

# **Reducing Crime and Fear Collectively**

**By**

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In the past year, there have been successful attempts to defund and remove police throughout communities across our nation. Somewhat predictably, the results of these decisions have led to dire consequences, specifically, a substantial increase in crime. A healthier alternative is supporting our police and working with them to reduce crime. The following suggested methods are not simply a political choice, they are sound methods supported by scientific research in reducing crime and fear of crime, both critical existential issues. Becoming proactive, and involving other community residents, is a historical backdrop to keeping communities safe. Realistically, then, can anything affect a more favorable outcome resulting in lowering crime and fear of crime in the community?

Researchers, as well as police, criminologists, victimologists and astute readers of crime, have discovered critical ways to address this issue. Individually, there are a myriad of ways to become a harder target, or more crime aware, if you will. First and foremost, resisting the temptation to trust strangers until we know them well, is a practice that has most assuredly been taught for decades, if not centuries. Additionally, staying in groups when we're out of our familiar surroundings, and locking all car and home doors once inside all are very effective. However, these are individual efforts to reduce crime. Is it also possible then to reduce crime collectively?

Researchers have discovered that there are also ways to reduce crime and fear of crime through community and collective efforts. Often, when research is completed, it is published in an academic journal where academics with similar interests are able to read it and apply it to their own background knowledge. Why not give people who rarely read these journals access to the findings? While not completely unprecedented, it is quite uncommon. My aspiration is to change this familiar outcome.

One of the major theories of reducing crime through collective action is coined Broken Windows Theory. The authors of Broken Windows Theory can assist community members who are currently in this predicament of high neighborhood crime through consistent application. If the steps to reducing fear and crime take place, as suggested by its authors, it can create an environment which forcefully tells criminals and visitors engaged in illicit behavior: We are on watch. We do not allow any type of rowdy and/or questionable behavior here. This initially can include discouraging pre-criminal behavior from gaining a foothold. This type of minor or pre-crime, which is invariably mentioned, includes both physical remnants, such as litter and smashed windows, as well as social cues, which include disorderly behavior, and loud arguments between two parties. If allowed unchecked, the common thinking is that residents don't care and don't work with police to reduce this disorder. This creates a situation in both resident's and visitor's minds that anything goes and is inevitably allowed to take place in this community (Wilson & Kelling, 1982).

Fear of crime is also an essential issue that can be addressed by community members. Being in a constant state of fear can reduce quality of life and make every day an overwhelming chore. Researchers have also found support for the effect of disorder on fear. If residents

regularly see litter, abandoned homes, and uncut lawns, their fear level increases. This can also occur on a social level, such as residents regularly witnessing and experiencing panhandlers, prostitutes, and people using the community to shoot up drugs (Siehr, 2004).

What then, can be done to reverse a community's high crime presence? The following are specific steps which, if practiced by the majority of the community, will allow residents, to reclaim their homes and neighborhoods:

1. Hold a neighborhood march or party with community residents.
2. During this time, form necessary neighborhood relationships, always staying in continual contact.
3. As with the planning for the march or celebration, plan a neighborhood clean-up. If possible, this should be carried out regularly, with residents being given their own jobs to do.
4. Report disorder and/or suspicious behavior to police. This is absolutely critical, as disorder often changes into crime.
5. If possible, form a neighborhood watch, meeting regularly with police and others who live in and protect the community.