A lot of people think that teens are up to no good. They call us slackers, disrespectful, selfish. They think we’re juvenile delinquents.

What do you want to be labeled as?
The fact is that many of us are doing something about preventing crime in our communities.

The most recent Independent Sector poll showed that 59 percent of teenagers volunteer their time to programs that make their communities better. We’re proving critics wrong. We’re changing our labels — to mentors, tutors, and peer counselors!

And it’s easy to get involved. There are already things going on that we can get involved in. We have lots of talents and skills that others can put to use — if you’re an artist you can paint a mural to replace graffiti; if you like sports, you can coach a team in your neighborhood; if you are a listener or problem solver you can volunteer at a teen hotline or be a peer mediator.

Check it out —
here’s what other teenagers are already doing.

- Students at Picacho Middle School in Las Cruces, New Mexico, planned and participated in a graffiti paint-out project at their school.
- Teens on the Washington, DC, Youth as Resources Board have awarded grants to other teens for projects like tutoring HIV/AIDS children, restoring an abandoned playground, creating a book of personal stories about different cultures in an English as a Second Language class, organizing a community spring clean-up, and planting flowers in neglected public areas.
- Teens in Roxbury, Massachusetts, got political. They expressed their views in legislative committee hearings, argued their ideas on the State Senate floor, and actually wrote laws on issues that affected their lives.
- For students at Mesa High School in Mesa, Arizona, volunteering is a vital part of their academic and social lives. Students volunteer at the local food bank, hospitals, day care centers, and after-school programs; tutor younger students; and put on special performances for seniors or elementary school children.
- In Melbourne, Florida, teenagers took it upon themselves to repair and paint the house of an elderly neighborhood resident.
- The Teens, Crime, and the Community Class at St. Bernard High School in Louisiana made table tents with crime prevention tips on them for their cafeteria.
- In Chicago, Illinois, at the Robert Taylor Homes public housing complex, there was fighting among girls who lived in different buildings. When older girls from each building decided to read stories, share ideas, and play games with the younger girls from the other building, the tension began to go away. They realized they had a lot in common and really liked each other.
- Even teens who have already been in trouble are doing the right thing. Girls at the Indianapolis Juvenile Correctional Facility produced a video about their personal experiences with gangs. In their video, they suggest things that both youth and adults can do to prevent gangs or help kids get out of gangs. They show their video at local elementary schools and discuss with students the dangers of gangs and other criminal activities.
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You can do
Here are a few places you can go for more help...

- Form patrols to walk younger children to and from school.
- Plant a vegetable garden for soup kitchens and homeless shelters.
- Prepare home-cooked meals for senior citizens and single, expectant mothers.
- Set up a mini-library and study/resource center in your neighborhood.
- Build a nature trail for youth with special needs.
- Provide companionship to residents of nursing homes, children in trauma centers, adults with disabilities, families in homeless shelters, and hospice patients.
- Plan and staff summer recreation programs for young children.
- Create a television program about crime and violence prevention and ask for airtime on your local cable access channel.
- Join a group that builds or renovates housing for low-income or homeless families.
- Organize after-school sports leagues.
- Practice and teach street smart.
- Start a teen court in your school.
- Create a video, performance, or peer discussion group that addresses multicultural issues.
- Be a tutor or mentor to a younger person.
- Rescue and retrain abandoned playgrounds and parks in your community.
- Organize graffiti paint-outs.
- Start a conflict resolution program in your school.
- Get political — attend local committee meetings and debates on issues relevant to you, and share your thoughts.
- Encourage your peers to get involved, too!

www.nts.org
In this city you can find a lot of crime prevention info. You can also link with community Resources (the Institute for Community Safety, the Crime Officers, and the Community Justice Project) to find out about programs for you and your youth.

www.nccj.org
Look for the page on interest in crime, justice, and nondiscrimination rules.

www.courts.org
In this city you can find a lot of information about crime, justice, and nondiscrimination rules.

www.nyscest.org
You can receive a lot of information by logging in to the website of the New York State Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

www.ncde.org
You can check the website of the National Crime Victims Right’s Center, which provides information about crime, justice, and nondiscrimination rules.

www.ncjrs.gov
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So you see, everyone's doing it. You can, too.

Okay, so how do you get started?

You can either find a group or get one together. You can join something that's already there like an after-school program at your school. Boys & Girls Clubs, 4-H, Scouts, YMCA or YWCA, or Camp Fire. If you need help finding out what's around, talk to someone in your school, family, place of worship, police station, or rec center.

What if you already belong to a group like a soccer team, drama club, dance group, church youth group? Your soccer team could challenge a police officers' team and give the proceeds to a women's shelter. Your dance or drama group could put on a show about drug abuse prevention and perform it for younger kids in a Head Start or day care class.

First Decide what your project is going to be.

List the problems that you and your group believe you can change in your neighborhood. For example, are there too many fights in your school? Are kids doing drugs? Is there no safe place in your neighborhood for kids to hang out? Choose one problem. At this point you may want to look around your community and see what people are already doing. Maybe you can work with another group.

Second Plan what you're going to do and each step you're going to take to get there.

Decide who's going to do what, and set deadlines for completing each step. Remember to plan for how you're going to be able to tell if your project was successful.

Third Get what you need.

Basically, you need people to do the work, materials (remember to include things like transportation, meeting space, food, photocopies), money, publicity, and the support of adults. Get moving on your project.

Fourth Check your progress once your project is underway.

You want to be able to see if what you are doing is working. Ask people what they think — do they feel safer with less arguing in the school? Ask your friends how they think it is going. Or count things — if your project is supposed to reduce fights in your school, you can count how many there were before your project began and how many there are now.

Fifth Get the message out.

And when you're done — share your success in your school and local newspapers and television and radio stations. Then celebrate!

Why bother? Here's why some kids say they are helping out:

"Adults trusted me. It was a great feeling!"
— CALIFORNIA TEENAGER VOLUNTEER

"I wanted... to see how it felt to help instead of hurt someone. It made me feel happy to help them."
— TEEN ON PROBATION

"They're happy every time we go."
— TEEN BIG BROTHER LITTLE SISTER VOLUNTEER

"It was so much fun helping someone else out."
— TEEN IN INTERN FOR HUMANITY VOLUNTEER

What do you want to be labeled as?

Get involved.

800-722-teens weprevent.org
So you see, everyone's doing it. You can, too.

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— TEEN BIG BROTHER BIG SISTER VOLUNTEER

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— TEEN HABITAT FOR HUMANITY VOLUNTEER