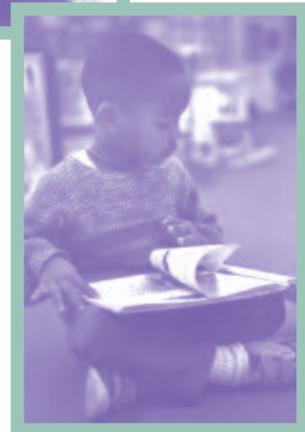
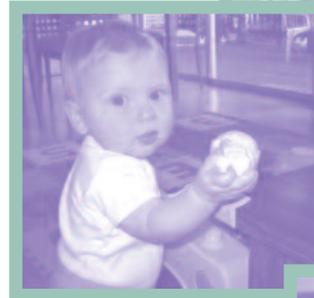
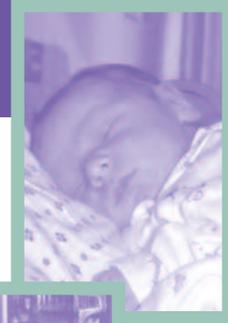


Prevention Institute
Action Alliance for Children
Fight Crime: Invest in Kids *California*

1st STEPS

**TAKING
ACTION
EARLY TO
PREVENT
VIOLENCE**



A GUIDE

Funded by The David and Lucile Packard Foundation



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This **FIRST STEPS GUIDE** summarizes findings in the full report **FIRST STEPS: Taking Action Early to Prevent Violence**. This report:

- Synthesizes available research on risk and resiliency factors,
- Specifies activities for each of the fifteen recommendations,
- Provides additional case studies, and
- Includes a resource section.

For a copy of the full report, **FIRST STEPS: Taking Action Early to Prevent Violence**, please go to www.preventioninstitute.org/firststeps.html or www.4children.org.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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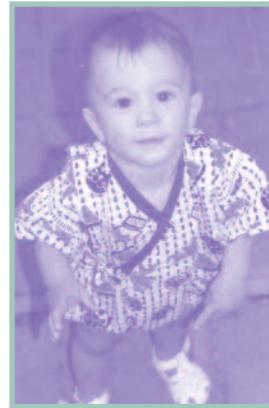
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Early Childhood and Violence Prevention

A wide range of people, from law enforcement officials to child development experts to policy makers, are increasingly aware of the impact of violence on young children and the relationship between violence prevention and the healthy development of young children. Consider the following:

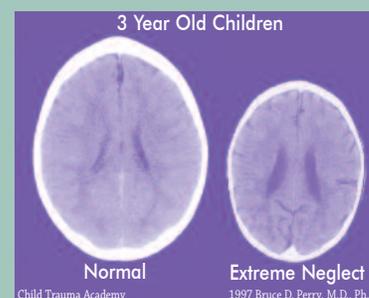
- **EARLY CHILDHOOD IS A CRITICAL TIME.** During this time, intellectual and emotional abilities form. Keeping young children safe and nurturing them is protective against lifelong problems, including involvement in violence.
- **EARLY EXPERIENCES HAVE A POWERFUL EFFECT ON BRAIN DEVELOPMENT.** Neglect and a lack of positive nurturing can harm brain development, affecting the child's capacity to bond with and relate to other people.
- **VIOLENCE HAS A TRAUMATIC IMPACT ON YOUNG CHILDREN.** Experiencing or witnessing violence can result in not only developmental delays,¹ but also a 're-wiring' of the child's brain in which survival skills are developed at the expense of learning and other social skills.² Early trauma can harm the part of the brain responsible for impulse control, problem solving, and empathy—elements that often play a role in preventing violence.
- **FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND SOCIETY ARE POWERFUL IN SHAPING DEVELOPMENT.** Helping young children and their families, by providing the necessary supports, resources, and services, minimizes the impact of violence and increases the odds of children growing up healthy and capable of realizing their potential.



The brain develops to 90% of its full size in the first 5 years, unlike the body, which takes 20 years to mature to 95% of its full size.³



In the CT scan on the left is an image from a healthy 3 year old with an average head size. The image on the right is from a 3 year old child suffering from severe sensory-deprivation neglect.



SOURCE: These images are from studies conducted by a team of researchers from the Child Trauma Academy led by Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D.



Violence prevention begins in the high chair, not the electric chair

*Rob Reiner, Chair
California Children and Families Commission*

A growing body of evidence shows that:

When children's needs for nurturing, protection, and learning are met, they are far less likely to become involved in violence when they grow up.

■ SUPPORTING HEALTHY EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IS ESSENTIAL IN PREVENTING VIOLENCE.

The quality of bonding with caretakers, the food or toxins a young child consumes, and stimulation or deprivation in the young child's environment all have an impact. When children's needs for nurturing, protection, and learning are met, they are far less likely to become involved in violence when they grow up. Supporting early childhood development and providing families with the support they need is a violence prevention strategy.



■ PROTECTING YOUNG CHILDREN FROM VIOLENCE, AS VICTIMS OR WITNESSES, IS ESSENTIAL IN ENSURING THEIR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT.

Witnessing or experiencing violence at a young age increases a child's risk for a variety of future problems, including aggression, involvement in violence, and difficulties in learning, forming healthy relationships, and maintaining emotional health.



CASE STUDY

The Nurse-Family Partnership

In the Nurse-Family Partnership, trained nurses visit low-income, first-time parents during pregnancy and for the next two years. They promote healthy emotional development, support the parent-child relationship, screen for depression and substance abuse, provide health advice and referrals, and help with educational goals and employment searches. Outside agencies provide needed services. This program, designed by David Olds, reduced child abuse during a child's first two years by 79%. Women in the program spent less time on welfare, smoked less, and consumed less alcohol. Participants had one-third as many arrests and their children were half as likely to be delinquent 15 years later.

Contact: (866) 864-5226; www.nccfc.org.



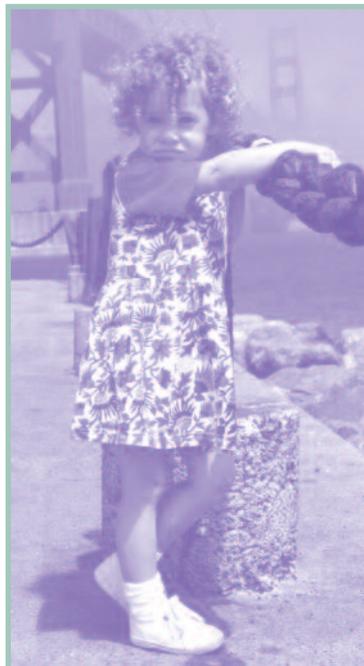
“When I was watching a knife movie, I went to sleep and I woke up. I ran out the room because I was having a nightmare.”

— 3 YEAR OLD

■ **EARLY APPROACHES ARE COST-EFFECTIVE.** For example, the High/Scope study of the Perry Preschool program measured net savings of more than \$70,000 in per-participant crime-related savings, and a total of \$88,000 saved when welfare, tax, and other savings were taken into consideration. In other words, every \$1 spent on the program returned \$7.16 to the public.⁴ A RAND study concluded that the Nurse-Family Partnership home-visiting program saves at least \$4 for every \$1 spent on the program.⁵

Right now there is more known than ever about the causes of violence and how to prevent it. The changes must be systemic; changes in the early years will have the greatest impact.

Childhood experience of maltreatment increases the likelihood of an arrest as a juvenile by 59%, as an adult by 28%, and of arrest for a violent crime by 30%.⁶



CASE STUDY

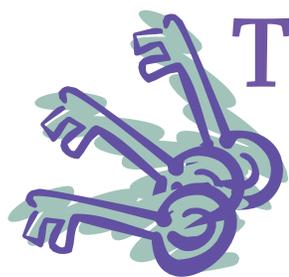
Perry Preschool Project

Between 1962 and 1967, low-income children (ages 3 and 4) were enrolled in a high-quality preschool program based on the High/Scope approach. The approach emphasized active learning through limiting class size and allowing children to initiate activities and control their environment. Teachers received curriculum training and supervision in social relations, music and movement, language and literacy, and logic and mathematics. The program included weekly home visits by teachers to discuss and practice activities for parents to carry out with their children. Participating children showed significant, long-lasting, positive outcomes. They were more likely to graduate from high school, own a home, and earn more than \$2,000 a month, and were less likely to be on welfare or be arrested by age 21. In addition, the lifetime economic benefits to the participants, their families, and the community far exceeded the cost of the program.

For more information, contact High/Scope at 600 North River St., Ypsilanti, MI 48198; (734)485-2000; info@highscope.org; or www.highscope.org.



American children will view approximately 100,000 acts of violence on television, including 8,000 murders, before completing elementary school.⁷ Excessive exposure to media violence has been shown to increase aggressive behaviors in children.⁸



The **3** KEYS

Violence Prevention Framework

Young children who live in poverty are at greater risk for behavior problems, such as aggression, fighting, anxiety, withdrawal, depression,¹⁰ and delinquency.¹¹

Violence is complex and requires a comprehensive approach



We must plan and act comprehensively. The *Spectrum of Prevention*⁹ is a tool that can help move beyond an educational or individual skill-building approach to address broader environmental and systems-level issues.

The Spectrum of Prevention

SPECTRUM LEVEL	DEFINITION OF LEVEL
1 Strengthening Individual Knowledge & Skills	Enhancing individual capacity to prevent injury and illness and promote wellness and safety
2 Promoting Community Education	Reaching groups of people with information and resources
3 Educating Providers	Informing providers who will transmit skills and knowledge to others to improve prevention outcomes
4 Fostering Coalitions & Networks	Bringing together groups and individuals for broader goals and greater impact on early childhood development and violence prevention
5 Changing Organizational Practices	Adopting regulations and shaping norms to improve health and safety
6 Influencing Policy & Legislation	Developing strategies to change laws and policies for broader outcomes



Risk and resiliency factors must be addressed

We must take into account the factors that increase the risk of violence as well as the factors that impact young children’s capacity to develop and thrive (resiliency). A growing body of research shows the capacity of resiliency to mitigate the effect of some risks^{12,13} and the importance of focusing on both risk and resiliency factors.¹⁴

Early Childhood Development and Violence Prevention: Identified Risk and Resiliency Factors

	RISK	RESILIENCY
COMMUNITY AND STRUCTURAL FACTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Poverty & economic disparity ■ Bias & discrimination ■ Community deterioration ■ Media violence ■ Access to firearms ■ Gender socialization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Community networks & leadership ■ Financial resources ■ Empowerment & decision-making avenues ■ Community facilities ■ Health, education, & social service systems
INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY FACTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Prenatal risk, toxins, & poor nutrition ■ Child abuse & neglect ■ Negative family dynamics ■ Alcohol & other drug abuse ■ Witnessing violence ■ Mental illness ■ Illiteracy & poor academic achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Good physical & mental health ■ Positive attachments & relationships ■ Emotional competence ■ Cognitive competence ■ Self-esteem

Violence prevention requires an integrated strategy for action

We should make sure efforts coordinate, support, and strengthen each other. On the following pages are 15 recommendations to consider in planning a strategy.



“It is only the overwhelming accumulation of risk without a compensatory accumulation of assets that puts kids in jeopardy.”

— DR. JAMES GARBARINO
FAMILY LIFE DEVELOPMENT CENTER,
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Recommendations

1 Provide families with services and supports to foster health and empowerment.

Raising children is hard work and parents often need help. Caregivers who are supported, empowered, and successful make better parents and are more able to raise healthy children. Effective family support programs are vital to increasing the ability of parents to nurture their children and ensure their optimal physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development.

2 Recognize poverty as a significant risk factor and take steps to minimize its impact.

Lack of economic opportunity and resources create a strain on families and can affect children's emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development. Poverty restricts access to food, safe housing, and other health and social services. It can also increase parental stress and children's risk of exposure to environmental toxins, alcohol and other drugs, abuse, neglect, and violence in the home or community. Eliminating poverty is long-term, and steps must be taken to minimize its impact. These include increasing earning potential and 'living incomes' and strengthening safety net programs and support for low-income workers, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, food stamps, subsidized housing, and cash grants.

CASE STUDY

The Incredible Years

A curriculum series for parents, teachers, and children, The Incredible Years promotes social competence and prevents, reduces, and treats aggression and behavior problems in young children (ages 2 to 8). Objectives are to strengthen social and academic competence, reduce behavior problems, and increase positive interactions with peers, teachers, and parents. The Incredible Years programs have been field-tested over the past 18 years. Results indicate that parents and teachers were able to significantly reduce children's problem behaviors and increase their social competence and academic engagement. These programs have also been shown to be effective for high-risk populations.

For more information, visit www.incredibleyears.com.



3 Prevent and reduce the impact of abuse, neglect, and witnessing violence.

Experiencing neglect and abuse and witnessing violence put young children at significant risk for developmental failures, emotional disturbance, and additional victimization or perpetration of violence later in life. Further, neglect, abuse, or witnessing violence often go unnoticed. Children should receive the care, treatment, and support services they need. Although the effects of neglect and of witnessing violence may be less visible than the effects of physical abuse, careful attention must be paid to ensuring that both the physical and emotional needs of these children are met.

4 Increase wellness opportunities and access to quality healthcare for children and families.

Ensuring the health and well-being of young children begins with safeguarding the health of their parents along with providing quality primary and preventive care for infants and young children. Good health in childhood promotes positive growth and the development of positive emotional and cognitive skills that in turn contribute to long-term learning and academic success — traits that are highly protective against involvement in violence.

5 Promote mental health and meet the mental health needs of all family members.

Mental health strategy includes early identification, provision of quality, affordable treatment, and promotion of healthy mental functioning for parents and children. It should also address underlying issues such as substance abuse, unemployment, and violent experiences that trigger or exacerbate mental health problems. As Dr. Bill Carter, Deputy Director of the California Institute for Mental Health, asserts, "We need to reconceptualize our understanding of mental health. It is not distinct from risk factors like domestic violence, bullying, or substance abuse... Questions about these need to be incorporated into screening materials. A lot of providers don't want to serve kids this young; they need support and training."¹⁵

CASE STUDY

School Readiness Legislation

The Connecticut State Legislature unanimously passed a School Readiness Act in 1997, creating a comprehensive system to capture best practices and research-based findings in early care and education. Key components of the system include: 1) evaluation and accreditation of all childcare and preschool programs; 2) accreditation, training, and career support for providers; 3) sliding scale payment mechanisms and round-the-clock, round-the-year care; 4) diagnostic screening, health, and dental care for every child; 5) linkage of family literacy, parent employment, and job training with school readiness and childcare; 6) parent involvement and participation in decision-making; 7) funding for facilities renovation and expansion; and 8) technical assistance for public-private partnerships, fundraising, and community building. Legislation was also passed to bolster early learning and reading skills through teacher training, early literacy curriculum development, school reading plans and standard setting, early screening and ongoing assessment, parent involvement, and partnerships with AmeriCorps volunteers and school and public libraries.

For more information, visit Connecticut Commission for Children at www.cga.state.ct.us/coc.

7 Provide affordable, available, and high-quality early care and education.

Quality early childcare and education enhance cognitive, emotional, and social development, especially among low-income preschoolers.¹⁶ Children who experience high-quality, stable childcare engage in more complex play, demonstrate more secure attachments to adults and other children, and score higher on measures of thinking ability and language development, all qualities that increase lifelong social and academic success. According to T. Berry Brazelton and Stanley Greenspan, “In the present setup, less than 10% of infants and toddlers have access to high-quality day care, even though we know that quality child care is essential to the optimal development of children.”¹⁷

8 Improve the ability of families, communities, and schools to prepare children for school.

Ensuring that a child enters school ready to learn and succeed lays the foundation for academic success, which is protective against violence. School readiness encompasses many aspects of a child’s health and ability. These include: ensuring children’s physical, social, cognitive, and emotional health, and making sure they have financially secure, supported, and engaged parents, well-trained teachers, and access to quality schools and services. Efforts to decrease family poverty are important components, as a small boost in family income is correlated with an increase in children’s social skills and school readiness.¹⁸ Further, as Patricia Van Horn, coordinator of San Francisco Safe Start, notes, “You cannot ignore the emotional readiness part of school readiness.”¹⁹

6 Reduce substance abuse among caregivers and pregnant women and their partners.

Substance abuse during pregnancy can have a lasting impact on development. Substance abusing caregivers are often unable to properly care for their children and support their healthy development. In addition, stressors such as poverty, oppression, deteriorating communities and social networks, and untreated mental illness can interact to exacerbate substance abuse. Reducing alcohol and other drug abuse requires the expansion of quality prevention efforts and treatment services. Further, a substance abuse prevention strategy must address the underlying factors that influence people’s relationship with drugs and alcohol, along with individual children and caregiver needs.

CASE STUDY

Reducing the Impact of Media Violence

Moving Young Children’s Play Away from TV Violence provides concrete recommendations for reducing the impact of media violence on young children. Developed by the Ready at 5 Partnership and endorsed by the Center for Media Literacy, this guide provides parents, childcare providers, and early childhood educators with practical, hands-on ideas and instructions. The goal is to help children ages 2 to 5 move from violent play stimulated by television viewing to healthy, fun, and safe activities that promote growth and development.

For more information or to order a copy of the guide, call (800) 228-4630, or visit www.medialit.org.

9 Implement measures to reduce young children's access to guns.

The presence of guns in homes with children and the failure to properly store them puts children at risk for fatal injury. Young children are curious about guns but developmentally unable to comprehend the consequences of using them. Ease of access to firearms threatens children's safety and survival. In addition, the presence of firearms can escalate the severity of violent incidents if they occur.

10 Reduce the impact of media violence on young children.

Reducing the amount of time children spend watching television and playing video games can make them less aggressive towards their peers²⁰ and can increase their academic performance.²¹ At age 5, watching educational programming in place of other programming predicts higher grades in science, math, and language arts in later years.²² As noted psychologist Ron Slaby states, "Media can be used to support or promote good behavior or reinforce negative behavior."²³

CASE STUDY

Promoting Father Involvement

A major goal of the Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization is to connect or reconnect fathers with their children, and, ideally, their children's mother. To achieve this, Outreach Specialists provide a range of services and supports to fathers including role modeling, relationship guidance, job and health counseling, encouraging community involvement, and skill development, such as literacy, trade skills, and financial management. The program operates in 13 cities and 9 states across the country. Independent evaluation has shown: 1) 96% of participating fathers experiencing substantial improvement in their relationship to the mother of their child; 2) 97% spending quality and consistent time with their children and providing financial support; and 3) over 70% of participating fathers and mothers retaining positions in sustained, unsubsidized employment.

For more information, call 1-800-7FATHER.

CASE STUDY

Parents as Teachers (PAT)

This international family education and support program, which begins prenatally and extends to age 5, is based on the principles that all families have strengths and parents are the experts on their children. The program's main goal is to help families lay a strong foundation for children's success in school and life. PAT's main components are: 1) personal home visits by certified parent educators to educate parents on developmentally appropriate expectations and parent-child learning activities; 2) group meetings for parents to enhance their knowledge, share experiences, and discuss common successes or concerns about their children's behavior and development; 3) screening to identify whether children are developing on target; 4) connections with community resources to link parents to services beyond PAT's scope. Independent evaluations show that children in PAT are significantly more advanced in language, social development, problem solving, and other cognitive abilities than comparison children. PAT children also score higher on kindergarten readiness tests and on standardized measures of achievement in early grades. PAT parents are more involved in their children's schooling, read more to their children, and are more confident in their parenting role.

For more information, contact PAT National Offices at (314) 432-4330 or visit www.patnc.org.

11 Intervene in early bullying behavior and address underlying causes.

Children who are routinely teased, bullied, or harassed are at increased risk for social isolation, depression, school failure, low self-esteem, and involvement in violence both as victims and perpetrators. Early bullying behavior may be indicative of underlying risk factors, and without intervention, the behavior is likely to continue. Socialization into rigid gender codes that associate masculinity with domination and violence often plays a significant role in children's involvement in bullying, so it is important to address gender socialization in prevention efforts.

12

Increase children's opportunities for appropriate play and creative exploration.

Every community has the responsibility to ensure that individual efforts build upon one another and achieve the greatest possible impact. Strategy is the key to maximizing discrete efforts and ensuring that they promote broader system and policy level changes. Key components of strategy development include identifying and prioritizing the needs and assets of a community, engaging and gaining the support of key stakeholders and decision makers, evaluating program effectiveness, fostering sustainability, and ensuring that resources are appropriately used. Strategy development leads to better outcomes for young children and families by promoting approaches that are well coordinated, responsive to local needs and concerns, and more likely to succeed.

13

Enhance community connections, resources, and access to information and decision-making.

Strengthening communities results in stronger, healthier families and children. Strong social networks and connections between community members help foster trust. They also support the development of norms such as peaceful conflict resolution and maintaining safety in communal areas. In addition, increased involvement in decision-making empowers community members to act on behalf of children and families and leads to an increase in physical, informational, and other resources to support healthy child development and functioning.

14

Increase local coordination of services and resources for families and their children.

Services for families and children should be easily accessible and integrated when appropriate. Too often, young children and families in distress end up navigating a complicated and ambiguous web of services and are shuffled from one place to another without receiving the services they need. Service integration addresses the needs of the whole family. Such integration can be supported by joint training. According to Patricia Van Horn, "In-service training of different service providers should be more cross-disciplinary so they can better understand and assist children who have been impacted by violence."²⁴

15

Ensure that violence prevention efforts for young children are driven by strategy.

Engaging in creative and stimulating activities helps strengthen children's cognitive and emotional development and builds interpersonal and communication skills. Play provides an opportunity for young children to interact with and learn from other children and adults, explore strengths, overcome challenges, process information, and practice developmentally appropriate behaviors such as sharing, cooperation, and conflict resolution. Play and creative activities have also been found to be effective in reducing the impact of trauma and in helping children work through their fears and anxieties.

CASE STUDY

Multidisciplinary Teams

The Police Action Counseling Team (PACT) of Riverside County, California partners licensed mental health professionals with law enforcement officers to respond jointly to emergency calls when children and families have been traumatized. PACT's objectives are to increase the possibility of a child's healthy recovery from trauma, interrupt familial cycles of violence, and create a culture within the police department that fosters relationships with community agencies. Police officers and mental health professionals receive intensive training in assessing the psychological needs of families in crisis and in providing immediate, informed intervention. Mental health professionals are on-call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to respond to calls from the police department. The mental health team also rides along with police officers regularly to increase accessibility and availability for follow-up services. Following an initial crisis assessment, PACT offers families appropriate and streamlined referrals. Agencies currently in the referral system include county mental health agencies, school districts, medical facilities, child protective services, probation services, victim witness assistance, and the district attorney's office. More than 300 children in the county are annually served by PACT. Outcomes include increased awareness of family trauma and violence within law enforcement, increased reporting to Child Protective Services, and more children and families being referred to and accessing mental health services. Initial evaluation shows that deputies involved in PACT referred 80% of children and families for mental health care, while deputies not involved in PACT only referred 10% of families. Evaluation also shows a four-fold reduction in negative symptoms among children and families who received referrals.

Call the Riverside County Sheriff's Department at (760) 836-1600.



What this means for you

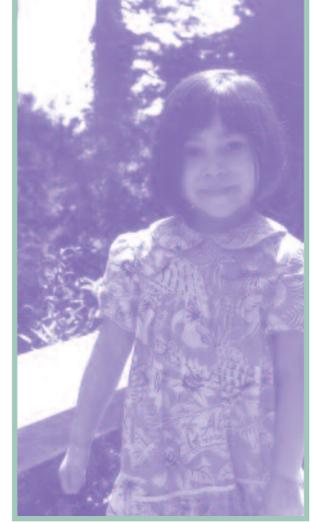
“We know that it is easier to get children on a positive path early than to come in after the fact and try and make it up.”

— DR. JACK SHONKOFF
EDITOR, NEURONS TO
NEIGHBORHOODS

The *FIRST STEPS* 15 recommendations lay out a policy and practice framework for policy makers, funders, service providers and administrators, parents, and advocates. Each has a role to play in strengthening efforts for young children and their families.

- **Policy makers and public officials** can support implementation of the *FIRST STEPS* recommendations, put training, funding, and program guidelines and requirements into law, and increase attention to the importance of healthy early childhood development and violence prevention through use of the bully pulpit.
- **Funders** can influence priorities and practices through what they choose to fund. They can provide resources for effective programs, ongoing strategy development, training and technical assistance, and evaluation. They can also mount campaigns that increase public support for programs and laws that support healthy child development and violence prevention.
- **Service providers and administrators** can build the skills of parents and other caregivers of young children, develop and participate in appropriate training, and strengthen program delivery. Further, they can increase public understanding of and support for outcomes related to early childhood development and advocate for changes within their own organizations and policy change to support early childhood development and reduce violence. This broad group includes those in direct contact with young children and families such as early care and education providers, health and social service providers, police officers, and judges. It also includes those who have indirect contact such as city planners, parks and recreation administrators, housing authorities, and transportation entities.
- **Parents and advocates** can actively engage with policy makers, funders, and service providers in order to strengthen services and communities that will support young children and prevent violence. They can also become more informed about the relationship between early childhood development and violence prevention and advocate for organizational and policy changes that support families and young children.

The *Spectrum of Prevention* chart on page 11 delineates specific activities to help achieve the *FIRST STEPS* recommendations.



The Spectrum of Prevention

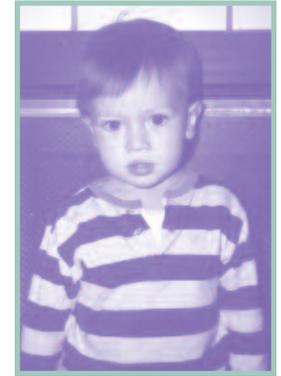
SPECTRUM LEVEL	EXAMPLES
1 Strengthening Individual Knowledge & Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Provide caregivers with information about child development and teach them stress management, problem solving and boundary setting skills, and positive communication and discipline techniques.■ Build developmentally appropriate literacy skills in young children, for example, by encouraging caregivers to read to children frequently and providing books that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate.
2 Promoting Community Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Educate community members about the vulnerability of young children and the detrimental effects of abuse, neglect, and witnessing violence.■ Encourage safe gun storage in the home, including storing guns unloaded and away from ammunition, out of children's reach, and in locked boxes.
3 Educating Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Ensure that professionals who work with young children and families are trained to identify substance abusing caregivers and affected children and provide them with developmentally and culturally appropriate care and support.■ Train childcare providers to model appropriate behaviors, understand how cultural beliefs influence behavior and socialization, provide consistent discipline, and offer a range of developmentally appropriate activities that support each child's unique learning style.
4 Fostering Coalitions & Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Foster collaboration between city planners, transportation and housing authorities, law enforcement, business leaders, funders, and health and education service providers in the development of neighborhoods and services that promote young children's health and well-being.■ Foster partnerships that increase young children's access to positive male role models, including fathers and father figures. Partner with community organizations and networks to involve boys and young men in activities promoting interpersonal respect and cooperation.
5 Changing Organizational Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Incorporate violence screening and assessment tools into existing healthcare protocols and training and promote their use to increase identification and intervention with pregnant women, caregivers, and young children who are at risk of violence.■ Contact television stations, advertising sponsors, and other media outlets, encouraging them to incorporate less violent and inappropriate content in children and family programming.
6 Influencing Policy & Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Advocate for a refundable per-child tax credit for all families that does not change if parents enter the workforce and for the provision of non-cash benefits such as childcare subsidies and housing and transportation vouchers to low-income families with young children.■ Advocate for policies that support family mental health, including expanding health insurance coverage to include infant and parental mental health and providing adequate training to ensure quality services and programs.



Take the First Steps

“Violence is learned so it can be unlearned or conditions can be changed so it’s not learned in the first place.”

— DR. RON SLABY
DEVELOPMENTAL
PSYCHOLOGIST,
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



Current knowledge about the causes of violence and how to prevent it is greater than ever. The level of violence that exists in the U.S. is too high, but it is preventable. One important focus must be on young children’s well being. Too often there is not enough attention paid during children’s early years, only to later discover angry, depressed, alienated, and violent teens and adults. The evidence is overwhelming: the quality of early development opportunities and early experiences of violence make a difference in ways that persist far beyond childhood, impacting brain development, academic achievement, relationships, and the risk of being involved in violence.

It is becoming increasingly recognized that enhancing early childhood development requires working collaboratively and reducing risks and fostering resiliency in the community, family, and individual. There remains, however, a grave disconnect between what is known and existing policies and practices. While implementing the *FIRST STEPS* recommendations in a meaningful way requires significant investment, research supports the assertion that the investment will pay off in the long-run — for individuals, communities, and society. Clearly, parents and other caregivers have significant responsibility for raising their children; however, they need appropriate resources, services, and support. Ensuring that young children have the supports and opportunities they need and deserve is a priority that requires great commitment.



Endnotes

Complete citations are available in the Endnotes section (pp 56-66) of the full report.

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Recommendations

1. Provide families with services and supports to foster health and empowerment.
2. Recognize poverty as a significant risk factor and take steps to minimize its impact.
3. Prevent and reduce the impact of abuse, neglect, and witnessing violence.
4. Increase wellness opportunities and access to quality healthcare for children and families.
5. Promote mental health and meet the mental health needs of all family members.
6. Reduce substance abuse among caregivers and pregnant women and their partners.
7. Provide affordable, available, and high-quality early care and education.
8. Improve the ability of families, communities, and schools to prepare children for school.
9. Implement measures to reduce young children's access to guns.
10. Reduce the impact of media violence on young children.
11. Intervene in early bullying behavior and address underlying causes.
12. Increase children's opportunities for appropriate play and creative exploration.
13. Enhance community connections, resources, and access to information and decision-making.
14. Increase local coordination of services and resources for families and their children.
15. Ensure that violence prevention efforts for young children are driven by effective strategy.





1st STEPS
TAKING ACTION EARLY TO PREVENT VIOLENCE

"He shot her baby at my house. I heard it. I felt sad and scared."

— 3 year old

"When I was watching a knife movie, I went to sleep and I woke up. I ran out the room because I was having a nightmare."

— 3 year old

"When I was spending the night at my granny's house, somebody shot somebody, and he was wrapped in blue paper. I was feeling sad."

— 4 year old

"Somebody threw a rock at my momma's window when I was sleeping. It was my bedroom. I felt sad. Then I was crying."

— 4 year old

"The younger kids, or younger generation, they follow. They want to follow what you do. They want to do what you do."

— 15 year old