

Doing Developmental Crime Prevention

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An Australian expert on developmental criminology, Ross Homel, notes: “Developmental prevention involves the organised provision of resources in some fashion to individuals, families, schools or communities to forestall the later development of crime or other problems ... The **twin challenges**, of course, are to **identify exactly what it is in individuals, families, schools and communities that increases the odds of involvement in crime** and then to do **something useful about the identified conditions as early as possible**”ⁱ (emphasis added). However, assessing who is at risk of future offending, isolating the reasons for this increased risk and then effectively intervening to prevent future onset of criminality are difficult tasks. Farrington and Welsh have helped guide our understanding of the critical risk factors associated with later offending and the types of intervention which appear to be most effective, through the followingⁱⁱ:

Risk Factors	Evidence-Based Interventions
<p>Individual Risk Factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Low intelligence and attainment b) Personality and temperament c) Empathy d) Impulsiveness 	<p>Individual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Pre-school intellectual enrichment b) Child skills training
<p>Family Risk Factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Criminal or antisocial parents b) Large family size c) Poor parental supervision d) Parental conflict e) Disrupted families 	<p>Family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Parent education plus daycare services b) Parent management training programs c) Home visiting programs
<p>Environmental Risk Factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Growing up in a low socio-economic status household b) Associating with delinquent peers c) Attending high-delinquency-rate schools d) Living in deprived areas 	<p>Environmental:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) After school (involving a heavy dose of social competency skill development) and community-based mentoring appear promising b) School-based interventions – school and discipline management, classroom or instructional management, reorganisation of grades or classes, increasing self-control or social competency with cognitive behavioural or behaviour instructional methods

Exercise

1. What challenges might exist in effectively isolating key risk factors for later offending behaviour?

2. Less is known about effective protective factors. How might the greater focus on risk adversely impact upon our thinking in this area?

While this information provided by Farrington and Welsh (2007) is particularly helpful in understanding critical risk factors and forms of intervention, it does not necessarily help with the difficult tasks associated with designing and implementing a developmental crime prevention program. These tasks can be especially challenging. Ensuring the right groups and individuals participate in the program; ensuring that the mechanisms for change are well understood and addressed through the intervention; having appropriately trained program staff and closely monitoring the impact of the intervention are just some of the challenges of implementing developmental crime prevention programs. The table below provides helpful guidance on aspects of program development and implementation.ⁱⁱⁱ

Think Developmentally	Do Good Science
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Emphasise universal, non-stigmatising programs 2. Focus on life transitions and related developmental issues 3. Use a multi-contextual approach with programs located within the major spheres that influence children’s development 4. Focus on building connections between key developmental contexts 5. Use a strength-based orientation – build on families’ personal and cultural assets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop evidence based interventions (based both on research and effective practice) 2. Focus on preventive interventions 3. Commit to the achievement of measurable goals 4. Use both quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods 5. Focus on outcomes – avoid the usual drift to outputs 6. Generate new knowledge – how were the outcomes achieved?
Understand Community Needs	Engage in Community Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The needs of the community take precedence over the interests of the partner organisations 2. Use multiple methods to understand local needs and resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Risk factor analyses b) Qualitative surveys c) Local histories (including oral) d) Focus groups e) Build on knowledge of community workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Empower individuals and community 2. Employ local people and train them 3. Involve the community in planning activities 4. Support existing programs and services 5. Build partnerships between services, researchers, local institutions & the community 6. Facilitate access to services by culturally diverse groups 7. Demonstrate commitment to the community 8. Communities cannot do it all: use external expertise 9. Work for sustainability: changes in institutional practices

Exercise

1. How could the ‘Do Good Science’ suggestions help with program development?

2. Despite the guidance provided by Homel et al (2006) and depicted in the above table, what challenges would you expect to confront in developing a developmental crime prevention program?

3. Given that many developmental crime prevention programs take a considerable period before results can be observed, how would you maintain political will in these interventions?

ⁱHomel, R. (2005) Chapter 4: ‘Developmental Crime Prevention’, in Tilley, N. (ed.) Handbook of Crime Prevention and Community Safety, Willan Publishing, Devon, page 71.

ⁱⁱFarrington, D. and Welsh, B. (2007) Saving Children From a Life of Crime, Oxford University Press, pages 159-161.

ⁱⁱⁱHomel, R.; Freiberg, K.; Lamb, C.; Leech, M.; Batchelor, S.; Carr, A.; Hay, I.; Teague, R. and Elias, G. (2006) ‘The Pathways to Prevention project: doing developmental prevention in a disadvantaged community’, Trends and Issues No. 323, AIC, Canberra, page 2.