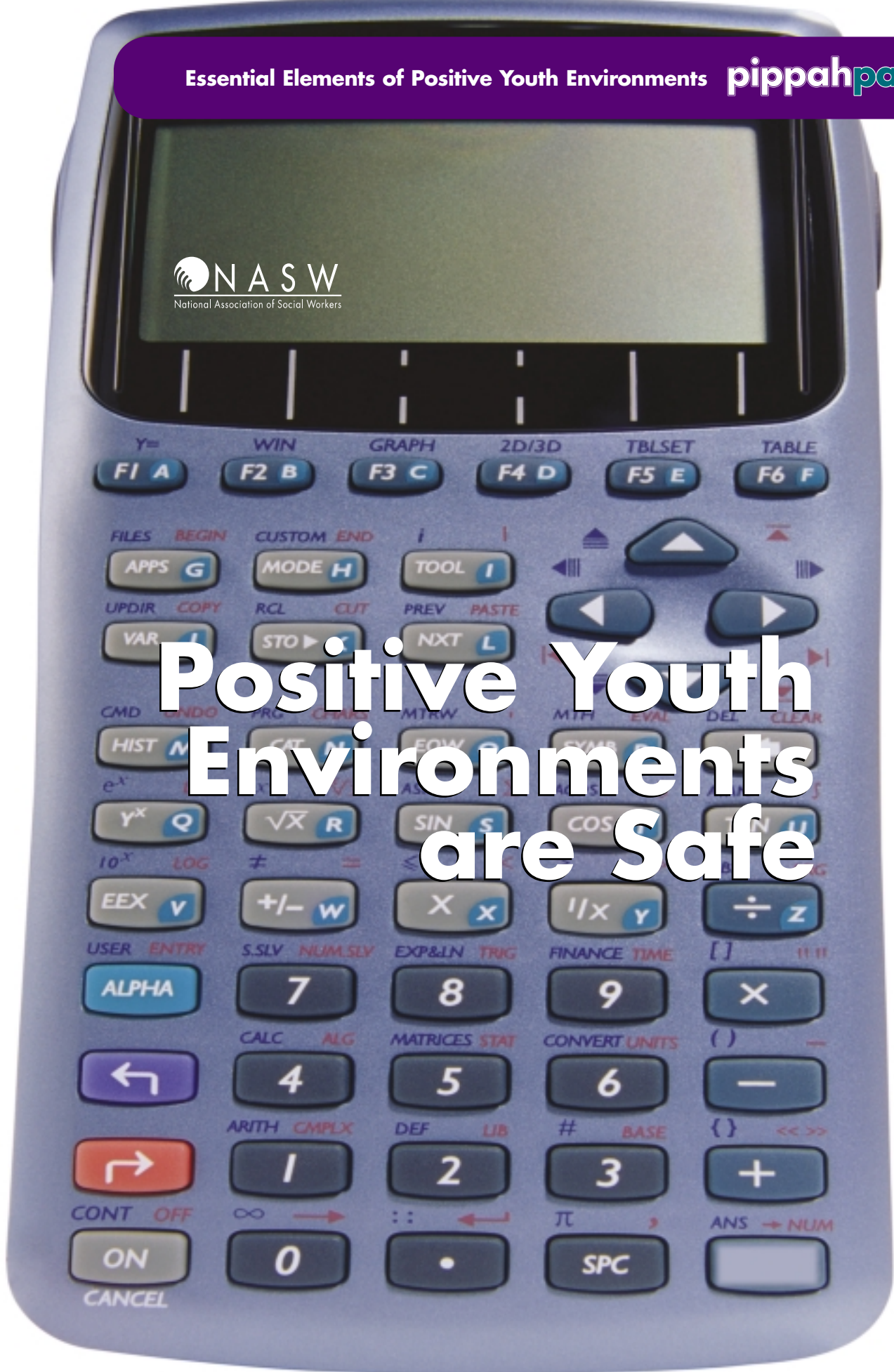




Positive Youth Environments are Safe



Positive Youth Environments are Safe. Families and communities are free from violence, physical, mental, and emotional harm, abuse, exploitation, and coercion. Environments have safe places for youths to play, to learn, and to live. Environments promote healthy lifestyles and provide meaningful alternatives to health-damaging behaviors. Policies and laws protect the health and safety of youth communities, families, and individuals.

- Every seven hours a child or teenager was killed in a firearm-related accident or suicide in 1999 (*Centers for Disease Control & Prevention [CDC], 2001a*). Homicide is the second leading cause of death for people 15 to 24 years of age and is the leading cause of death for African Americans (*CDC, 2000a*). **Serious violent juvenile crime has declined** (*National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002*).
- Forty percent of American households with children under age 18 have guns (*Peter Hart Research Associates, 1999*). The risk of homicide in a home is tripled with the presence of a gun (*American Bar Association, 2002*). **Fewer youths are carrying guns and weapons** (*CDC, 2001b*).
- Most child abuse is committed in the home by people known and trusted by the child. An estimated 826,000 children were victims of abuse and neglect in 1999 (*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999*). **National rates of child abuse and neglect have been declining** (*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999*). **Comprehensive prevention programs can be effective.**
- Intimate partner violence among teenagers is prevalent—one quarter of eighth- and ninth-grade students have experienced dating violence, and 8% have been victims of sexual violence on dates (*CDC, 2000b*). **Prevention programs for youths can be successful at changing attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors related to dating violence** (*Advocates for Youth, 2000*).
- Youth exposure to chronic community violence is related to increased levels of acting out and aggression (*Osofsky, 1999*). **Well-supervised after-school recreational programs and service facilities can substantially reduce juvenile crime, drug use, vandalism and community violence** (*Cornell, 1999; Thurman, Giacomazzi, Reisig, & Mueller, 1996*).
- Abandoned buildings and vacant lots in neighborhoods are unsafe because they are often harbors for waste and fire hazards, as well as sites of criminal activity and prostitution. **Federal and local innovative community revitalization projects can create safer neighborhoods by converting abandoned buildings and lots into community centers, gardens, or playgrounds.**

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■ Substandard environmental quality is correlated with respiratory illness, cardiovascular disease, and cancer (*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000*). People living in poverty and members of ethnic minority groups are at greater than average risk of exposure to environmental hazards. Asthma is the number one cause of school absenteeism (*Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health, 2000*).

Environmental policies and regulations can help reduce pollution and protect public health

(*Natural Resources Defense Council, 2001*).

■ Tobacco industries specifically target youths, ethnic minority communities, and women. Billboards advertising tobacco products are placed in black communities four to five times more than in white communities (*American Heart Association, 2001*). Fifty percent of smokers begin using tobacco by age 14. (*American Legacy Foundation, 2000*).

Smoking rates among teens and adults could be reduced by half within the decade if current knowledge about effective approaches were fully implemented

(*U.S Public Health Service, 2000*).

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Community Checklist for Safety:

- Structured after school educational and recreational programs accessible to all youths
- Designated “safety zones” or sanctuaries for youths that are supported by the community
- Community and school-based prevention programs focusing on family, youths, and gender-based violence
- Proactive programs that help parents and families develop positive conflict resolution strategies and positive communication styles
- Prevention and treatment services for correlates of violence including substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, and supportive services for youths, adolescents, and their families
- Emergency and social services that are sensitive and responsive to youths, their families, and the community
- Adequate legal and service protections for adolescent victims of violence
- Adequate policies and awareness initiatives related to gun control
- Adequately monitored routes and pathways that youths travel to school and other places where youths frequent
- Existence and enforcement of policies that delimit the deliberate targeting of youths in unhealthy practices
- On-going effective campaigns and visible outreach activities and messages that model and promote good health habits
- Adequate policies and monitoring systems for pollution, toxic waste dumping, lead poisoning, and other environmental hazards
- Implementation of community revitalization and “clean up” projects

Tips on Things You Can Do

- Organize community clean up crews to address safety hazards in vacant lots and other areas.
- Create/participate in coalitions that include youths, families, service providers, and law enforcement in creating safety zones/community centers that offer safe harbors for young people.
- Work with schools and communities to expand structured programs for young people.
- Implement school/community-based mediation programs to provide youths with a venue for conflict mediation and resolution.
- Conduct workshops and training for youths, families, and school and service personnel on gender-based violence.
- Use school/community billboards, local newspapers, agency mailings, and electronic resources to increase awareness of available prevention, treatment, and emergency services and hotlines.
- Partner with advocacy groups working on policies related to gun control and antiviolence initiatives.
- Work with community organizers and policymakers in crafting and implementing environmental protection policies.
- Work with parents, community volunteers, police officials, and school officials to establish a monitoring system for pathways to school and other areas where youth travel or frequent.