



Approximately 40% of gang members in the United States are 18 years old or younger.¹

How does Georgia define 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.²

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.³ Homicide is the **third leading cause of death** for 10- to 24-year-olds and the **number one cause of death for Black youth**.⁴ The estimated cost of youth violence is almost **\$100 billion per year**.⁵ Committing youth violence increases the risk for:⁶



Substance use



Depression



Suicide



Academic challenges and school drop-out



Behavioral and mental health conditions

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

Factors that Impact Youth Violence and Gang Membership

The more risk factors a young person experiences, the greater their chance of committing youth violence, including through gang membership;⁸ however, exposure to protective factors reduces this chance.² Given this, prevention strategies are aimed at increasing crucial supports in a youth’s life, including security, connectedness, and safety.



Risk Factors:⁷

- 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
- Social rejection



Protective Factors:

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

Comprehensive Gang Model: Five Core Strategies

The Comprehensive Gang Model is a set of five interrelated core strategies that offer a comprehensive, collaborative approach to prevent and reduce gang violence. The five strategies are:

Community Mobilization

community engagement and collaboration

Community Mobilization: Involvement of local citizens, including former gang members and community groups and agencies, and the coordination of programs and staff functions within and across agencies

Opportunities Provision

education, training, and employment programs

Opportunities Provision: The development of a variety of education, training, employment, and reentry programs specific to engaging gang-involved youth and young adults.

Social Intervention

outreach and access to provision of services for gang-involved youth and their families

Social Intervention: Youth-serving agencies, schools, street outreach workers, grassroots groups, faith-based organizations, law enforcement agencies, and other criminal justice organizations reaching out and acting as links between gang-involved youth and their families, the conventional world, and needed services.

Suppression

community policing with formal and informal social controls and accountability measures

Suppression: Formal and informal social controls procedures and accountability measures, including law enforcement and close supervision or monitoring of gang-involved youth, by criminal justice agencies working in collaboration with community based service providers, schools, and grassroots groups.

Organizational Change & Development

development of policy for effective use of resources

Organizational Change and Development: Development and implementation of policies and procedures that result in the most effective use of available and potential resources to better address the gang problem.

Source: National Gang Center, 2020

Prevention Strategies Implemented in Georgia



Promote Family Environments that Support Healthy Development

Approach:

- Early childhood home visitation
- Parenting skill and family relationship programs

How This Looks in Georgia:

- Home visiting and parental skill building (through the Department of Public Health (DPH) and Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS))
- Strengthening Families Georgia



Provide Quality Education Early in Life

Approach:

- Preschool enrichment with family engagement

How This Looks in Georgia:

- Georgia Pre-K
- Head Start
- Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS)
- Quality Rated Child Care

Prevention Strategies Implemented in Georgia, continued



Strengthen Youth Skills

Approach:

- Universal school-based programs

How This Looks in Georgia:

- Georgia Apex Program
- Youth Mental Health First Aid and Teen Mental Health First Aid
- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
- Comprehensive school-based health centers



Wrapping Children At-Risk Children with an Array of Supportive Services

Approach:

- Cognitive behavioral treatment

How This Looks in Georgia:

- Cobb Co. Juvenile Court's 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

Approach:

- Mentoring programs
- Afterschool programs

How This Looks in Georgia:

- Boys and Girls Club
- 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- Afterschool Care Program (DFCS)
- YMCAs
- 4-H
- Prevention Clubhouses (Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities)



Create Protective Community Environments

Approach:

- Modify the physical and social environment
- Reduce exposure to community-level risks
- Street outreach and community norm change

How This Looks in Georgia:

- 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

Approach:

- Treatment to lessen the harms of violence exposures
- Treatment to prevent problem behavior and further involvement in violence
- Hospital-community partnerships

How This Looks in Georgia:

- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Evidence-based programs for cognitive restructuring, problem-solving, and crisis management (Department of Juvenile Justice - DJJ)
- Georgia Preparatory Academy (DJJ)
- Pathways to Success
- Connections Graduate Programs
- Educational and vocational opportunities
- Mental health and substance abuse treatment through DJJ

Policy 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 (e.g., mental health providers, social workers, juvenile courts).

Intervention

- Increase funding for intervention programs that provide outreach workers and train community members as credible messengers to diffuse community conflict after violence occurs (e.g., Neighborhood Planning Units and CHRIS180).
- Increase funding for restorative programs for children and youth (e.g., Children in Need of Services (CHINS), Public Safety and Community Violence Reduction Grant, 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 to 18 years of age.
- Develop effective juvenile accountability courts, including education on violence, community involvement, and 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.



References for Gang and Youth Violence Prevention

Suggested citation: Voices for Georgia's Children. (2023). Fact Sheet: Gang and Youth Violence Prevention. Voices for Georgia's Children. <https://adobe.ly/3QWx2Cb>

- 1 "Survey Analysis: Demographics," National Gang Center, Accessed June 23, 2023. <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 23, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/index.html>.
- 4 CDC, Violence Prevention. "How big is the problem?" <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence>.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 "Youth Violence," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Accessed June 23, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/index.html>.
- 7 "Youth Violence: Risk and Protective Factors," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Accessed June 23, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/riskprotectivefactors.html>.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.