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## Preventing Delinquency & Promoting Prosocial Activities

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## Evidence-Based Practices Brief

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## Preventing Delinquency & Promoting Prosocial Activities

Recognizing the need to support youth before problem behaviors take shape, prevention programs emerged in the 1970s to address the needs of youth and families; however, these early programs were rarely rooted in either theory or research on childhood development. Consequently, programs began incorporating information gleaned from longitudinal studies to address specific risk factors identified as predictive of problem behaviors in youth. In the 1980s, prevention efforts often focused on a single problem behavior, however in the early 1990s, consensus emerged that programs should expand beyond focusing on a single problem behavior and instead examine co-occurrence of problem behaviors and common predictors of multiple problem behaviors (Catalano et al., 2004). Further, prevention efforts recognized that promoting positive youth development was just as important as avoiding negative behaviors (Catalano et al., 2004; W.T. Grant Consortium, 1992).

### Communities that Care

Communities that Care (CTC) is a prevention framework system that aims to reduce risk and prevent problem behaviors, while enhancing protection and promoting healthy youth

development (Hawkins 1999). CTC seeks to prevent problem behaviors and promote positive development by creating opportunities for prosocial involvement. To do so, CTC involves trained community stakeholders who assess community risk with epidemiological data, create a community-specific profile of risk, and then target two to five elevated risk factors by implementing evidence-based effective prevention programs in the community. Changes in the prevention service system are expected to reduce risk and strengthen protective factors at the community-level. With respect to protective factors, CTC coalitions are asked to provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for prosocial activities, teach them skills to successfully be involved, and provided consistent recognition of their efforts and achievements (Kim et al., 2015). To empirically test the efficacy of the CTC framework, a randomized control trial in 24 communities and seven states was conducted in which youth in each community were surveyed annually for seven years. The general findings indicated that communities implementing CTC significantly reduced the onset of substance use and delinquency through high school (Catalano et al., 2014).

### Principles of Effective

### Programs

In reviewing the vast literature on prevention and promotion programs, Nation and colleagues (2003) identified nine general principles of effective programs aimed at preventing delinquency-related behaviors.

#### Program Characteristics

- (1) **Comprehensive:** including a combination of interventions to address the problem behavior, and engaging multiple systems or domains that have an impact on the behavior (e.g., schools, family, community, peers)
- (2) **Varied teaching methods:** emphasizing the needs for active, skills-based component that provides hands-on experiences that increase the development of cognitive, language, and social skills necessary for the target behavior; but not to rely too much on knowledge, information, or group discussions
- (3) **Provided sufficient dosage:** enough exposure to the intervention to have an impact (intensity of program measured in quantity and quality of contact hours), with the risk level of the youth taken into account and providing follow-up or booster sessions.

4) Theory-driven: based on scientific justification, including etiological theories focused on the causes of the problem behavior (e.g., risk or protective factors); and intervention theories focused on the best method for changing etiological risks.

(5) Provided opportunities for positive relationships: providing exposure to individualized, healthy attention from adults (e.g., parents, other adult mentors) and peers that promote strong relationships and support positive outcomes

#### Matching the Program with Target Populations

(6) Appropriately timed: implementing interventions early enough to have an impact on the development of the problem behavior (prior to the problem behavior) and are sensitive to the developmental needs of the youth

(7) Socio-culturally relevant: programming should be both culturally relevant to youth in the program and should be tailored to address the individual needs of the youth (not a one-size-fits all)

#### Implementation and Evaluation

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(8) Outcome evaluation: clear goals and objectives that can be systematically evaluated periodically to document outcomes relative to the goals to measure of program effectiveness

(9) Well-trained staff: staff should be sensitive, competent, and receive sufficient training, support

and supervision; considering turnover, morale, and buy-in

### Nebraska Prevention and Promotion Programs

The Community-based Aid (CBA) grant process follows a similar framework to the CTC framework. Nebraska communities select community stakeholders who are responsible for identifying appropriate community-level data to create a community-specific risk profile and then select appropriate evidence-based programs to meet the community's needs. One method for this process, as recommended by the Juvenile Justice Institute (JJI), is to provide the modified Risk and Protective factors survey created by JJI to youth enrolling in CBA-funded programs and then comparing this

data to the state and county-level data provided by the Bureau of Sociological Research (BOSR) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (<https://bosr.unl.edu/sharp>).

To assist communities in identifying their community-specific risk profile, the Juvenile Justice Institute has prepared program-specific reports for each CBA-funded promotion/prevention program. There are also other data sources available online to meet these needs. The nine principles of effective programming can then be used to assess whether programs are evidence-based. If a program is not currently meeting these nine, then they should demonstrate how they plan to meet all nine elements in the upcoming year.

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