

HELPING AMERICA'S YOUTH

Presidential Action

- Tonight, the President spoke of the enduring values that keep America strong – freedom, faith, and family – and highlighted the need to encourage communities to focus on our most-at-risk youth.
- The President is fully committed to empowering more of America's families, schools, and faith-based and community organizations to address some of our toughest social problems and help those most in need. President Bush's new proposals focus on an outreach to young, at-risk Americans to help them make healthy decisions and to help America's youth overcome the danger of gang influence and involvement.

Background on Presidential Action

- **Young Americans Are At Risk.** While many trends in negative risk-taking among youth are heading in the right direction, risky behaviors, including illegal drug and tobacco use, violence and early sexual activity, are still among the top causes of disease and early death among youth. In addition, more children are growing up in homes without a father present, and studies show that an overwhelming number of violent criminals in the United States are males who grew up without fathers. Research has shown that the more children are connected to family, school, and community, the less likely they are to engage in risky behaviors.
 - Statistics show that boys are at greater risk than girls for learning disabilities, illiteracy, dropping out of school, substance-abuse problems, violence, juvenile arrest, and early death caused by violent behavior. Many adolescent boys also struggle with literacy skills and aggressive behavior. Boys often begin to fall behind girls in elementary school, which leads to higher dropout rates and juvenile delinquency, and they often show signs of behavioral problems early in life. As boys grow older, risk behaviors such as alcohol and drug abuse become more prevalent, and gang involvement increases.
 - The Department of Justice estimates approximately 750,000 individuals are now members of gangs – one-third of which are under the age of 18. While gang membership among girls is becoming much more common, the overwhelming majority of gang members are male – representing more than 90% of the gang population in large cities. Without prevention and intervention, these problems can be passed from generation to generation.
- **The President and Mrs. Bush are Committed to Helping America's Youth.**
 - The President announced a new outreach effort, to be led by Mrs. Laura Bush, to focus on young Americans, especially young men, to help ensure a successful future. During the next year, the President and Mrs. Bush are committed to:
 - ✓ Highlighting the importance of focusing on at-risk youth, especially boys;
 - ✓ Educating parents and communities on the importance of promoting positive youth development; and
 - ✓ Informing parents and communities of strong and successful prevention and intervention programs that work by highlighting the efforts of coaches, pastors, and mentors from around the country, especially those with programs that focus on boys.
 - The President's focus on young Americans will include support for programs that help youth overcome the specific risk of gang influence and involvement.
 - ✓ The President proposed a three-year, \$150-million initiative to help youth at risk of gang influence and involvement. Through grants to faith-based and community organizations targeting youth ages 8-17, the initiative will help some of America's communities that are most in need. These organizations will provide a positive model for youth – one that respects women and rejects violence.