

# Juvenile delinquency persuasive



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Juvenile Delinquency There is no doubt that various experts can give us many theories as to the causes of juvenile delinquency, including one's economic background, substance abuse, delinquent peer groups, repeated exposure to violence, increased availability of firearms and media violence, however, I feel that the number one cause of juvenile delinquency is the breakdown of families, including lack of parental control over children. It is ironic in America, today, one must have a driver's license to operate a vehicle, a permit to own a gun and even a license to own a dog, but one does not have to have training or a license in order to become a parent. Without specialized educational programs in child development and parenting, many of our future parents will not have a chance at becoming successful parents and worse, yet, many parents today are already contributing to the ever-increasing problem of juvenile delinquency simply by not knowing how to be parents. Being a parent is a lifelong commitment and new parents must learn parenting skills immediately; they do not have the luxury of internships and often times, mistakes in parenting will have drastic effects on the child.

There are many reasons for the widespread crisis in families today. Below are some of those causes: Changes in the Social Environment – there have been many changes in our social environment over the last twenty-five years. These changes have made a risky environment for today's youth. Children and teenagers spend more time with peer groups than ever before. Drugs and deadly weapons are used increasingly as ways to solve problems. Illicit and explicit sexuality and violence are the main subjects of choice in the media; and the impact of media influence has widened and become more

vivid with the introduction of computers, video games, portable stereos and MTV.

Changes in Family Structure and Functioning – The prevalence of divorce and the increasing number of women in the workplace have reduced the number of adults who provide interaction, structure and supervision in a child's life. Along with this, institutions have not kept pace in providing alternative programs for unsupervised kids. Add to this new parenting expectations that come with single parent and step-parent families and you now have a confusing, often inconsistent and/or unreliable home base for children.

Confusion About Parent Roles and Parent Control – When children reach adolescence, conflict between parents and teens normally increases as teens need to distance themselves from parental identity to establish their own identity. Experts agree they are generally three parenting styles that reportedly escalate these conflicts.

The authoritarian parent tends to emphasize rules and very harsh consequences. There is little room for discussion or negotiation. The indulgent parent tends to spoil the child and expects little or no responsibility at home, choosing instead to clean up after the child both at home and in his social misbehavior.

The indifferent parent is so preoccupied with his/her own life and activities that little time and energy is given to either involvement or appropriate structure.

The type of parenting that does work is simply called authoritative parenting. This type of parent assumes a role of authority in the child's life, but the rules and structure are sensible and flexible to accommodate the child's growth toward adolescence and young adulthood. The parent's intelligent explanations of the rules plus reasonable enforcement help to maintain a steady reduction of control as the child matures.

Studies have been made to determine the causes of juvenile delinquency. Many of these studies have focused on family relationships. In one study, comparing delinquent and non-delinquent youths showed that over ninety percent of the delinquents had unhappy home lives and felt discontented with their life circumstances. Only thirteen percent of the non-delinquent youths felt this way. This study also brought attention to the fact that to these youths delinquency appeared to be a sort of solution to them. It brought attention to youths neglected by their parents, or approval of delinquent friends, or it solved problems of an unhappy home life in other ways.

A study by the National Institute of Justice also determined that youths from neglectful homes, single parent homes and homes in which substance abuse was a problem had a greater likelihood of being charged as a juvenile of a crime or status offense. In fact, research has shown that fifty three percent of these children are more likely to be arrested and thirty eight percent more likely to commit an act of violence. Between 1976 and 1996, the number of juveniles living in poverty grew 42 percent. Along with this growth, crimes committed by juveniles also grew.

From as early as the turn of the century, experts in juvenile delinquency (Morrison, 1915) have recognized the family's early and primary role in influencing delinquency. These experts concluded that family dysfunction and poor parental supervision and socialization are major influences on children's subsequent delinquency. Unfortunately, society did not take action on these earlier findings, thus it has only been recently that the impact of family factors has received much attention or research funding. The implications of existing research are that the family environment can either protect children from subsequent delinquency or put them at greater risk.

It is true, that depending on the level of functioning, families can negatively impact a child's development. In a study conducted by Stouthamer-Loeber of approximately 300 research study cases, it was determined, in longitudinal studies that socialization factors such as lack of supervision, parental rejection of the child, child rejection of the parent and lack of parent/child involvement were found to be the strongest indicators of delinquency. Parental dysfunction, such as criminality, substance abusers and poor marital relations were mid level predictors and parental health and actual absence of parent were weak predictors. In concurrent comparative studies, the strongest correlate of problem behaviors in children was the child's rejection of the parents and the parental rejection of the child. The importance of effective parental discipline was higher in the comparative studies than in the longitudinal studies. The overall effect of these risk factors appeared to be the same for both boys and girls.

In a study conducted by Wright and Wright in 1997, four factors were determined to explain the relationship between single parent families and

delinquency. These factors include economic deprivation, reduced supervision, formal controls, social supports, living in poverty neighborhoods characterized by high crime rates and alienation and lastly an increased criminal justice system response to children from single parent families. They also determined the absence of fathers increased these factors. Children from both single parent families, as well as those children who live in complex, shifting, and highly stressed families suffer from these same conditions. In fact, according to Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, poverty has now become a children's problem, owing chiefly to the fact that an increased proportion of children live for long periods, sometimes their entire childhood, in mother only families, a large fraction of which are also poor. A 1996 Department of Health and Human Services study found that at every income level except for the very highest (over \$50, 000 a year), children living with never married mothers were more likely than their counterparts in two parent families to have been expelled or suspended from school, to display emotional problems and to engage in anti-social behavior. The same study revealed that if a teenage African American single mother heads the family, the risks are even greater. Children of teenage black single mothers are less able to control their impulses, have a lower tolerance for frustration, are more likely to be hyperactive, have more difficulty adapting to school and, if boys, are likely to be more hostile, assertive and willful than children of older mothers, both black and white.

Another factor to consider in the breakdown of families is the increasing number of children placed into foster care by single mothers who are unable to provide for their care, children born addicted to crack and taken away

from their mothers, children born infected with the HIV virus who demand more care than their mothers are able to provide for them and those children who are actually homeless due to any number of conditions. These children are at an even greater risk for delinquency. It is estimated that over 500,000 children are presently in foster care. These same children move from home to home an average of three times per year. Is it any wonder, without proper parental care, supervision and control that 44 percent of these foster children are expected to commit an act of delinquency before they turn eighteen? Children, both young and old, have the right to expect strong family morals and values. Children have the right to have their parents show a sincere interest in both their schoolwork and their activities away from school. Children have the right to have both parents actively involved in all aspects of their lives. They have the right for parents to sit civilly at the dinner table and ask about their day. They have a right for respect and decency and they have a right to not be victimized by those people who chose to bring them into this world. They have a right to be able to learn respect for other people, respect for authority and respect for themselves. Children have a right to effective parenting. In conclusion, I would agree there are many causes of juvenile delinquency, however, the most important cause and one that needs to be addressed and corrected is the breakdown of families. Parents that are responsible for their children will help them avoid the other causes of delinquency. These parents will restrict their access to media violence, monitor their peer groups, explain and inform them of the negative effects of substance abuse, prevent their access to firearms, provide them with a stable family life, free of violence, discipline them with

love and consistency and most importantly, teach them the basic values of life – respect for others, respect for authority and respect for themselves.

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