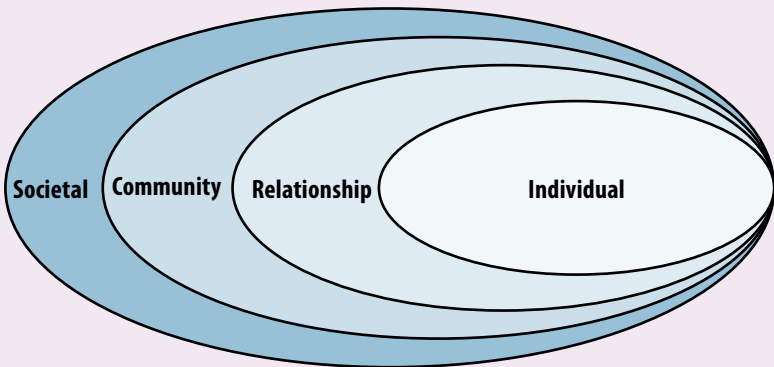


# The Social-Ecological Model: A Framework for Violence Prevention

The ultimate goal of the work of violence prevention is to stop violence before it begins. CDC uses a four-level social-ecological model (SEM) to better understand and prevent violence.<sup>1</sup> Violence is complicated and results from a combination of multiple influences on behavior. It is about how individuals relate to those around them and to their broader environment. The SEM allows us to address the factors that put people at risk for or protect them from experiencing or perpetrating violence (risk and protective factors) and the prevention strategies that can be used at each level to address these factors.



### A CLOSER LOOK AT EACH LEVEL OF THE SEM

**Individual**  
Identifies biological and personal history factors; such as age, education, income, substance use, or history of abuse, that increase the likelihood of becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence.

**Relationship**  
Examines close relationships that may increase the risk of experiencing violence as a victim or perpetrator. A person's closest social circle-peers, partners and family members-influences their behavior and contributes to their range of experience.

**Community**  
Explores the settings, such as schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods, in which social relationships occur and seeks to identify the characteristics of these settings that are associated with becoming victims or perpetrators of violence.

**Societal**  
Looks at the broad societal factors, such as health, economic, educational and social policies, that help create a climate in which violence is encouraged or inhibited and help to maintain economic or social inequalities between groups in society.

## How does the SEM inform prevention practice?

Each level in the social ecological model can be thought of as a level of influence and also as a key point for prevention. It offers a framework for program planners to determine how to focus prevention activities. In order to prevent violence, it is important to implement programs and policies that can reduce risk factors and increase protective factors at each of the different levels in the model.

## Are your prevention activities addressing multiple levels of the SEM?

Using the matrix on the back as a guide, map your prevention program activities onto the SEM. Use this framework to answer the following questions: Where do you want to make the most impact? Where are the gaps? What activities can fill those gaps?

SEM Map of Program Activities			
What is the issue you are working to prevent?			
Level of SEM	Activity or strategy currently being implemented?	What risk factors does this strategy reduce?	What protective factors does this strategy increase?
Example Issue: Youth Violence	A series of after-school youth programs are established in local middle schools through collaborations with local youth serving organizations.	Limited or no monitoring and supervision, as well as a lack of social connectedness are risk factors for youth violence.	The availability of after school programs in the community offer a layer of supervision and monitoring, increase recreational opportunities for youth and increase their level of social connectedness.
Example SEM Level: Community			
Individual			
Relationship			
Community			
Societal			

Level of SEM	Examples of Factors that Potentially Increase Risk (Risk Factors)	Examples of Strategies By Level of Influence <sup>2</sup>
<b>Individual</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal characteristics</li> <li>Biological factors</li> <li>Behavior</li> <li>Personal experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Age / gender</li> <li>Lower levels of education</li> </ul> Belief supporting use of violence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anger or hostility toward others</li> <li>Having few friends or being isolated from others</li> <li>Being unemployed</li> <li>Substance use</li> <li>History of engaging in violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School-based programs that help students develop social, emotional and behavioral skills to build positive relationships</li> <li>In-home programs that teach parents skills for age-appropriate infant and toddler care</li> <li>An after-school program that provides tutoring to increase academic performance</li> <li>Group sessions that increase knowledge and understanding of healthy dating relationships</li> <li>Classroom based health curriculums that teach ways to cope with loss and disappointment, and learn warning signs for depression</li> </ul>
<b>Relationship</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interaction between two or more people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fights, tension, or struggles among family members</li> <li>Marital instability, divorces or separations</li> <li>Poor communication between parents</li> <li>Poor supervision or monitoring of children</li> <li>Association with aggressive or delinquent peers</li> <li>Emotionally unsupportive family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education and family support to promote positive child development offered within child-parent centers</li> <li>A mentoring program that pairs youth with caring adults</li> <li>A peer program that teaches youth how they can promote positive norms for dating in their circle of friends</li> <li>Relationship workshops where couples work with other couples on respectful communication strategies</li> <li>An art program that increases emotional support to children by pairing elders from a senior center with children from a preschool program</li> </ul>
<b>Community</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Settings or institutions in which social relationships take place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Level of residents' social connectedness</li> <li>Income level of neighborhood</li> <li>Rate of residents moving in and out of a neighborhood</li> <li>Lack of neighborhood organization</li> <li>Limited economic opportunities</li> <li>Lack of recreational opportunities</li> <li>Poor physical layout of a neighborhood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Residents organize and make physical improvements to their neighborhoods</li> <li>A city develops safe recreational areas for residents</li> <li>Community associations work with the mayor's office to develop a series of after-school programs for youth</li> <li>A school district creates, implements, monitors, and evaluates a policy to prevent bullying behavior</li> <li>A city establishes a business improvement district to increase community employment opportunities and make other improvements in the community</li> <li>A citywide policy that changes the planning procedures for the layout of new communities</li> </ul>
<b>Societal</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Societal factors that either create a level of acceptance or intolerance for violence. Also included are factors that can create and sustain gaps between different segments of society.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social norm that it is acceptable to use violence to resolve conflict and that consequences are minimal</li> <li>Cultural norms</li> <li>Health policies</li> <li>Economic policies</li> <li>Educational policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legislation to encourage employers to offer family-leave options and flexible schedules to both men and women</li> <li>A national media campaign including TV, radio, newspaper, and Internet methods of communication to create awareness and change the way people think about violence</li> <li>A state sponsors a media campaign designed to reduce the stigma associated with self-directed violence being considered only a mental health problem</li> <li>Statewide legislation that provides tax incentives to businesses that partner with school districts to provide learning-based technology and other academic resources in disadvantaged communities</li> </ul>

1. Dahlberg LL, Krug EG. Violence-a global public health problem. In: Krug E, Dahlberg LL, Mercy JA, Zwi AB, Lozano R, eds. World Report on Violence and Health. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization; 2002:1-56.

2. The examples given for each level of the social-ecological model are meant to illustrate the concept of an individual-level strategy, relationship-level strategy, etc. and are not necessarily evidence-based. Information about evidence-based strategies at each level can be found at registries for evidence-based practice such as *The Community Guide to Prevention Services* - <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/about/methods.html> or *Blueprints for Violence Prevention* - <http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/>.