# Strategies to Slow and Prevent Youth Violence

This Evidence Brief summarizes risk factors for youth violence, as well as strategies to build protective factors that can slow and prevent youth violence.

**EVIDENCE BRIEF**

## DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Risk factors are any characteristics associated with a *higher likelihood of negative outcomes*, whereas protective factors are any characteristics associated with a *lower likelihood of negative outcomes*.

## SETTING THE CONTEXT:
### Risk Factors for Youth Violence

### 01. Systemic Inequities

Experiences of poverty and social exclusion have been identified as critical risk factors for youth violence. Other risk factors for youth that intersect with systemic inequity include racism, discrimination in the education system, and lack of economic opportunity, as well as family conflicts, which are often the result of these challenges.[1,2,3]

### 02. Stigmatization

Due to systemic inequities, low-income neighbourhoods can be impacted by youth violence; when poverty is racialized and associated with violence, stigma is created and regularly experienced by young people.[4] Media coverage of youth violence often avoids exploring systemic causes of inequity, instead placing blame on the residents of the community impacted.[4] This can lead to internalized stigma and consequently create conditions for continued violence.[1]

### 03. Inequities in Service Access

There are insufficient accessible social support services for youth; where they do exist, youth are not always made aware of these services, which can often mitigate the impacts of systemic inequities.[2,3]

### 04. Overpolicing

Since many youth report feeling unsafe when interacting with police and the criminal justice system, youth are more likely to engage in weapon carrying or violence *after* these initial interactions.[1]

## SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE:
### Strategies to Build Protective Factors to Slow and Prevent Youth Violence

### 01. Increase Accessibility to Mentors & Supports

Greater accessibility to mentors and affordable, quality programs that recognize the trauma that Black, Indigenous, and youth of colour experience are needed. These programs should provide a balanced approach that acknowledges psychological difficulties and social-interpersonal influences. This approach can include supporting youth to connect with additional social support services (e.g., employment, housing, mental health services) and prevent them from gravitating towards violence.[1,2,5]

## 02. Meaningfully Engage Youth

Youth should be engaged in designing programs and in decision-making processes; this involvement can build skills in multiple areas, which has the potential to positively impact both youth and their communities.[2]

## 03. Promote Resources and Services

Available resources and services need to be better communicated to youth, especially to youth who are most vulnerable to violence due to risk factors.[2]

## 04. Acknowledge Lived Experiences

Communities should also be meaningfully engaged and lived experience must be valued when it comes to understanding and responding to youth violence, including experiences of white supremacy, colonialism, and intergenerational trauma. This is essential for programs that support youth who may be vulnerable to violence or in contact with the law, and it is critical for criminal justice system institutions, including the police.[2]

## ENDNOTES

1. Youth Research & Evaluation eXchange (YouthREX). (2019). *Youth weapon carrying.*

2. Toronto Youth Equity Strategy. (2015). *Toronto youth equity strategy: Building resilience and supportive systems.*

3. McMurtry, R., & Curling, A. (2008). *The review of the roots of youth violence, volume 1: Findings, analysis, and conclusions.* Queens Printer for Ontario.

4. Eizadirad, A. (2016). *Is it "bad" kids or "bad" places? Where is all the violence originating from? Youth violence in the City of Toronto.* Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies, *38*(2), 162-188.

5. Srivastava, V. (Host & Producer). (2022, December 7). *How can we slow down youth gun violence?* [Audio podcast episode]. In *Don't call me resilient.* The Conversation.

## HOW DID WE COMPILE THIS EVIDENCE?

This Evidence Brief is a summary of select resources from YouthREX's online Knowledge Hub on the topic of youth violence.

www.youthrex.com | @REXforyouth
An Ontario where shared knowledge is transformed into positive impact for all youth!

YOUTHREX
Research &
Evaluation eXchange