

# Keep Kids Safe

## Afterschool Programs Provide Safety and Supervision for Youth and Teens

Afterschool, as it is used in this report, refers broadly to out-of-school time programs for youth from kindergarten to high school age that take place during summer, school vacations, weekends and the hours immediately preceding and following the regular school day.

### In Brief

The hours immediately following school are the time when children are at highest risk of engaging in criminal behavior, becoming victims of crime, being in auto accidents, engaging in sexual activity, and of otherwise causing harm to themselves or others. Afterschool programs have been proven effective in preventing these behaviors and their negative and costly consequences by providing a safe and supervised space for children during these high-risk hours.

### Afterschool Hours Are . . .

#### A Prime Time for Crime and Victimization

Not surprisingly, the hours between the end of the school day and the end of the workday present the most risk for children and teens because parents are unable to provide supervision during this window of time. In fact, a survey by the American Academy of Pediatrics found that 56% of high school youth reported being unsupervised at home for 4 or more hours after school.<sup>1</sup> The National Incident-Based Reporting Data on crime indicates that these afterschool hours between 3 and 6 p.m. are a "Prime Time for Crime." During these hours, children between the ages of 10 and 17 are more likely to abuse drugs<sup>2</sup> and commit violent crimes than at any other time. Crimes such as murder, rape, sexual assaults, robbery, and aggravated assaults are two to three times greater during these prime hours than later hours when parents are home from work.<sup>3</sup> And assaults with weapons and those that inflict bodily injury among teens are also most likely to occur between 3 and 4 p.m. Afterschool hours are also the time when most gang violence is reported.

Children are more likely to perpetrate crime on other children, so it is no surprise that this "Prime Time" is also the time when children are more likely to be victims of crime.<sup>4</sup> After the school bell rings, victimization more than triples. Furthermore, the National Crime Victimization survey reminds us that all figures, startling though they may be, likely underestimate the spike in crime afterschool by as much as 44%,<sup>5</sup> as many crimes remain unreported.<sup>6</sup>

#### Linked to Risky Behavior

Besides crime and victimization, other dangerous and risky behavior is also prevalent among children during unsupervised afterschool hours. In addition to being at double risk of experimenting with smoking, drinking, and illegal drugs, tandem issues such as truancy, poor grades, depression and sexual activity are also associated with a lack of supervision in the afterschool hours.<sup>7</sup>

Unsupervised teens engage more often in unprotected sex, which results in higher teen pregnancy rates than for those teens who do participate in afterschool programs. In one study, children without access to an afterschool program were 50% more likely to have children during their high school years.<sup>8</sup> An increase in sexual activity and experimentation also means an increase in sexually transmitted disease; the American Academy of Pediatrics survey showed that teens, particularly boys, who were unsupervised for more than 5 hours a week had more sexually transmitted diseases than those under supervision.

## **A Likely Time for Accidents and Injuries**

The afterschool hours also show an increase in teen car accidents,<sup>9</sup> the leading cause for death among our youth. Intoxication, peer pressure, and group dynamics contribute to reckless driving among children and also put the community at risk. In the hours between 3 and 6 p.m., 16- to 17-year-old drivers are more than twice as likely to have a serious motor vehicle accident.<sup>10</sup> Injuries in the home and injuries that result in unintentional death among children occur most often when they are out of school and unsupervised. These accidents are the second leading cause of death for children 5 to 14 years of age, and a leading cause of death among older teens.<sup>11</sup>

## **Afterschool Programs . . .**

### **Help Prevent Crime, Experimentation with Sex and Illegal Substances**

Research clearly illustrates that well-supervised, quality afterschool programs reduce the frequency of crime, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and substance abuse. One study, which compared housing projects with or without the existence of Boys and Girls Clubs, found that those without clubs had 50% more vandalized housing units and 30% more drug activity than housing projects with clubs.<sup>12</sup>

Other programs, such as The Coca Cola Valued Youth Development Program<sup>13</sup> and The Voyager<sup>14</sup> summer reading program, show similar success in reducing dropout rates and improving literacy. And many programs report a decrease in pregnancies, teen sex,<sup>15</sup> and substance abuse<sup>16</sup> in their participants. Afterschool programs provide positive experiences that encourage children to be involved in constructive activities such as skill-building, community service, leadership opportunities, and outdoor experiential learning activities<sup>17</sup> rather than aimless and risky behavior.

### **Inspire Social Confidence with Structure and Role Models**

Many afterschool programs focus on inspiring social confidence by developing social skills, self-esteem, initiative, and leadership skills with structured group sessions and role models who provide positive examples. Go Grrrls, an Arizona program that provides girls with structured group sessions was found to improve girls' body image, assertiveness, self-esteem, and competence, while evaluations of mentoring programs that provide kids and teens with older mentors show an increase in participants' self-control and self-confidence. Other social and emotional outcomes associated with participation in afterschool programs include decreased behavioral problems, improved communication skills and relationships with others, and lower levels of depression and anxiety.<sup>19</sup>

### **Are Not Readily Accessible to Disadvantaged or Low-Income Families**

It has been estimated that nearly 11 million children are left on their own afterschool while their parents work<sup>4</sup>. Yet promising programs that provide an opportunity for safety and enrichment are far too scarce and too often financially inaccessible to those at-risk children who could most benefit, as many available programs require participation fees that are simply unaffordable.

### **Have Strong Public Safety and Public Voter Support**

The statistics on violence, teen pregnancy, substance abuse and motor vehicle accidents in afterschool hours point clearly to the need for public funding to increase the availability of quality programs to ensure the safety and brighten the future of our nation's young people. Police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors and crime victims have joined together to create the Fight Crime: Invest in Kids program in order to call on public officials to improve public safety by providing quality afterschool programs.

The President of Oregon's own Association of Chiefs of Police, Chief David Nelson, has said, "I know violent juvenile crime triples when the school bell rings and kids leave school for the day. But I also know that afterschool programs reduce juvenile crime and violence, reduce drug use, and keep kids safe and out of trouble."<sup>20</sup> The American voting public concurs. Eighty-six percent of the public agree that "America could greatly reduce violent crime by expanding preventive measures like afterschool programs,"<sup>21</sup> and fifty-two percent of voters said they were willing to increase their own state taxes by \$100 annually to pay for every child to attend an afterschool program.<sup>22</sup>

A copy of this document, including footnotes, can be found at

[www.oregonask.org](http://www.oregonask.org).

## Footnotes

- 1** -Cohen, D./ Farley, T., Taylor, S., Martin, D., & Schuster, M. (2002). When and where do youths have sex? The potential role of adult supervision. *Pediatrics*, 110(6), 1-6.
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- 14** -Voyager Expanded Learning, National Study: 1998 Voyager Summer Reading Program, Time Warp, Voyager Expanded Learning, 2000.
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