

**Approximately 40% of gang members in the United States are 18 years old or younger.<sup>1</sup>**

## What is a gang?

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.<sup>2</sup>

## What is youth violence?

Youth violence is the intentional use of force or power by 10- to 24-year-olds to threaten or harm others.<sup>3</sup> Committing youth violence increases the risk for:<sup>4</sup>



Academic challenges  
and school drop-out



Substance use



Depression



Suicide



Behavioral and  
mental health conditions

**Most youth who commit violence lack positive supports from parents, schools, peers, and their community.**

## RISK FACTORS

Risk factors for youth violence and gang membership include:<sup>5</sup>

- Child abuse and neglect
- Academic problems or school discipline issues
- Parent-child separation/Lack of parent involvement
- Poverty
- Housing instability
- Aggressive, violent, or delinquent behavior
- Youth alcohol or drug use
- Mental health conditions
- Exposure to community violence
- Parental substance abuse and/or parental criminality
- Racial prejudice

## PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Protective factors against youth violence and gang membership include:

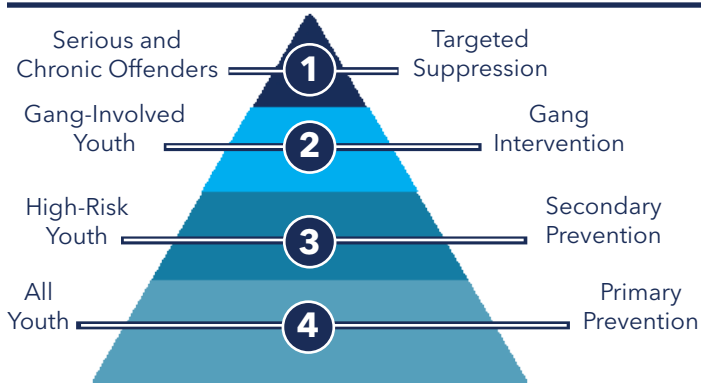
- Parental involvement
- Family support system
- Coping and interpersonal skills
- Positive social connections
- Peer support
- Academic achievement
- Reducing alcohol and drug use

**The more risk factors a young person experiences, the greater their chance of committing youth violence, including through gang membership;<sup>6</sup> however, exposure to protective factors reduces this chance.<sup>7</sup>** Given this, prevention strategies are aimed at increasing these crucial supports in a youth’s life: security, connectedness, and safety.

## PREVENTION STRATEGIES

STRATEGY	APPROACH	GEORGIA PROGRAMS AND SUPPORTS EXAMPLES
Promote family environments that support healthy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early childhood home visitation</li> <li>Parenting skill and family relationship programs</li> </ul>	DPH and DFCS home visiting and parental skill-building, and Strengthening Families Georgia
Provide quality education early in life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preschool enrichment with family engagement</li> </ul>	Georgia Pre-K, Head Start, CAPS, and Quality Rated Child Care
Strengthen youth's skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universal school-based programs</li> </ul>	Georgia Apex Program, Youth Mental Health First Aid and Teen Mental Health First Aid (tMHFA), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, and comprehensive school-based health centers.
Wrapping children who are at risk of becoming gang-involved with an array of supportive services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cognitive behavioral treatment</li> </ul>	Cobb County Juvenile Court R.I.S.I.N.G. Program diverts participants from the juvenile justice system by offering a specialty court that has been developed based on an accountability court structure.
Connect youth to caring adults and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mentoring programs</li> <li>Afterschool programs</li> </ul>	Boys and Girls Club, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, DBHDD's Prevention Clubhouses, DFCS's Afterschool Care Program, YMCAs, and 4-H
Create protective community environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modify the physical and social environment</li> <li>Reduce exposure to community-level risks</li> <li>Street outreach and community norm change</li> </ul>	Community-oriented policing, afterschool programs and community centers like the @PromiseCenter, Front Porch Community Resource Center, Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, norms change programs like CureViolence (happening in some Southwest Atlanta neighborhoods)
Intervene to lessen harms and prevent future risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Treatment to lessen the harms of violence exposures</li> <li>Treatment to prevent problem behavior and further involvement in violence</li> <li>Hospital-community partnerships</li> </ul>	Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT); DJJ's evidence-based programs for cognitive restructuring, problem-solving, and crisis management; DJJ's Georgia Preparatory Academy, Pathways to Success and Connections Graduate Programs, offering educational and vocational opportunities; and mental health and substance abuse treatment through DJJ

## MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS FOR GANG AND YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION



Source: National Gang Center, 2020

**Tier One:** Targeted enforcement and prosecution through a gang accountability court. May account for 4-8% of offenders.

**Tier Two:** Intensive treatment, like group therapy, family therapy, mentoring, and cognitive-behavioral therapy.<sup>8</sup>

**Tier Three:** Less intensive levels of the same interventions as used for Tier Two.

**Tier Four:** Primary prevention strategies, like school-based programs, mentoring, and afterschool programs.<sup>2</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### PREVENTION

- 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.)
- 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, free of bias, and include input from local child-serving stakeholders (i.e. mental health providers, social workers, juvenile courts).

### INTERVENTION

- Increase funding for restorative programs for children and youth (e.g., Children in Need of Services (CHINS), Juvenile Incentive Grant Program, and Community Service Grants Program).
- 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).

### RESTORATION

- Raise the maximum age of juvenile court jurisdiction up to 18.
- Expand and develop effective juvenile gang accountability courts, including 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.

## Sources for Gangs and Youth Violence

- 1 "Survey Analysis: Demographics," National Gang Center, Accessed June 29, 2022. <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Survey-Analysis/Demographics#anchorage>.
- 2 Ga. Code Ann. § 16-15-3.
- 3 "Youth Violence," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Accessed June 30, 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/index.html>.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 "A Comprehensive Technical Package for the Prevention of Youth Violence and Associated Risk Behaviors," National Center for Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention 2016, Accessed June 30, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/yv-technicalpackage.pdf>.
- 6 "Risk and Protective Factors," Youth.gov. Accessed July 1, 2022. <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/preventing-gang-involvement/risk-and-protective-factors>.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 "Juvenile Justice Bulletin," U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2010, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/231116.pdf>
- 9 "A Comprehensive Technical Package for the Prevention of Youth Violence and Associated Risk Behaviors," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016. Accessed July 1, 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/yv-technicalpackage.pdf>.