

## Preventing Youth Violence through Therapeutic Foster Care

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### The Bottom Line:

Youths aged 10-17 years constitute 12% of the population yet commit 25% of all serious violent crimes. Delinquent juveniles commonly have additional problems, including drug abuse, difficulties at school, and mental illness. Therapeutic foster care programs are designed to curb youth violence by placing young people into foster homes with foster parents who are trained to create a positive learning environment. A review of these programs suggests that therapeutic foster care may *reduce* violent behaviour in *adolescents* with a history of chronic delinquency. However, there is insufficient evidence to determine if these programs are effective in *preventing* violence by *children* with severe emotional disturbances.

### What problem is being addressed?

The problem of violent crime among children and youth. Since the 1970s, 25% of all serious violent crimes have been committed by youths 10-17 years old. In 2001, 5.7% of all crimes in the U.S. were committed by youths 12-20 years old, a higher rate than any other age group.

### What intervention is being tested?

Children and youths who cannot live at home are placed in the homes of foster parents who are trained to provide a positive environment that promotes the learning of social and emotional skills. Each home can have up to two youths, and the program may involve some additional help and counseling for the youth and/or their biological family.

In this review, two types of interventions were assessed. The first is therapeutic foster care lasting 18 months on average that is designed to prevent violence by 5- to 13-year old children with severe emotional disturbances (SED). The second is therapeutic foster care of 6 to 7 months duration for the reduction of violence by 12- to 18-year old chronically delinquent adolescents.

### What is the *real scientific evidence*?

The authors reviewed five studies that assessed the outcomes of therapeutic foster care. Evidence showed that therapeutic foster care was significantly effective in reducing violent behaviour by chronically delinquent adolescents. However, there were too few

studies and insufficient evidence to confirm a positive effect of therapeutic foster care for children with SED.

In addition to the program's success in reducing violent behaviour, it is also very cost effective. Studies show that for every dollar spent on the costs of the justice system, therapeutic foster care saves \$14.07.

The authors concluded that therapeutic foster care is a promising intervention for adolescents; however, additional research must be done in children.

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The preceding is a summary of:

Hahn RA, Lowy J, Bilukha O, Snyder S, Briss P, Crosby A, Fullilove MT, Tuma F, Moscicki EK, Liberman A, Schofield A, Corso PS. *Therapeutic Foster Care for the Prevention of Violence: A Report on Recommendations of the Task Force on Community Preventive Services*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2005, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 53 (RR-10).