



An Overview

HOUSTON PEACE

Youth Violence Prevention Strategic Plan

*"Preventing Youth Violence, Promoting Youth Health
& Providing Youth Opportunities." Houston's Hope For Peace.*



Overview

Cities across the United States continue to **grapple with youth violence**. Houston, unfortunately is no different. As the fourth largest and most diverse metropolitan area in the United States, **Houston has a youth population (ages 10-24) of approximately 460,000**. This means nearly half a million people face the prospect of witnessing and experiencing violence. In Houston, violence is broad and defined differently by various youth. One youth defined violence as hearing “gunshots by my house every night.” Another youth says it’s walking in his community and then getting shot at and robbed; still another by the fear and worry that stems from knowing that a friend is in an abusive relationship.

Numerous individuals and organizations work at addressing youth violence. This work is apparent in policy changes, mentoring programs, diversion opportunities, and after-school programs, among others. However, despite these numerous existing resources, **there is a need to do MORE**. This can be achieved through **city-wide collaboration, a unified vision, and a coordinated approach**. To help coordinate this effort, the Houston Health Department is taking the lead with a **public health approach** to prevent further incidents of youth violence.

“Houston Peace,” is a comprehensive plan for **preventing** youth violence with a vision that youth in Houston are **safe, healthy, and have hope for the future.**

Houston Peace Youth Violence Prevention Strategic Plan was developed through the collaboration of numerous organizations and individuals in Houston, and with resources such as the American Institutes of Research and Cities United. Through **Houston Peace**, everyone invested in the future of Houston will be invited to work together to ensure that youth in Houston are safe, healthy, and have hope for the future. **Houston Peace** is designed to be a multi-year plan (2019-2021) covering three years of interventions, advocacy, and evaluation.

What is Youth Violence?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines youth violence as occurring

"when young people between the ages of 10 and 24 INTENTIONALLY use physical force or power to threaten or harm others."

Violence can manifest in a variety of forms, including bullying, teen dating violence, **murder**, gang related violence, and **threats** with weapons.

This wide classification means that adolescents can be involved in youth violence as a victim, offender, or witness. Furthermore, youth violence can result in physical injuries, death, psychological harm, justice costs, and community disruption, among others.

Violence poses a **serious threat** to the safety, health, and future of Houston's youth. The outcomes of violence vary, and at most can lead to physical and/or psychological harm or even death. Exposure to violence, crime, and their corresponding risk factors can affect youth development, a critical time when adolescents form behaviors that carry into adulthood. The consequences of violence can extend beyond victims and can impact **families, communities, and society**.

Adolescents can be **INVOLVED** in youth violence as a victim, offender, or witness.

The **CONSEQUENCES** of violence can impact families, communities, and society.

Violence poses a **SERIOUS THREAT** to the safety, health, and future of Houston's youth.

Types of Youth Violence

TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

Teen dating violence is a form of youth violence that occurs between two people in a close relationship. It can be physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual.

Nationally, 33% of teens have been victims of relationship violence; a similar number reports committing dating violence.

Like youth violence, teen dating violence can have short- and long-term effects, including adverse outcomes such as increased sexual risk taking, suicidal behavior, poor mental health, and substance use. Both males and females experience and perform teen dating violence throughout relationships. Research varies on the frequency of victimization.

Table 1: Prevalence of Teen Dating Violence, YRBS Data 2017

Indicator	Houston (2017)	Texas (2017)	United States (2017)
Were ever forced to have sexual intercourse	10.1%	10.4%	7.4%
Experienced physical dating violence	9.4%	7.1%	8%
Experienced sexual dating violence	5.6%	6.1%	6.9%

GANG VIOLENCE

Gang violence refers mostly to the illegal and non-political acts of violence perpetrated by gangs against property, ordinary people, or members of other gangs.

Houston Police Chief Art Acevedo says that the **majority of violent crimes in Houston are committed by documented gang members.**

In Houston, a lot of the youth gang violence stems from gangs and cliques across different communities and neighborhoods. Crimes center on shootings, robberies, burglaries, and jugging, as well as controlling drug territory, prostitution, and immigrants

Organizations tend to recruit youth from schools, apartments, and sometimes parks.

In recent years, social media has played a growing role in gang organization activity. This includes live streaming gang activities.



GUN VIOLENCE

Youth gun violence occurs when a gun or firearm is present in the process of a youth (ages 10-24) intentionally using force or power to threaten or harm others.

Gun violence is a rapidly growing concern across towns and communities in the United States. On average, 96 Americans are killed by a gun daily.

Gun violence among adolescents is also a concern. Gun violence can result in homicides (victimization and perpetration), nonfatal injuries, suicides, community violence, and school violence/school shootings.

On average, 47 children and teens are shot with a gun each day.

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Structural violence refers to a social arrangement that put individuals and populations in harm's way.

Core components of structural violence include the:

- **Social-cultural environment** — the elevation of destructive, dislocating social norms; a low sense of political and social efficacy.
- **Physical/Built environment** —unhealthy products, such as high volumes of stores selling alcohol in some communities; deteriorated environments and unhealthy, often dangerous public spaces with a crumbling built environment.
- **Economic environment** — intergenerational poverty; long-term unemployment; disinvestment in community.

SCHOOL-BASED VIOLENCE

School violence is violence that can disrupt the learning process and have a negative effect on students, the school itself, and the broader community.

School violence is one of the many subsets of youth violence. For many adolescents, violence may be observed within the school.

In recent years, school violence has become synonymous with school shootings. A result of the recurrence of horrific mass shootings at schools such as Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, and Santa Fe High School in Santa Fe, Texas. Despite these horrendous occurrences, **it is important to note that schools are relatively safe.** School districts across the country are diligent about securing the safety of their students, faculty, and staff.

The Public Health Approach

Public health is the science of protecting and improving the health of people and their communities.

In public health, we ask:

Where does the **problem** begin?

How can we **prevent** it from occurring in the first place?

The public health approach has four different steps that allow for people from different organizations and systems to work together to solve problems.

It's been successful at making cars safer through promoting seat belts, adding fluoride to drinking water to prevent dental cavities, and promoting vaccinations to prevent the spread of preventable diseases.

This same approach is being applied to youth violence.

Step 1

Define the problem

Step 2

Identify risk and protective factors

Step 3

Develop and test prevention strategies

Step 4

Assure widespread adoption of prevention strategies

Guiding Principles:

1 Youth Voice

When youth engagement and leadership is at its highest level, programs are more innovative, responsive, and targeted. We acknowledge the value of having youth involved in developing solutions, and furthermore, that youth voice allows for adolescents to build a platform to inform, lead, and manage community solutions.

2 Equity

Most of the communities addressed in this plan are impacted by structural violence. By helping to minimize some of this structural violence, communities will gradually become more equitable.

3 Existing Resources

Houston is vast. It is important to ensure that existing resources are being utilized to effectively prevent youth violence. The utilization of these resources further solidifies the comprehensiveness of the plan.

4 Prevention

We acknowledge that prevention is a core component of the public health approach to youth violence. This means that the goal is to reach individuals, families, and communities before violence happens. However, prevention can also include addressing violence as it happens to produce a more positive outcome or assisting those who have committed crimes with resources and opportunities to prevent recidivism.

5 National Standards

Several objectives are mirrored off existing national goals outlined in Healthy People 2020. By paralleling these objectives, we aim to garner support for **Houston Peace** at the local, state, and national level.

GOAL 1: Prevent Youth Violence

Youth violence is a significant problem for Houston. It's also a problem that can have a long-lasting impact. This goal works to address the varying forms of youth violence, at the various levels of the socio-ecological model. The goal also acknowledges that there is a need to successfully address violence beyond prevention and incorporates intervention and re-entry components. Perhaps most impactfully, this goal champions the need for collaboration to ensure successful and comprehensive violence prevention efforts across the city.



OBJECTIVES

- 1 Increase awareness of teen dating violence, as it relates to sexual violence, psychological violence, physical violence, and emotional violence in active communities by 2021.
- 2 Decrease perceptions of community disorganization and unsafe communities among youth in active communities by 2021.
- 3 Increase youth involvement in youth violence and teen dating violence prevention activities by 2021.
- 4 Build local capacity to address youth violence and teen dating violence by 2021.
- 5 Increase the capacity for rehabilitation opportunities instead of punishment at schools and in community-based settings by 2021.
- 6 Provide opportunities for youth previously involved in the justice system to decrease the likelihood of violence to reoccur by 2021.
- 7 Enhance youth prevention and intervention level activities for gang involvement by 2021.
- 8 Increase implementation of violence-prevention trainings and policies across school districts by 2021.

GOAL 2: Promote Youth Health

Youth are in a critical period of rapid biological and socio-emotional development in which they gain independence, take risks and form behaviors that carry into adulthood. This goal is intended to provide youth with opportunities to develop healthy behaviors surrounding their physical, mental, and behavioral health choices. Like the previous goal, this goal also supports comprehensive and collaborative efforts. While health professionals can serve as a great resource for helping to address the health needs of adolescents, numerous other stakeholders and partners can also support this work.



OBJECTIVES

- 1 Increase the percentage of youth completing their annual wellness visits at partner schools by 2021.
- 2 Increase the number of youth who receive information on substance use prevention by 2021.
- 3 Increase active communities access to fresh and healthy foods by 2021.
- 4 Increase access to mental health supports by 2021.

GOAL 3: Provide Youth Opportunities

Providing youth with opportunities can drastically alter the path of youth. It can help reduce their likelihood of engaging in violence, provide them with workforce training opportunities, and enhance their likelihood to complete secondary education. Strategies in this goal focus on providing youth in active communities with equitable opportunities. **Houston Peace** calls for the strengthening of educational opportunities and workforce opportunities. These opportunities allow youth to develop and increase protective factors at various levels.

OBJECTIVES

- 1 Increase quality education for learners of all ages by expanding supportive resources for students at area schools, including out of school enrichment and college and career readiness programs, and increasing access to high quality early childcare by 2021.
- 2 Increase the number of opportunities for workforce development and job readiness training for youth in MBK and Complete Community areas by 2021.
- 3 Enhance and improve extracurricular and out of school activities in active communities by 2021.
- 4 Stimulate economic development in active communities by 2021.



Get Involved!

Everyone can help prevent youth violence.

Check out our tips below!

- 1 Listen to youth around you and develop strategies with their input
- 2 Talk to your neighbors about youth health, safety, and opportunity
- 3 Seek youth voice for decision-making in your organization
- 4 Engage your organization in the Youth Violence Prevention Coalition
- 5 Adopt best practices
- 6 Allocate existing resources to the areas of greatest need
- 7 Talk about how images of violence affect you and others
- 8 Host a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) project
- 9 Support the **Houston Peace** movement!



For more information about

Houston Peace or to request the full

Houston Peace Strategic Plan, please contact

Houstonpeace@houstontx.gov



Acknowledgements

Thank you to all of the organizations, community partners and individuals that have contributed to the advancement of our community and to the prevention of youth violence in our city. Your contributions have not gone unnoticed.

Special thanks for the following:

Local Partnerships

- African American Police Officers League (AAPOL)*
- Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans (AAMA)*
- Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse (AVDA)*
- Baker Ripley
- Baylor College of Medicine*
- Big City Gardener*
- Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Houston
- Change Happens!*
- City of Houston - Houston Health Department*
- City of Houston - Mayor's Office*
- City of Houston – Municipal Courts
- City of Houston – Office of Business Opportunity
- City of Houston – Office of Complete Communities*
- City of Houston – Office of Education
- City of Houston - Parks and Recreation*
- City of Houston – Public Library
- Communities in Schools (CIS) Houston*
- Council on Drugs and Alcohol*
- Crime Stoppers of Houston*
- Goodwill Industries of Houston*
- Greater East End District*
- Harris County – Attorney's Office*
- Harris County – Commissioner Precinct 1
- Harris County – Constable Precinct 1
- Harris County – District Attorney's Office

- Harris County – Department of Education
- Harris County – Juvenile Probation*
- Harris County – Juvenile Probation Court Program*
- Harris County – Protective Services for Children's and Adults
- Harris County Youth Collective*
- Healthy Living Matters*
- Houston Area Women's Center*
- Houston Food Bank
- Houston Independent School District*
- Houston Police Department*
- Houston Youth Violence Prevention Coalition
- Legacy Community Health*
- Mayor's Anti-Gang Office*
- Ministers Against Crime*
- Moms Demand Action*
- My Brother's Keeper – Houston*
- Nature Heritage Society
- North Harris County Substance Abuse Coalition
- Prairie View A&M University*
- ReVision*
- Safe and Supportive School Collaborative
- St. Michael's Learning Academy*
- Teen and Police Service Academy (TAPS)*
- Texas A&M University Agri Life*
- Texas Children's Hospital*
- Texas Criminal Justice Coalition*
- The Providence of Southmore*

- United Against Human Trafficking*
- University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston – School of Public Health*
- University of Texas Medical Branch*
- Urban Enrichment Institute
- Urban Workforce Initiatives*
- Vox Culture
- World Youth Foundation*
- YES Prep Schools*
- YMCA of Greater Houston
- Youth Justice Council

National Partnerships

- My Brother's Keeper Alliance
- Cities United
- American Institutes for Research
- Campaign for Black Male Achievement
- Obama Foundation

(*) denotes involvement in the Youth Violence Prevention Coalition

April 2019

