminality
- Poor supervision
- Peer influence
- Gang involvement
- Poor academic performance
- Communities with high rates of instability, low-income residents, and incidents of crime



Protective Factors:

- High educational achievement/aspirations
- Social skills/competencies
- Parental involvement
- Positive social and peer connections
- Positive school environment

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PREVENTION STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED IN GEORGIA

Strategy and Approach:

What This Looks Like in Georgia:

Promote Family Environments that Support Healthy Development

- Early childhood home visitation
- Parenting skill and family relationship programs
- Home visiting and parental skill building (through the Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS)
- Strengthening Families Georgia

Provide Quality Education Early in Life

- Preschool enrichment with family engagement
- Georgia Pre-K
- Head Start
- Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS)
- Quality Rated Child Care

Strengthen Youth Skills

- Universal school-based programs
- Georgia Apex Program
- Youth Mental Health First Aid and Teen Mental Health First Aid
- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
- Comprehensive school-based health centers

Wrapping At-Risk Children with an Array of Supportive Services

- Cognitive behavioral treatment
- Douglas County CHANCE Court is an accountability court serving youth adjudicated as delinquent or as a Child In Need of Services which uses individuals case plans, intensive case management, peer support and a therapeutic court setting.

Connect Youth to Caring Adults and Activities

- Mentoring programs
- Afterschool programs
- Boys and Girls Club
- 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- Afterschool Care Program (DFCS)
- Prevention Clubhouses (DBHDD)
- YMCAs
- 4-H
- Cafe Momentum

Create Protective Community Environments

- Modify the physical and social environment
- Reduce exposure to community-level risks
- Street outreach and community norm change
- Community-oriented policing
- Afterschool programs and community centers like the @PromiseCenter
- Front Porch Community Resource Center
- Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiatives
- Norms change programs like Cure Violence (happening in some Southwest Atlanta neighborhoods)

Intervene to Lessen Harms and Prevent Future Risk

- Treatment to lessen the harms of violence exposures
- Treatment to prevent problem behavior and further involvement in violence
- Hospital-community partnerships
- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Evidence-based programs for cognitive restructuring, problem-solving, and crisis management (DJJ)
- Georgia Preparatory Academy (middle and high school within DJJ school system)
- Pathways to Success (DJJ's high school equivalency program)
- Connections Graduate Programs (DJJ's college, career, and life-ready program)
- Educational and vocational opportunities
- Mental health and substance abuse treatment through DJJ

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Prevention

- Increase the number of mental health and social work professionals in schools.
- Expand federal and state funding to afterschool and summer learning programs to increase access and ensure affordability.
- Ensure that school codes of conduct are evidence-based, trauma-informed, and include input from local child-serving stakeholders (e.g., mental health providers, social workers, juvenile courts).
- Ensure that training on trauma-informed care and implicit/explicit bias is provided to all stakeholders who engage with children in any way (e.g., law enforcement, school resource officers, school faculty and staff, child care and afterschool providers, DJJ staff, child welfare and foster care settings).

Intervention

- Increase funding for intervention programs that provide outreach workers and train community members as credible messengers to diffuse community conflict after violence occurs (e.g., Neighborhood Planning Units and CHRIS180).
- Strengthen partnerships between community-based afterschool programs, school districts, juvenile courts, and other community partners to align services for young people through Local Interagency Planning Teams or truancy prevention programs.
- Promote the use of mentoring and apprenticeships programs (e.g., partner with local chambers of commerce, rotary clubs, chapters of 100 Black Men, Big Brothers Big Sisters, or other civically-focused organizations).
- Increase funding for restorative programs for children and youth (e.g., Child in Need of Services (CHINS), Public Safety and Community Violence Reduction Grant, Juvenile Justice Incentive Grant Program, and Community Service Grants Program).

Restoration

- Raise the maximum age of juvenile court jurisdiction to 18 years of age.
- Develop effective juvenile accountability courts, including education on violence, community involvement, and wraparound services that support the youth and the youth's family.
- Increase access to evidence-based practices for mental and behavioral health in schools.
- Increase access to educational and work remediation.



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REFERENCES FOR GANG AND YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION

- 1 Justia Law. 2024 Georgia Code § 16-15-3. Retrieved from <https://law.justia.com/codes/georgia/title-16/chapter-15/section-16-15-3/>.
- 2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Violence Prevention, About Youth Violence. Retrieved May 12, 2025 from <https://www.cdc.gov/youth-violence/about/index.html>.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.