

**CSGV Risk and Protective Framework:
Building Protective Factors Around
Children, Young People and Families to
Prevent Gang Involvement**

**Community Solution to Gang Violence
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Fortunately, most young resist the temptations and forces that make gang life appear attractive. Researchers agree that these young people have protective factors in their lives. The most recent research in juvenile justice prevention is guided by a variation of the risk-protective factors framework, an approach that assumes the best way to prevent problems such as gang involvement is to reduce or eliminate risk factors, and increase or enhance protective factors. Protective factors are conditions that buffer or moderate the effects of risks, or increase resistance to them. Risk factors are conditions individuals experience personally and/or within their social environments that can predict an increased likelihood of engaging in risk-taking behaviour such as gang involvement.

Drawing on this evidence the Community Solution to Gang Violence (CSGV) uses a risk-protective framework with the intention of ultimately preventing youth involvement in gangs. The risk and protective factors in this document are based on a combination of research on risk factors that contribute to gang involvement, substance abuse and violence. The protective factors are based on conditions that promote positive youth development and well-being. As such, the protective factors not only help mitigate or buffer risk, but at the same time, create building blocks for healthy transitions to adulthood.

Based on existing research and community knowledge, CSGV has identified risk factors for gang involvement, and at the same time, identified protective factors to help prevent gang involvement within the individual, family, school and community. In additions we have added risk and protective factors associated with the way we organize and implement services and polices to respond to issues like gangs and gang violence.

This framework is a way to help us clarify the factors that may increase the risk of youth gang involvement, and what is needed to promote positive youth development as a means of prevention. By building positive relationships and patterns of interaction with young people, creating positive social environments, and developing social and economic policies that support positive youth development, we can help young people resist gang involvement and work toward realizing their own potential as family members, friends, neighbours, co-workers and citizens.

Suggestions for Using the Tool

Review the Risk and Protective Factors and engage in a dialogue about how these factors play out in your experience.

- What risk and protective factors are most significant to you, your group or organization's mandate?
- What risk and protective factors are most significant to the issues your group or organization is trying to address?
- What risk and protective factors are missing?
- What protective factors do your programs and services build upon?

Individual Domain

Risk Factor	Protective Factor/Assets
Does not feel safe at home, school or community.	Advance a sense of safety at home, school, community* ¹
Few or no adults they can count on for sustained support and nurturance	Encourage positive relationships with adults *
Disconnected from family, school and community life	Give young people useful roles in the community and in organizations. *
	Young people provide services to others *
	Demonstrate that children and young people are valued *
Does not participate in creative activities, sports, clubs or organizations in school, place of worship or community	Support children and young people to participate in sports, clubs or organizations*
Ridiculed, teased or hassled because they are different (poor, different race or ethnic background, interests or just don't fit in with the mainstream)	Promote cultural competence and understanding*
Limited ability to handle differences and conflicts in non-aggressive manner	Help children and young people develop interpersonal skills *
	Help children and young people develop conflict resolution skills *
Spends a lot of time alone or with unsupervised peers.	Help children and young people develop positive peer relationships/friendships *
Doesn't care what happens and pessimistic about their future	Give children and young people a sense of purpose and hope for the future *
	Promote and engage young people in promoting equality and social justice *
Limited opportunities to obtain a positive sense of power and control over their lives	Help children and young people gain a sense of personal power control over their lives * and try new things
	Help young people develop planning and decision making skills *
	Help young people access employment and training services to enhance employment
	Help young people assert their beliefs and convictions *
Engaged in or peers engaged in risk taking behaviours (use of alcohol and drugs, drug trafficking ,delinquent activities)	Help avoid risky behaviour and adopt healthy lifestyles and sexual attitudes *
Not aware of resources and services to help them deal with difficulties and or uncertain as to how to access these services.	Provide outreach services to help young people access services and resources

¹ Note * indicates one of the 40 Developmental Assets for positive development identified by the Search Institute

Family Domain

Risk Factor	Protective Factor/Assets
Parents unable to communicate positively with children and young people.	Teach/support positive family communication*
Parents unable to provide advice and counsel to children experiencing difficulties	Teach/support family problem-solving skills
Parental expectations of children rigid, inconsistent or non existent	Teach/support parents to understand children's and young people's developmental needs
Parents do not model positive or responsible behaviour	Teach/support parents to model responsible behaviour*
Parents overwhelmed with their own issues and unable to provide support to their children	Provide support to parent's in practical ways (i.e. single parents groups, baby sitting networks)
Culture of "individualism" within family , everybody needs to make it on their own	Promote the importance of family time and activities
Parents do not know children's friends and acquaintances	Teach/support parents to learn about and engage with children's friends
Families outside mainstream face language and cultural barriers: unable to help their children adjust to another culture	Help parents (particularly immigrant and refugee families) learn about and adapt to raising children within two cultures
	Encourage/support parents facing cultural and language barriers to become involved with their children outside of the home
Parents unaware of signs of gang involvement and the impact on their children	Help parents identify signs of gang involvement and support their children to resist the lure of gang
Abusive or violent interactions among family members	Help parents address and overcome patterns of family violence
Family members involved or associated with gangs	Help family members disassociate from the gang lifestyle

Community Domain

Risk Factor	Protective Factor/Assets
High number of families supported by income assistance payments or low-paying jobs	Information about benefits, subsidies and services is available to low income individuals and families
	Range of opportunities and services offered for people working and earning low-wages
High residential mobility	Provide safe, affordable housing to families
Little interaction among caring neighbours	Bring people together as a community
Limited opportunities for positive interaction between young people and adults	Promote interaction between adults and young people at the community level
Young people are perceived as “problematic” and have limited opportunities to engage in useful roles in the community	Recognize contributions of young people in the community
	Create opportunities for young people to engage in useful roles in their community*
Limited knowledge, interaction or comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds	Celebrate and bring people together from different cultural communities
	Provide information and support to enhance cultural competence
Community does not have a common understanding of the root causes of gangs and gang violence and how the community can do to address this issue	Community is working to address root causes of gangs and connection between gangs, drugs and criminal activity
	Community is working to prevent crime and promote community safety

School Domain

Risk Factor	Protective Factor/Assets
Parents not involved in helping children succeed at school particularly at junior-high and high school levels.	Supports to help engage parents in their children's school.
Children/young people not actively engaged in learning.	Provide supports to help children and their parents with homework, reading abilities.
Children /youth do not have positive, sustained relationships with teachers	Opportunities for a variety of informal interactions between teachers and students.
Children/youth have a low attachment to school	Promote school spirit and sense of belonging.
Schools do not have the resources to meet the needs of students with special learning needs.	Provide a variety of resources to meet special learning needs.
Limited interaction or connection between home, school and community life	Variety of ways employed to involve parents and community in school.
Children/youth bullied or bullying others at school.	Programs provided to address bullying.
Children/young people not involved in extra-curricular activities	Extra-curricular activities available to students.
Children/young people regularly absent or skipping school.	Programs and policies address absenteeism
Expulsion or suspension from school primary means for dealing with disruptive behaviour.	Policies and supports exist to address root causes of behaviour and needs of disruptive students
Teachers, school staff and administrators unaware or uncertain of how to respond to the challenged faced by children, youth and families from different cultures.	Programs/resources provide training and support to teachers and school staff in cultural awareness and competence.
Teachers and school staff lack the resources to respond to the social needs of children and their families.	Policies, supports and resources are available to help schools respond to the social needs of children and their families.

Services and Organizations

Risk Factor	Protective Factor/Assets
Competition among service agencies for limited resources which can promote a tendency to protect turf, client-base and mandate	Shared knowledge and understanding of the unique services, resources and abilities of agencies providing services to families and youth.
Services not connected to each other resulting in disconnected experiences and support for those seeking help.	Collaborative approaches among service agencies and practitioners to create protocols, administrative procedures and practices to cross service mandates and connect families and youth to services when they are needed.
Limited ability of services to engage in outreach and attract families, children and youth who don't access services or don't know how to access services.	Innovative approaches to reach -out to families and children who don't traditionally access mainstream services.
	Services value diversity and provide a safe, nurturing and welcoming environment for children and families.
Tendency to focus on and define problems as a result of individual's deficiency or failure and with little or no focus on external forces that pushed them to act.	Commitment and ability to address the larger social economic issues behind the difficulties faced by families and youth.
	Approach to services based on asset and capacity building.
Services short staffed limiting ability to provide services when they are needed and to develop sustained relationships with those seeking help.	Ability to provide services that are friendly, informal, relationship-based and non-judgmental.
	Practices adjusted to meet the unique needs of individuals.
Short-term project-based funding limiting the ability of services to build on successes and establish a long-term approach to issues.	Flexible structures and processes that are able to tolerate failure and "hang-in there " with families and youth dealing with complex and persistent difficulties.
	Services provide consistent and sustained follow-up families and youth once they leave their service.

Socio-Economic Policies

Risk Factor	Protective Factor/Assets
Lack of common understanding among service providers, funding agencies and government, of gang violence and its impact on individuals, families and communities	Community groups, non-profit societies and government have a common understanding of the dynamics and conditions that give rise to gangs
Lack of understanding or agreement on the best practices and approaches for addressing issues of gang violence	Community groups, non-profit societies and government collaborate to develop relationships, approaches, practices and policies to address issues of gang activity violence and positive youth development.
Short-term, year-to-year funding of services and organizations that limit the ability to provide sustained and innovative programs that build on experience and offer continuity of services.	Long-term funding arrangements with agencies to enhance service innovation, and continuity and on-going programming.
Project specific funding that does not cover administrative or operational costs of agencies and non-profit groups.	
Demands for quick, measurable outcomes that do not account for sustained long-term efforts to address complex socio-economic problems like gang violence.	Proposal and reporting requirements that recognize the complexity of issues facing people and communities and the need for long-term commitment for substantial change
	Policies and programs geared to the multiple barriers faced by the most troubled and endangered youth and their families .
	Streamlined reporting requirements to enable agencies to focus more on planning and delivering.
	Development and support of policies, approaches and programs that promotes culture of mutual responsibility to address social issues.
Lack of policies and programs that help young people in difficulty get back into school, employment or meaningful community work and civic engagement	Policies and programs geared to prevention and asset building.

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