

# Deliberative Conversations at the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library October 2019

## How Should Communities Reduce Violence?

Learn more about this NIF issue guide at <https://www.nifi.org/en/issue-guide/safety-and-justice>

After falling steadily for decades, the rate of violent crime in the United States rose again in 2015 and 2016. Interactions between citizens and police too often end in violence. People are increasingly worried about safety in their communities.

Many Americans are concerned that something is going on with violence in communities, law enforcement, and race that is undermining the national ideals of safety and justice for all.

It is unclear what is driving the recent rise in violence, but bias and distrust on all sides appear to be making the problem worse. Citizens and police need goodwill and cooperation in order to ensure safety and justice. For many people of color, the sense that they are being treated unfairly by law enforcement—and even being targeted by police—is palpable. Others say police departments are being blamed for the actions of a few individuals and that the dangers, stress, and violence law enforcement officers face in their work is underestimated. Still others hold that if we cannot find ways to defuse potentially violent interactions between citizens and police, we will never be able to create safe communities in which all people can thrive and feel welcomed and comfortable.

How should we ensure that Americans of every race and background are treated with respect and fairness? What should we do to ensure that the police have the support they need to fairly enforce the law? To what degree do racial and other forms of bias distort the justice system? What should we do as citizens to help reduce violence of all kinds in our communities and the nation as a whole?

How should communities increase safety while at the same time ensuring justice? This issue guide is a framework for citizens to work through these important questions together. It offers three different options for deliberation, each rooted in different, widely shared concerns and different ways of looking at the problem. The resulting conversation may be difficult, as it will necessarily involve tensions between things people hold deeply valuable, such as a collective sense of security, fair treatment for everyone, and personal freedom. No one option is the “correct” one; each includes drawbacks and trade-offs that we will have to face if we are to make progress on this issue. They are not the only options available. They are presented as a starting point for deliberation.

*The following are transcribed notes from notetaker flipcharts during a 2019 Deliberative Conversation at the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library. Each deliberation is different based on the people in the room participating. The notetaker was working quickly during a fast-paced conversation and these notes are intended to capture the main ideas and points of interest throughout the deliberation. We hope the notes remind participants of topics highlighted during the deliberation and that the notes are useful to others in expanding their understanding of these topics in our community. For more information, upcoming deliberation schedule, or to view other notes from deliberative conversations, visit <https://www.tscpl.org/conversations> or email [connect@tscpl.org](mailto:connect@tscpl.org)*

## Option 1: Enforce the Law Together

### Expand policing while strengthening community-police partnerships.

Train more people in firearms – what training? We have driving tests for car and supervised hours. Driving is not a constitutional right, the right to bear arms is. The examples don't compare in law.

Kansas Statute has sections pertaining to stand your ground laws and also case law – too complicated to articulate as a non-lawyer

\*this was identified as a place for further research on local issues

Suggestion to separate the discussion of train more people in firearms from the concept of stand your ground laws

What about being in the right emotional place to use a gun?

Scare people can't de-escalate at home – "If someone is breaking in I'd rather be traumatized and alive, than dead." And "In my house, I've not a vigilante" - In their house, why should they de-escalate?

Decisions made when scared

Verbal aggression isn't as represented in the guide – how do those examples fit here with these more physically violent/gun examples?

Within neighborhood watch, training about stand your ground is to not get to that place – You will not approach. Get a description, stay back, call it in.

What are ways to Enforce the law together in this option without arming citizens or hiring more officers? Group dynamics and social norms around violence – will discuss more in Option 3

The mentality of recidivist, re-entry into jail – generational criminal life, most sees police as opposition, the "square community" sees law enforcement as useful/safe/partner

Tradeoffs – not all people have the teaching or experience with police being helpful or learned from family

The statistics – how do we interpret them if they seem inequitable?

"Doesn't it seem logical that more people would get arrested/shot in high crime areas?"

Some neighborhoods don't want to advertise they "have crime" there, don't want a neighborhood crime watch, training includes how to report a crime, purpose is to get to know your neighbors and recognize unusual activity, not approach, call it in

Versus "not being involved" – you have to work with the neighborhood people/law enforcement

Even though we are trying to discuss local issues, when we see the national news (ex: Trayvon Martin story) we imagine things happening here

The issue guide describes a residency requirement as an action to consider – great group deliberation on the complexities of this topic and unintended consequences in various situations and communities - for other school districts this is sometimes required. TPD requires Shawnee County residency. Living in the area you patrol in a city is impractical due to job changes and shift changes. Understanding the area and the community can help. Social work calls it “blurred lines” difficult to separate oneself from work. How much overlap for your family for safety, to be too close? And you must have the investment in the community for it to succeed. Rural policing examples. Meeting the bus to greet kids but sometimes the officer has been involved in domestic situations with families. Maybe it’s your kids friends and so you think about it harder. Communities full of renters coming and going are also a different situation.

TPD – if they hire more diverse races and backgrounds – what are unintended consequences “fear of rednecks pulling a gun when pulled over by a black officer” – will officers be harassed more or how will this impact their interactions?

Is hiring more diverse background difficult? Right now interest level is low overall – predominantly white profession – a person may look like “the enemy” emerging from and then going back into a high crime neighborhood - organizations must hire the best officers – how to get more qualified candidates? Are we accepting less?

A Black Lives Matter question – is this (policing) an option we are giving children to create opportunities for career/learning and more non-policing interaction in community. School resource officers build trust.

## **Option 2: Apply the Law Fairly**

### **Remove injustices, reform inequities, and improve accountability.**

When we talk about the disproportionate stats what do we mean? According to the population statistics (in the issue guide)

“If I felt like I was getting stopped a lot when I wasn’t doing anything wrong, I’d be mad.”

Koch’s where into criminal reformation rate research previously – murder and car theft had very low conviction rates – how are low conviction rate or disproportionate conviction rates considered here?

Racial profiling – also class based.

Fixing injustice – “it ain’t gonna happen

Officers cannot stop anyone randomly.

More victims are preyed upon if you pull officers out of high crime communities

Baltimore/New York – look at the stats surrounding police presence and stats as consequences of changes

If crime goes down, you can’t count how many victims were saved

Who pays the actual price for higher police presence? If more people are arrested and incarcerated, what is that trade off and is it worth it? “Marginalized people paying the highest cost for our safety isn’t something I’m okay with.”

Conservatives want more law enforcement and lower taxes both – inherent conflict

Implicit bias training is an annual TPD training and also offered at jail. TPD has added cultural diversity training. Are judges and other court officials required to do similar trainings? Or the DA? Or law school?

\*this was identified as a place for further research on local issues

“Justice is supposed to be blind” And how is that working out? And for who?

American ideal, not reality, of blind justice?

Sentencing grid in KS is used, with some interpretation.

How does a civil case fit into the equity/fairness discussion?

Probation violations are frequent at the jail, convicted of crime they plead to, a lesser crime.

“If I can afford a good defender, is that a significant factor in “apply the law fairly?”

Some say yes – some no. Public defender is viewed as experienced.

We can’t have a law on the books and not enforce it – if nonviolent crimes were serving less time, can we accept the tradeoffs of more people being available to commit repeat nonviolent crime. Example of sentencing in crack cocaine versus powder and what that reform has looked like in reality. Examples of arrests versus users of drugs with an equity focused breakdown of who uses and whether arrests match that.

### **Option 3: De-escalate and Prevent Violence**

#### **Address the causes of violence and take direct actions to disrupt conflict.**

“I like the emphasis on letting experts do the thing they are allowed to do in different ways in their specialties.”

Partnership with VALEO, Social workers/substance abuse/ police/ crisis intervention specialists. TPD has this on all 3 shifts now. CIT sends the team on these calls specifically, so more impactful calls for them.

Mental health-a statewide focus for corrections departments. Mental health can be self-treatment with drugs, or mental illness from prolonged use, plus childhood trauma led to that situation sometimes.

De-escalation -TPD train the trainers and teach and Inservice. Jail doing similar trainings. “I can have the same conversation with 100 people, and I have to get the message across 100 different ways.” Training needed for not only frontlines anyone who is involved.

Imagine if I am incarcerated currently, how does this impact me? Would you have benefited back then? All of this takes time to change.

And in some bad situations de-escalation isn't a priority over safety.

If people need to be in a good mental hospital or substance abuse treatment hospital instead of jail, then is that a bad thing for them to have, instead of jail being the default.

Option 3 – great BUT what about violent and criminal activity NOT connected to mental health and substance abuse – focus on the demand for the crime -- like human trafficking for example, not addressed in the issue guide but addressed locally, and the crime organizers of drug sales, etc.

“Reduce the culture of violence.” Where does that come from? Where does the violence come from? Example, a story of little kids in a school hearing a fairy tale- even young kids can hate the happily ever after, the idea shared of “only weenies believe in good things happening”. This comes from Interpersonal relationships. Violence/trauma history.

Where else does it come from? Commodify violence and sold it- not new, compare to old kids' stories which have violence. Historically - Watch the execution, etc.

NOW - Community norms-changing to say violence less acceptable --society change, kids not playing with other kids, games violent. Earlier sanctioned ways to exclude others, kids not being spanked now because of fear of DCF investigation. Accepting the win or loss, not competitive anymore. Safe zones. How do we understand across generational differences? If certain terms or changes trigger reactions from others, how do we stay in a productive deliberative conversation?

The local group JUMP tries intervention with violence, group violence intervention, as a model.

We have changed what is acceptable and inclusive? Young people and people isolated to sustain household – modern economy, empty households for kids, no dinner together. Become society of excesses. Is it true locally that 49% population living on paycheck to paycheck. How many households do not have \$400 for emergency?

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## **Reflections/Wrap up**

Where did we have some agreement? Degree of respect and gratitude for law enforcement and connections. Law enforcement can do a little more, these are complex issues, difficult to solve.

Where did we see tension? Tension around race every time. Interactions of minorities with police.

Who wasn't here today with us in our deliberation? What if other people were in the room? Wondering about what happens when a person is stopped-complied or confronted-? Wondering about why people were stopped. This is a place some would like to learn more.

More discussion on body worn cameras, courts have nitpicked on things- the pause and play scenario. Officers love them. Can show what happened. Unintended consequence is that courts are treating that differently now, expecting more.