Delinquency Prevention

• The philosophy is simple and appealing:
  – Teach juveniles
  – Provide them with the necessary skills
  – Educate them to reduce recidivism
  – Provide programs that occupy time in a positive and effective way

• The problem has been that there is no panacea that will prevent delinquency.
What works?

• Several types of delinquency prevention programs:
  – Many fall under the heading of **diversion**
    • First time offenders deserve a second chance
  – Others attempt to identify **at-risk** and try to intervene
  – Others focus on those who have already offended.
    • Review Figure 6.1 (p.149)
The Age of On-set

• Child delinquents are those who demonstrate earlier tendencies for anti-social behavior.
The Theory of Prevention

• The theory of prevention rests on the notion that **at-risk** youth and those most in need of intervention can be identified.

• A second and equally important aspect is that delinquency prevention is accomplished by providing assistance and support to all juveniles even if they are not at risk.
Categories of Prevention

• Early pre-delinquent intervention and prevention.
  – Targeting pregnant mothers and children in the early formative stages of life.

• Diversion
  – First time offenders who are diverted away from formal processing into any number of service programs.
• At-risk juveniles
  – Shown or demonstrated early problem behaviors
  – Other warning signs
  – Early in the stages of delinquency

• Some programs include:
  – School-based
  – Community-based
  – Job services
  – Recreational
  – Focus on status offenders
Early Pre-Delinquent Intervention

• Designed for youth who come into contact with the system early in life
  – Physical development in the brain occurs by age 3
  – The programs at this level must be able to identify risk factors inherent in the development of delinquent youth
    • Some have argued that these programs are more negative than positive
    • Positive approaches emphasize opportunities for healthy social, physical, and mental development.
Project Head Start

• Started in the 1960s under President Johnson’s War on Poverty.
  – Designed to prevent academic problems among economically disadvantaged children
    • Provided a broad range of social services centered around a creative preschool curriculum.
    • There has been evidence that the quality of parenting in the first two years of a child’s life can affect their behavior for the rest of their lives.
Risk-Focused Prevention

• There is a growing trend in this direction.
• Programs attempt to correct potential problems as well as provide additional services to youth most at risk.
• These programs are found in both the juvenile and social service systems.
• Referrals typically come from schools and the police.
• Many time educators are the first to see the warning signs of problems at home or with the juvenile.

• The police are often the referral source for juveniles who are at risk for being victimized and becoming delinquent.

• SHIELD
  – Police contacts during the course of their duties that identify at-risk youth
    • Violent behavior
    • Substance abuse
    • Gangs

• Children at Risk (CAR)
  – Identifies high-risk youth (11 – 13)
• CAR
  – Integrated delivery of a broad range of services to at-risk youth and their families.
  – Fostered collaboration between the criminal justice agencies, schools, and other community organizations.
  – Provides comprehensive individualized services targeting the neighborhood, peer groups, family, and individual risk factors.
  – Participants had more involvement in social and educational activities, exhibited less anti-social behavior, committed fewer violent crimes, and used and sold fewer drugs in the year after the program ended.
Family Treatment & Intervention

• A more holistic approach that involves more than just treating the juvenile.
  – Involves the family participating in therapy as well.
  – These programs attempt to intervene early, before problems arise.
  – The premise is that the most prominent sources for interaction with juveniles are in the home and at school.
Families and Schools First - FAST

• A holistic approach that attempts to build and enhance the juvenile’s interactions with family, peers, teachers, and other members of the community.

• The goal is to promote protective factors
  – Enhance the family by strengthening the parent-child relationship
  – Prevent school failure by improving behavior and performance
  – Reduce family stress by developing and ongoing support group for parents, linking them with appropriate community resources.
Diversion

- Diversion is a general term for a wide range of programs that keep juveniles who commit crimes out of the formal juvenile justice system.
- The programs are in place to correct or prevent future and more serious problems from occurring and to prevent further involvement with the system.
- The basic theory guiding these programs is that most youth will at some point commit deviant/delinquent acts.
- Assumes that formal processing will do more harm than good.
• The guiding principle of diversion is rooted in labeling theory and

• The belief that formal processing may perpetuate or increase the level of delinquency in some youth.
  – This is rooted in the principle of contagion.
Diversion Programs

• Often take several forms
• Can be general
  – Most offenders would be eligible
• Specific
  – Certain types of offenders
• Local jurisdictional rules often regulate who is eligible
  – Court policy
  – State statute
• Most diverted juveniles are 1st time offenders
Exclusions to Diversion

- Violent offenses
- Sexual offenses
- Weapons offenses
- Drug offenses
- Serious property offenses
Problem areas

• **Net Widening**
  – Using diversion programs as a means to bring larger numbers of juveniles under court control instead of as an alternative to formal processing.
  – A means of handling cases that would otherwise not have been processed.
    • Passing the buck.

• **Constitutionality**
  – Due process & equal protection
  – A disposition without benefit of adjudication.
Diversion Effectiveness

- Most who come into contact with the system never come back into the system again.
- The research on the effectiveness of diversion is mixed.
  - A large body of research has found that diversion is successful in reducing the system’s overload and deters future recidivism.
  - The most successful involve intensive and comprehensive services.
    - Are all systems the same?
School-based Programs

• Many programs target children at a very young age.
  – School-based initiatives
• Recommendations
  – Areas with high rates of delinquency
    • Preschool education for 3-4 year olds
  – Greater involvement between counselors and teachers
  – Family involvement
  – Home visitation programs
  – Independent evaluations
Community-based Programs

• Focus on education and awareness of topics that are problematic in the community.
  – Hands without Guns is a public health and education program.
    • Why the public health approach?
  – Teaches youth about the problems of violence and guns
  – Youth who identify with this type of program is 10 times less likely to carry a gun.
Mentoring

• Began in the late 1800s when adults served as role models for children of the poor.

• 1904 the Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America was created.
  – Today it is the largest mentoring program of its kind.
  – Federation of 500+ agencies
  – The mission is to make a difference in the lives of young people through a professionally supported one-on-one relationship with a caring adult.
BBBSA Data

• Participants compared to non-participants
  – 46% less likely to initiate drug use
  – 27% less likely to initiate alcohol use
  – 52% less likely to be truant
  – More confident in school work
  – 1/3 less likely to hit someone
  – Better in academic behavior, attitudes, and performance
Job Services

• Many vocational and job-related services that are available in communities are designed specifically for delinquency prevention.

• Job Corps is the most prominent federal program in this regard.
  – Prepares youth for stable, productive employment and entrance into vocational, technical, junior colleges, military, or other institutions.
• 70% of enrollees are minorities
• 80% are high school dropouts
• 30% are from families on public assistance
• Job Corps benefit youth in two ways
  – Occupying their time and letting them earn more money;
  – Teaching them a marketable skill that can benefit them for life.
Recreational Activities

• The majority of a juveniles time is unstructured and unsupervised. Some accounts place this at 50% of otherwise unproductive time.

• A variety of after-school and evening programs have been developed in an effort to productively occupy this time.

• The idea is simple:
  – Provide youth with a place to go and an activity to occupy their time during the most crime-prone times.
Teen Courts

• Originating in the 1960s with a nominal number of teen courts these programs now number in the several hundreds (675)
  – Legally binding system of diversion
  – Service relatively small numbers of cases
  – Usually handle 1st offenders or petit offenders
  – Usually juveniles 16 and under
The Benefits

- Accountability – often help to assure that the offender is accountable even if the offense would result in a sanction from the traditional JJ system.
- Timeliness – an effective court can move young offenders from arrest to sanction often in days.
- Cost savings – usually depend on youth and adult volunteers.
- Community cohesion – a well run program can affect the entire community by increasing public appreciation of the legal system.
Models and Process

• Most juveniles referred to teen court are offered the program as a voluntary alternative to formal processing.

• The courts generally follow one of four models:
  – Adult judge
  – Youth judge
  – Youth tribunal
  – Peer jury
Adult Judge

• An adult serves as the judge
  – Provides guidance on legal issues and terminology
  – Youths serve in all other roles in this model.
  – Often an adult volunteer or professional will assist.
Youth Judge

- A youth serves as the judge.
- Again youth serve in the other roles in the courtroom.
Youth Tribunal

- There is no jury in this system
- A panel of 3 youth judges, similar to an appellate court, hear cases.
Peer Jury

- Adults may argue the case
- A jury of youth decide guilt and determine the disposition.
Teen Court Sanctions

• There are several options.
  – The most common is community service.
  – Apology letters are often required.
  – Academic essays
  – Serve on future teen courts
  – Participate in drug or alcohol programs
  – Pay restitution
Effectiveness

• The jury is still out.
• Results of 20 years of research have been mixed.
  – Many studies were rudimentary in nature and did not provide adequate insight.
    • One report cites lower recidivism rates
    • Two other reports did not note differences between teen court participants and other juveniles who went through the formal JJ system.
Status Offenses

• There has been an increase in the enforcement of status offenses:
  – Curfew
  – Truancy

• The premise here is that these two offenses involve unsupervised and unstructured time.
  – The chronic or habitual offender is often the target.
Deinstitutionalization

• In 1974 the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act prevented agencies from incarcerating juveniles for prolonged periods for status offenses.

• This legislation raises a serious issue:
  – The chronic offender
    • Truants
    • Curfew violators
    • Runaways
  – Are typically the most at risk and in need of intervention.
The Police Response

• Many agencies today aggressively enforce status offenses.

• Curfew-enforcement programs work when police have a place to take violators and spend less time processing the violator and more time enforcing the curfew.
  – Support services that allow officers to return to work while full-time personnel process the offender
  – Parents are required to pick-up their son/daughter.
What Doesn’t Work

• Scared Straight – hailed as the best way to cure delinquents.
  – Cheap and inexpensive to run
  – Quickly adopted by agencies and communities without the benefit of long-term or longitudinal evaluation.
  – Successes were grossly exaggerated.
  – The belief was that the verbal and psychological assault would deter future deviance.
  – Did not address the years of problems that preceded the visit.
What Works

• Compared to the overall criminal justice system, the juvenile justice system is very successful.
  – Most actors in the system
    • Police
    • Judges
    • Social workers
  – All agree that most who come into contact with the system do not recidivate.

• Prevention/diversion programs that work often share common qualities.
• Successful programs are
  – Comprehensive
  – Multifaceted approach
  – An aftercare component built in
  – Serve smaller numbers of juveniles
  – Not a single type of intervention
    • Scared Straight