



Creating Safe, Asset-Building Places for Young People

When people work together and form a sense of community, reports the National Crime Prevention Council, they're more likely to prevent crime and help young people feel safe. Creating safe places for children and youth entails ensuring not only their physical safety but also their emotional well-being. A few ideas:

- Get to know the names of everyone around you and encourage young people to do the same. People who know each other tend to feel safer and also know whom to turn to when they need help and support.
- Discuss safety issues with children and youth. Find out where and how they feel unsafe. Young people's perceptions of safety are just as important as their actual safety.
- All young people need adequate adult supervision. Experts recommend that the child-to-adult ratios in child-care centers be three to four infants per adult, four to six toddlers per adult, and seven to 10 preschoolers per adult. States vary, however, in required staffing ratios. When it comes to teens, researcher Laurence Steinberg found that young people between the ages of 11 and 16 who had supervision were less likely to become victims—or perpetrators—of trouble.
- Make environments safe for young people by childproofing areas for children and having age-appropriate toys. Teenagers thrive in environments where they have stimulating activities to do with people who care about them.
- Encourage adults who work or volunteer with young people to create a caring environment where children and youth feel accepted and valued.
- Build the social-competencies assets. Young people who have resistance skills (asset 35) and can resolve conflicts non-violently (asset 36) are less likely to become victims of crime. Children and youth who have strong planning and decision-making (asset 32), interpersonal competence (asset 33), and cultural competence (asset 34) skills are more apt to make smart choices not only in dangerous situations but also in everyday experiences when interacting with a diversity of people.
- Set clear boundaries and expectations of acceptable behavior. Define what you collectively agree is safe and unsafe behavior. Then consistently uphold these guidelines.
- Encourage young people to report unsafe behavior. Talk about how to handle fights, bullying, and other dangerous behaviors. Be consistent about how you handle

discipline so young people know they can rely on you to keep the environment safe.

- Evaluate how much unsupervised time young people have during the day. Consider developing opportunities for meaningful experiences that connect them with caring adults and young people.
- Teach young people safety and self-protection skills. Emphasize what young people can do, how others can help, and

what makes a situation safe. Avoid scaring them with many examples of danger and violence.

- Find out whether children and youth have safe ways to get to programs, activities, and safe havens. Creating safe places for young people is only worthwhile if children and youth also feel secure getting to and leaving these places.

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