



Safe Routes  
to School  
**National  
Partnership**

# Personal Safety in Safe Routes to School: Addressing Violence and Crime in Your Community



## Taking Back the Streets and Sidewalks

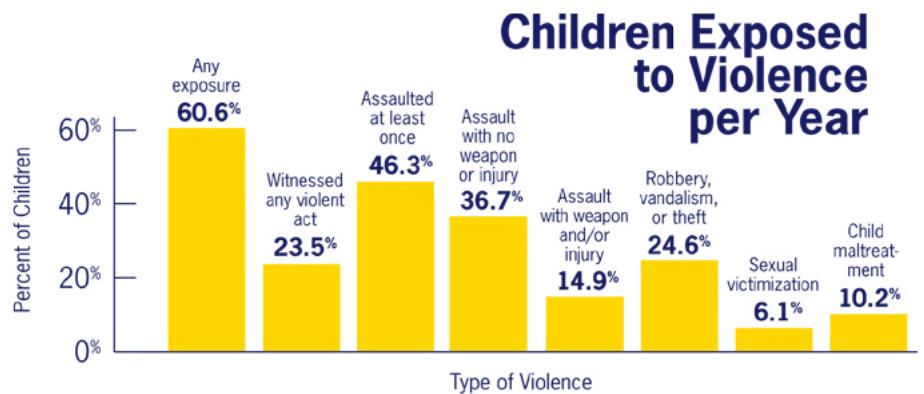
The Safe Routes to School National Partnership's *Taking Back the Streets and Sidewalks: How Safe Routes to School and Community Safety Initiatives Can Overcome Violence and Crime* provides more in-depth information on violence prevention and Safe Routes to School efforts. The report discusses the reasons Safe Routes to School matters for communities experiencing high violence and crime rates; further describes the impact that crime, violence, and fear have on children walking and bicycling to school, as well as the impact on communities; details strategies to address and prevent violence and crime – from traditional Safe Routes to School efforts to programs that promote broader community change; and provides considerations for moving into action in your own community.

What do you do when parents won't let their children walk or bicycle to school out of fear of crime? Or when violence makes just stepping outside the front door unsafe? Safety in Safe Routes to School goes beyond protecting children who are walking or bicycling from collisions with people driving cars. It also includes addressing personal safety threats like bullying, robbery, sexual harassment, and gang activity, as well as fear of violence and crime that can also pose a great barrier to walking, bicycling, and being physically active outdoors.

When addressing violence and crime, we can draw from traditional components of Safe Routes to School programs, as well as strategies and initiatives often undertaken by other organizations who can become great allies in making the route to school – and the community as whole – safer. This action sheet provides an overview of the impacts of crime and violence on communities, specifically impacts on children walking and bicycling to school. It also addresses strategies to address personal safety concerns, and how to get started in your own community.

## Personal Safety Concerns

Threats to children and teens traveling to and from school and being physically active in their neighborhoods take many forms. Violence and crime do not uniformly affect all communities. In some communities, certain personal safety concerns may be non-existent, while in others, they may pose a significant danger.



*Juvenile Justice Bulletin, October 2009*

Here are some concerns that can impact children safely walking, bicycling, and being physically active in their communities:

**Bullying.** In 2013, about 22 percent of students ages 12 through 18 reported being bullied at school at least once during the school year. Bullying does not just occur when students are at school and it is likely that students who worry about being bullied on the school campus feel vulnerable when unaccompanied on the way to and from school.



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**Street Harassment and Sexual Assault.** A 2014 survey found that 65 percent of all women and 25 percent of all men had experienced street harassment. Girls and young women are often the targets of street harassment; 50 percent of those harassed reported that such harassment had begun by age 17.

While the likelihood of a child being sexual assaulted while walking or bicycling to school is low, fear of such assaults can affect individual or family decisions about school travel, particularly for girls.

**Gang Activity.** Nearly 1 in 5 students ages 12 to 18 years old reported that gangs were present in their school in 2011. Among high risk youth in urban areas, gang membership ranges from 15 to 32 percent. Gang homicides account for the majority of youth homicide in some large cities, with gang homicides forming 61 percent of youth homicides in Los Angeles and 69 percent in Long Beach, CA.

## Physical Assault and Robberies.

According to the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, over 46 percent of youth were physically assaulted in the previous year. On a yearly basis, 5 percent of children and youth are victims of robbery.

**Child Abduction.** Very few children are kidnapped by strangers – the number is around 100 children per year in the entire United States. However, the fear of having a child abducted by a stranger has had an enormous effect on parents' decisions allowing their children to walk and bicycle to school.

**Police Harassment.** In one survey, over 50 percent of African-American respondents, 26 percent of white respondents, 28 percent of Latino respondents, and 19 percent of Asian-American respondents said they or someone they know has experienced harassment or violence at the hands of the police. When law enforcement officers misuse their authority, it results in harm to the individuals targeted and creates negative relationships with the community.



of children and adolescents were directly or indirectly  
**exposed to violence** in the past year

*Juvenile Justice Bulletin, October 2009*

## Detrimental Effects of Violence and Crime on Children

- Parents report violence and crime as one of the five primary factors affecting children's walking or bicycling.
- Youth who have been exposed to violence show a stronger likelihood of considering or attempting suicide.
- Elementary and middle school students who report witnessing violence have lower academic achievement.
- Youth who experience or witness violence report withdrawing from their friends and family, even changing friends or avoiding favorite activities.



*Juvenile Justice Bulletin, October 2009*



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## What Can Be Done: Strategies to Improve Safety

We can make children's trips to and from school safer from crime and violence. There are many strategies that can be integrated into efforts to address crime and violence concerns for children walking and bicycling and being active in their communities, and they are outlined in the following chart. These strategies may already be a part of your community's Safe Routes to School toolbox, or may be opportunities for expanded programs and partnerships. Strategies beyond those traditionally thought of as part of Safe Routes to School include youth and neighborhood programs, community-centered policing or school-centered law enforcement, physical design, and primary prevention approaches to promote broader community change. For each strategy, the chart identifies the most closely associated E's from the Safe Routes to School Six E's framework (engineering, education, encouragement, enforcement, evaluation, and equity), the level of prevention (primary, secondary, or tertiary) often referred to by health experts, and key implementation partners.

Strategies must consider that both real and perceived safety concerns can negatively affect decisions about healthy behaviors, including walking or playing outdoors. In communities where the actual risk of harm to children is very low, Safe Routes to School programs can play a crucial role in helping parents feel comfortable with their children walking and bicycling and a focus on personal safety can be incorporated into existing programs. For communities where violence and crime are more pervasive, a combination of strategies may be necessary. In any case, strategies should be tailored for each community and rooted in community engagement to address local needs.

## How to Get Started

- **Identify partners and explore collaboration.** Reach out to those already working on community safety and violence prevention, as well as other key implementation partners. Just as one strategy cannot address violence and crime concerns on its own, one group or person cannot successfully implement strategies without working in collaboration with others.
- **Understand the issues.** Gather qualitative and quantitative data to understand the local realities around crime, violence, and fear.
- **Work with community members to identify priorities and strategies.** Violence and crime prevention efforts rooted in community engagement are more likely to be successful. Use multiple avenues to engage community members from the beginning.

The National Partnership's [\*Taking Back the Streets and Sidewalks: How Safe Routes to School and Community Safety Initiatives Can Overcome Violence and Crime\*](#) describes more in-depth considerations for moving into action, including implementation and evaluation steps.





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## Chart of Strategies

Detailed descriptions of these strategies and considerations for implementing these strategies can be found in the Safe Routes to School National Partnership's [Taking Back the Streets and Sidewalks: How Safe Routes to School and Community Safety Initiatives Can Overcome Violence and Crime](#).

Strategy	Connection to Six E's*	Level of Prevention	Key Implementation Partner(s) along with Safe Routes to School and Public Health
<b>Safe Routes to School Basics</b>			
Walking School Bus	Encouragement	Secondary	Schools, Parents
Corner Captains	Encouragement	Secondary	Schools, Parents, Community Organizations, Businesses
Safe Havens	Encouragement	Secondary	Businesses, Community Organizations
Safe Passages	Encouragement, Education, Enforcement	Secondary	Schools, Parents, Community Organizations, Businesses, Law Enforcement
<b>Programs Beyond the School Trip</b>			
Shared Use	Encouragement	Primary	Schools, Community Organizations
Afterschool Programs	Encouragement, Education	Primary	Schools, Community Organizations
Anti-Street Harassment Initiatives	Encouragement, Enforcement	Secondary	Community Organizations
Gang Interruption Programs	Education, Enforcement	Primary, Secondary, Tertiary	Law Enforcement, Community Organizations
Youth Bike Kitchens and Programs	Encouragement, Education	Primary, Secondary	Community Organizations
Mentorship Programs	Encouragement, Education	Secondary	Community Organizations
Restorative Justice in Schools	Education, Enforcement	Tertiary	Schools, Law Enforcement
Neighborhood Watch	Enforcement	Secondary	Law Enforcement, Neighborhood Residents
<b>Law Enforcement</b>			
Community Policing	Enforcement, Education	Secondary, Tertiary	Law Enforcement, Neighborhood Residents, Community Organizations
School Resource Officers	Enforcement, Education	Secondary, Tertiary	Law Enforcement, Schools, Community Organizations
<b>Physical Design</b>			
CPTED	Engineering	Primary	Municipal Planning/Community Development Department
Crime Cameras and Gunshot Detection Systems	Enforcement	Secondary	Law Enforcement
Traffic Calming	Engineering	Primary	Municipal Public Works/Transportation Department
<b>Broader Community Change</b>			
Affordable and Healthy Housing	Engineering	Primary, Tertiary	Municipal Planning/Community Development Department, Housing Providers
Economic and Employment Opportunities	Equity	Primary, Tertiary	Local Economic Development Department, Schools, Businesses
Educational Opportunities	Education, Encouragement	Primary, Tertiary	Schools Local Economic Development Department

\*Equity should be a consideration in all strategies. Evaluation should be a part of all strategies.

CPTED=Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design



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