

DEFENDING CHILDHOOD

PROTECT HEAL THRIVE

THE THREE GOALS OF THE INITIATIVE:

1. Prevent children's exposure to violence
2. Mitigate the negative impacts of exposure when it does occur
3. Develop knowledge and spread awareness about the issue

"Our children are counting on us. Our communities are counting on us. And we cannot—and will not—let them down."
—Attorney General Eric Holder

Children's Exposure to Violence (CEV)*

To better understand the nature and extent of children's exposure to violence, the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) within the Department of Justice partnered with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to sponsor the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence. The survey is the most comprehensive effort to date to measure children's exposure to violence, abuse, and crime. The survey found:

- Sixty percent of American children were exposed to violence, crime, or abuse in their homes, schools, and communities.
- Almost 40 percent of American children were direct victims of 2 or more violent acts, and 1 in 10 were victims of violence 5 or more times.
- A child's exposure to one type of violence increases the likelihood that the child will be exposed to other types of violence and exposed multiple times.

CrimeSolutions.gov

The Office of Justice Programs' CrimeSolutions.gov uses rigorous research to determine what works in criminal justice, juvenile justice, and crime victim services. The database of evidence-based programs identifies 20 programs as "effective" in addressing children's exposure to violence, and another 20 programs are identified as "promising," based on program evaluation evidence.

www.crimesolutions.gov/Topic-Details.aspx?ID=60

The Department of Justice launched the Defending Childhood Initiative on September 23, 2010, to address children's exposure to violence, as both victims and witnesses. Research shows that children who have been exposed to violence are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol; suffer from depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic disorders; fail or have difficulty in school; become delinquent or engage in criminal behavior; and experience repeated victimization. Children's exposure to violence is often associated with long-term physical, psychological, and emotional problems.

Building on lessons learned from previous research, Defending Childhood leverages existing resources across the Department to focus on preventing, addressing, reducing, and more fully understanding childhood exposure to violence.

Defending Childhood has several component projects that include the following:

- **Demonstration program.** In 2010, the Department awarded grants to eight cities and tribal communities to develop strategic plans for comprehensive community-based efforts to address children's exposure to violence in the home and the community.
- **National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence.** The task force will review research and conduct public hearings across the nation to collect input from experts, advocates, and impacted families on policy options for improving the prevention, identification, assessment, and response to children's exposure to violence.
- **Partnerships.** A number of federal, private, and non-profit agencies and organizations are part of the Defending Childhood Initiative. Federal partners include the Department of Health and Human Services, the Executive Office of United States Attorneys, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, the Office on Violence Against Women, and the Office of Justice Programs.
- **National Survey on Children Exposed to Violence.** This survey is the first comprehensive attempt to measure children's exposure to violence in the home, school, and community across all age groups from birth to age 17, and the first attempt to measure the cumulative exposure to violence over the child's lifetime.

In addition to these efforts, the Initiative supports research, evaluation, public awareness campaigns, and training for professionals and affiliates of national organizations.

The Initiative operates on three key principles:

PROTECT

- Recognize the range of negative effects on children who are direct victims or witnesses to violence.
- Understand that violence takes many forms, may come from many sources, and may occur in various settings.
- Work with community members and partners in multiple disciplines to raise awareness, educate, and build the capacity of those who interact with children.
- Reduce the occurrence of violent incidents and reverse belief systems that accept childhood exposure to violence as normal or inevitable.

HEAL

- Recognize that proper interventions, support, and services can mitigate the negative effects of violence and the natural resilience of children can be enhanced.
- Develop comprehensive and coordinated responses to ensure seamless delivery of services and resources.
- Identify and assess children immediately or soon after exposure to violence to provide support and services tailored to the child's or family's needs.
- Engage first responders, service providers, medical professionals, teachers, and other community members to help identify children exposed to violence and contribute to healing.

THRIVE

- Encourage and support healthy families.
- Provide opportunities for enrichment and growth for all children.
- Build positive bonds among family members.
- Provide safe communities in which families and children may prosper.
- Support a culture of non-violence in households and communities.

SPOTLIGHT

Defending Childhood Task Force



The task force is composed of 13 leading experts, including practitioners, child and family advocates, academic experts, and licensed clinicians. Joe Torre, founder of the Joe Torre Safe at Home® Foundation, and a witness to domestic violence as a child himself, and Robert Listenbee, Jr., Chief of the Juvenile Unit of the Defender Association of Philadelphia, serve as the co-chairs of the task force.

Using the testimony from public hearings in Baltimore, Albuquerque, Miami, and Detroit; comprehensive research; and extensive input from experts, advocates, and impacted families

"I am not sure if there is any emotion worse than fear. I am the product of a violent home and lived in fear during my childhood. As a child, I was fearful of my own father who physically abused my mother. He emotionally abused me and my brothers and sisters.

When I would come home from school and see his car in front of our house, I wouldn't go in. I was a very nervous child.

I felt alone, and thought I was the only one who had this problem. At that time, I certainly did not recognize any connection between domestic violence and the feeling of inadequacy. I was fortunate to have baseball as an escape, a place to hide, but, even there, I carried my insecurity with me."

— Joe Torre

and communities nationwide, the task force will issue a final report to the Attorney General presenting its findings and comprehensive policy recommendations in the fall of 2012. The report will serve as a blueprint for preventing children's exposure to violence and for reducing the negative effects experienced by children exposed to violence across the United States.

Law Enforcement

The COPS office has been training and supporting law enforcement response to children's exposure to violence and, as part of the initiative, is developing a resource and strategy guide based on input from law enforcement experts in the field and has allocated additional resources to develop practical resources and support to address children's exposure to violence. The work of law enforcement is inextricably bound to the initiative's goals.

"The critical role that local law enforcement officers play in the defense of children cannot be overstated. Law enforcement officers have a critical responsibility in protecting young people from violence and disorder. As first responders, they deal with both victims and suspects in the epidemic of youth violence that threatens our nation's children. It is also law enforcement who first responds

"A child's first encounter with violence can be the beginning of a lifetime of trouble. That's the bad news. The good news is that, with proper intervention and support, a future with violence is not inevitable."

— Mary Lou Leary
Acting Assistant Attorney General



Attorney General's Task Force on Children's Exposure to Violence, hearing one Baltimore Maryland

to calls of neglect and abuse. It is the responding officers who will determine whether society's resources are made available in a way that contributes to breaking the generational cycle that is so often present in these kinds of incidents. In effect, they are the gatekeepers between the child and the societal support required to ensure the child's safety and long-term well-being."

—Bernard Melekian, Director of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS)-

Communities

As part of the initiative, the Department of Justice is supporting 35 communities addressing children's exposure to a broad range of violence. The Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) funds 17 sites and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention funds 10 Safe Start Initiative sites. In 2010, the Department awarded additional grants to eight cities and tribal communities to develop strategic plans for comprehensive community-based responses to children's exposure to violence. Each of these sites received additional support in 2011 to launch, sustain, and expand programs, and organizations focused on the development of community-based solutions to address the problem.

Of the eight sites, the Department awarded \$2 million grants to Boston, MA; Cuyahoga County, OH; Grand Forks, ND; and Shelby County, TN, to implement their strategic plans. One million dollars was awarded to two tribal communities—Rosebud Sioux, SD, and Chippewa Cree, Rocky Boy, MT—for 2 years to continue comprehensive planning and to implement their plans and \$500,000 was awarded for 2 years to Portland, ME, and Multnomah County, OR, for partial implementation of their strategic plans.

Resources

The Defending Childhood Initiative has launched a Web page "Take Action To Protect Children," with Voices from the Field to support professionals who address children's exposure to violence. The Web page provides online resources, tips, hotline numbers, and a

personal call to action tailored for professionals in different fields who work with children who experience or witness violence.

To view the Take Action Web page, go to www.justice.gov/defendingchildhood/action.html.

For more information about the Defending Childhood Initiative, go to www.justice.gov/defendingchildhood.