



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: Friday, April 3, 2026.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. Contact [Gage Harter](#) with any questions.

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Chesterfield County, VA

Program Title: Gun Violence Prevention

Program Category: Public Safety

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Deborah Dugger

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: James D. Worsley

Title: Deputy County Administrator Human Services

Signature: 

## **VACo Application 2026**

### **Chesterfield County, Virginia Gun Violence Prevention**

#### **Abstract of the Program**

Chesterfield County Juvenile Justice Services saw an influx of youth with gun-related charges in its Juvenile Courts and Detention Center during the pandemic. In response, the Juvenile Court Judges of the 12<sup>th</sup> District Court Service Unit began ordering youth to attend Gun Safety classes as a consequence for some gun-related convictions. The only option that seemed to be available were courses that taught youth how to safely use a firearm, not the dangers of using a firearm or the laws related to minors possessing guns.

In response to this need, Juvenile Justice Services, the Court Services Unit, and the Commonwealth Attorney's Office collaborated to create its own Gun Violence Prevention Program. This one-time session teaches youth and their families the laws related to gun ownership as well as the possible consequences of gun use and gun violence. At the conclusion of the course, youth must sign a pledge not to use a gun illegally and to encourage their friends to avoid using guns. This incredibly cost-effective program has been highly successful and well-received

#### **The Problem or Need for the Program**

From 2016 to 2021, the Virginia Department of Health reports that deaths by firearm in Chesterfield County increased from 49 to 84 deaths. In 2022, Chesterfield had several widely reported shootings. Simultaneously, the judges of the 12<sup>th</sup> District CSU began to order youth to complete a gun safety course as a consequence of some firearms convictions. It became apparent that gun safety courses in the community were not readily available nor are they geared toward reducing violence.

With that history in mind, Chesterfield Juvenile Justice Services decided the best way to be sure a gun safety course met the court's intentions was to develop its own. The goals of the course are to reduce illegal use of weapons, increase knowledge of safety procedures, and provide resources to discourage future gun use and reduce gun-related violence.

#### **Description of the Program**

In 2022, the most recent year for which complete data is available, 48,830 people died from gun-related injuries in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) "That's about 132 people dying from a firearm-related injury each day." The CDC further found that gun violence was the leading cause of death among people ages 1 to 19. People coming before the courts on weapons-related charges in Chesterfield, like the rest of the country, increased during the pandemic. In some cases, the judges of the 12th District CSU had begun ordering youth to complete a gun safety course. In reviewing the gun safety course curricula, the professionals in Chesterfield Juvenile Justice Services were concerned that the courses varied widely in content and cost. For example, there was common emphasis on properly handling a gun but little emphasis on the consequences of firing it.

### **Chesterfield County, Virginia Gun Violence Prevention**



**I will never bring a gun to school;**  
*Nunca llevaré una arma de fuego a la escuela;*

**I will never use a gun to settle a personal problem or dispute;**  
*Nunca usaré una arma de fuego para resolver conflictos;*

**I will use my influence with my friends to keep them from using guns to settle disputes.**  
*Trataré de influir a mis amigos para que ellos tampoco usen armas para resolver conflictos.*

**My individual choices and actions, when multiplied by those of young people throughout the country, will make a difference. Together, by honoring this pledge we can reverse the violence and grow up in safety.**  
*Mis propias acciones y decisiones, cuando multiplicadas por las de los demás jóvenes en este país, tendrán un efecto. Juntos, viviendos las promesas de este contrato, podemos eliminar la violencia y sobrevivir en un futuro pacífico.*

Name/Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade/Edad: \_\_\_\_\_

School Name/Nombre de la escuela: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date/Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

In response, the county developed its own program. This program is based on Virginia Rules, a curriculum designed and maintained by the Virginia Attorney General's Office, with supplemental material provided by the Department of Behavioral Health Services. The format is a one-time group session for youth who are referred by the judges for gun-related offenses and their families. The Virginia Rules' portion of the session is presented by the Commonwealth's Attorney for Chesterfield County. Before and after the presentation, the participants are given a quiz with the goal being to improve their knowledge of gun-related laws after having participated in the session. After the laws are presented, a credible messenger engages youth in a discussion of the consequences of gun violence. The speakers may vary, but all are members of REAL LIFE RVA and the Virginia League for Safer Streets. These speakers share their lived experiences related to gun violence, and they do so in a way that is engaging and relatable, not in a "scared straight" manner.

Youth and their families are presented with resources provided by the Chesterfield County Department of Mental Health Services. These resources include gun locks and information about finding free gun lockers at any library branch in Chesterfield. Prior to dismissal, youth and families must sign a promise to keep guns safe and only use them legally (Pledge attached). The group is held at least quarterly in the Court Services Unit building and more frequently if warranted by referrals. The target audience for this program is youth who have weapons-related charges and/or who have been ordered to complete a gun safety course.

The inclusion of the Virginia Rules as well as the use of credible messengers is supported by research:

According to their website: "Virginia Rules is an educational program designed to help instructors, parents, and students understand the laws that apply to Virginia teens in their everyday lives." While credible messenger programs lack a robust research base, the evidence that does exist shows that these programs have the potential to reduce juvenile reoffending, including more serious or violent offenses, including gun offenses. The following research supports the use of credible messengers. N. Gonzalez et al., *Life Coaching and Employment and Education Support for Youth at Risk of Violence* (Mathematica, 2019); David Muhammad and Cait Ahearn, *Healthy, Wealthy, and Wise: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Transformative Credible Messenger Mentoring to Reduce Violence and Justice System Involvement* (National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform, 2023); Rod Martinez et al., "New York City's Wounded Healers: A Cross-Program, Participatory Action Research Study of Credible Messengers" (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2022), <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/opportunity/pdf/evidence/wounded-healers-finalreport-2022.pdf>; Julia Lesnick et al., "Credible Messenger Mentoring to Promote the Health of Youth Involved in the Juvenile Legal System: A Narrative Review," *Current Problems in Pediatric and Adolescent Health Care* 53, no. 6 (2023); Mathew Lynch et al., "Arches Transformative Mentoring Program An Implementation and Impact Evaluation in New York City" (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2018).

#### **Responding to Economic Downturn (optional) N/A**

#### **Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (optional)**

According to the CDC, firearm homicide rates are highest among Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Hispanic or Latino people. Additionally, in 2023, Black or African American people had

gun homicide rates that were 13 times higher than white persons (CDC website). Clearly, this is an issue that is devastating for the entire community but is more predominant in black and brown populations. In fact, every referral thus far in Chesterfield’s Gun Violence Prevention Group has been Black or Hispanic. Our goal is to stop this trend of increasing gun violence in our community which disproportionately affects minority populations.

**The Cost of the Program**

The Gun Violence Prevention Program requires no additional funding from Chesterfield County. The Directors of the Juvenile Justice Services, the Court Services Unit and the Adolescent Resource Pathways all provide administrative support and oversight. The Commonwealth Attorney’s Office provides speakers to present the Virginia Rules information regarding laws related to guns and gun violence. Credible messengers from the community offer their “testimony” and lead engagement sessions with the participants free of charge. The gun locks and information about free gun safes are provided by Chesterfield County Mental Health Support Services through a grant from the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and distributed free at every county library branch.

**The Results/Success of the Program**

The program began in July 2024 and has served 52 students as of January 2026. One student did not complete the group. Of the students completing the group, 100 % of participants have pledged:

*I will never bring a gun to school.*

*I will never use a gun to settle a personal problem or dispute.*

*I will use my influence with my friends to keep them from using guns to settle disputes.*

Further, 100% showed an improvement in knowledge about gun laws based on the pre/post-test based on the Virginia Rules (attached).

**Worthiness of Award**

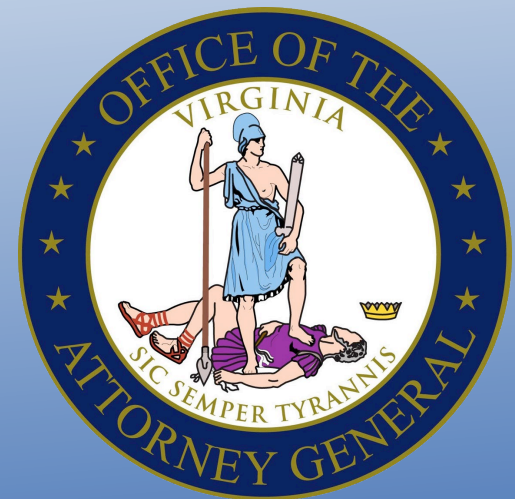
Chesterfield is passionate about the safety and well-being of its residents. Our youth are our future, and we are dedicated to investing in them. Other localities have gun reduction programs provided by paid professionals who may or may not live in the locality. We specifically designed this program to be delivered by our own community members and professionals working in our county. If one young person is saved by this program, it is worth every accolade!

**Supplemental Material (optional)**

Pledge

VA Rules

# Teens and Violence



TEENS AND VIOLENCE

# Lesson goal

To improve students' understanding of the impact of violence on young people, violent crimes and their consequences, and what teens can do to help prevent violence.

TEENS AND VIOLENCE

# Students will learn:

- how violence impacts young people
- how Virginia law defines violent crimes, and related penalties
- what teens can do to prevent violence

# Why should violence concern teens?

Young people commit a larger share of violent crimes and are more often the victims than those in other age groups.

- In 2020, there were 15,684 total violent-crime incidents and 18,136 offenses were reported to Virginia law enforcement agencies.
- Of the total 15,684 violent crime incidents in Virginia, 3,067 young people aged 10 to 19 were murdered in 2020. However, 2,704 young people aged 10-19 were the offenders.

(Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Crime Data Explorer, 2020).

## Why should violence concern teens, *cont.*

According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control:

- In 2019, homicide was the third leading cause of death for young people ages 10 to 24 years old in the United States.
- Among 10- to 24-year-olds, homicide is the leading cause of death for non-Hispanic Black or African American youth.
- In 2019, more than 1,000 young people were treated in emergency departments for physical assault-related injuries each day.

(See [https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/yv/YV-factsheet\\_2022.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/yv/YV-factsheet_2022.pdf)).

# Youth Violence Outcomes

According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, youth violence is linked to negative health and well-being outcomes and disproportionately impacts communities of color. Violence increases the risk for behavioral and mental health difficulties which include:

1. future violence perpetration,
2. future violence victimization,
3. Smoking,
4. substance abuse,

## Youth Violence Outcomes, *cont.*

1. obesity,
2. high-risk sexual behavior,
3. depression,
4. academic difficulties/school dropouts, and
5. suicide

## TEENS AND VIOLENCE

# Felonies

Felonies are classified into categories called **classes** for the purposes of sentencing

- Classes range from a **Class 1** Felony, which carries life imprisonment and a possible fine of \$100,000, to a **Class 6** Felony, which can result in a prison sentence of one to five years, or confinement in jail for up to 12 months, and a fine of up to \$2,500. (*Code of Virginia* §§ 18.2-9 and 18.2-10).

# Misdemeanors

Misdemeanors are also classified for the purpose of sentencing

- Classes range from a Class 1 Misdemeanor, which results in confinement to jail for not more than 12 months and/or a possible fine of not more than \$2,500, to a Class 4 Misdemeanor, which results in a fine of not more than \$250. (*Code of Virginia* § 18.2-11).

## TEENS AND VIOLENCE

# Homicide

- **Homicide:** Homicide is the killing of one human being by another.

Homicide offenses include murder and manslaughter. The difference between murder and manslaughter is malice, the intent to commit a wrongful act without justification or excuse. When malice is present, the killing is murder.

## TEENS AND VIOLENCE

# Murder

- **Murder:** Murder is the killing of a person and is typically classified as first-degree murder when it is willful, deliberate, and premeditated, and is a Class 2 felony.
- All other murder not defined as either aggravated murder or first-degree murder is second-degree murder, and is punishable by anywhere from five to 40 years in prison. (*Code of Virginia § 18.2-32*).

# Capital Offenses

- Some murders are considered so reprehensible that they are punishable by a sentence of death. These are known as **capital offenses**. In 2021, Virginia became the 23rd state that eliminated capital punishment, which means that offenders cannot be executed.

# Capital Offenses, *cont.*

## Capital Offenses, *cont.*

- Some examples of capital crimes include
  - killing a person for hire;
  - killing a law enforcement officer for purposes of interfering with his or her duties;
  - murder by a prisoner
  - multiple killings
  - murder arising from a drug distribution crime
  - murdering a person as an act of terrorism

# Aggravated Murder

## Aggravated Murder

- Aggravated murder is the willful, deliberate, and premeditated killing of a person (1) in the commission of abduction, robbery, rape, sodomy, (2) for hire, (3) by a prisoner, (4) killing of a law-enforcement officer, etc. (*Code of Virginia* § 18.2-31(A)).  
Aggravated murder is a **Class 1** felony punishable by no less than life in prison and a possible fine of not more than \$100,000.
- All other murder not defined as aggravated murder or first-degree murder is second-degree murder, and is punishable by anywhere from five to 40 years in prison. (*Code of Virginia* § 18.2-32).

## TEENS AND VIOLENCE

# Manslaughter

## Manslaughter

- Manslaughter is also the killing of one human being by another but is not premeditated.
- When someone unintentionally causes the death of another person, it is considered involuntary manslaughter. Voluntary manslaughter is a killing that is intentional but not premeditated, such as a killing committed during mutual combat or a killing committed after being provoked by the victim.

## TEENS AND VIOLENCE

# Firearms

- It is a felony to use or attempt to use any pistol, shotgun, rifle, or other firearm or display such weapon in a threatening manner while committing or attempting to commit any felony.
- This is punishable by mandatory imprisonment of three years for a first conviction and five years for a second or subsequent conviction.
- Also, it is a felony to intentionally discharge a firearm with a reckless disregard to human life, when this discharge results in a serious injury to another person.  
(*Code of Virginia* § 18.2-56.1 (A1))

TEENS AND VIOLENCE

# Most frequently occurring violent crimes

Violent crimes that occur most frequently are simple **assault**, **assault and battery**, and **threat**.

A simple assault, or assault and battery, is an unlawful physical touch by one person upon another. (*Code of Virginia* §18.2-57).

# Added penalties for assault & battery

- It is a **Class 1 misdemeanor** and hate crime to intentionally select a victim to commit a simple assault because of race, religious conviction, gender/gender identity/sexual orientation, disability, color, or national origin. Mandatory six months in jail.
- It is a **Class 6 felony** to **and hate crime** to intentionally select a victim because of race, religious conviction, gender/gender identity/sexual orientation, disability, color, or national origin if the assault results in bodily injury. Mandatory six months in jail.

## TEENS AND VIOLENCE

## Added penalties, *cont.*

- It is a **Class 6 felony** to commit an assault or assault and battery against a judge, law enforcement or correctional officer, firefighter, or rescue squad member engaged in the performance of his or her public duties. Mandatory six months in jail.
- It is a **Class 1 misdemeanor** to commit an assault or assault and battery against any full-time or part-time school employee engaged in the performance of his or her duties. Sentence of 15 days in jail, mandatory 2 days in jail. If the offense is committed by using a firearm or other weapon on school property, there is a mandatory six months in jail. (*Code of Virginia* § 18.2-57(A)-(D)).

# Stalking

- Stalking is defined as engaging in conduct, on more than one occasion, directed at another person with the intent to place that person or that person's family or household member in reasonable fear of death, criminal sexual assault, or bodily injury. This includes cyber-stalking (*Code of Virginia* § 18.2-60.3)
- Stalking actions are undesired, harassing, or threatening; they can be very blatant, such as making overt threats, or seem harmless, such as showing up repeatedly in someone's school parking lot.

TEENS AND VIOLENCE

## Stalking, *cont.*

- Stalking should be taken seriously because it can be the beginning of harmful, aggressive behavior toward a person.
- Stalking must also be immediately reported to law enforcement.

## Penalties for stalking

- If a person is convicted of a first offense for stalking, that person is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.
- When it has been shown that a person has been given notice of unwanted contact or following, there is sufficient evidence to prove that the person who unwantedly attempts to or actually contacts or follows an individual intended to place that individual in reasonable and objective fear that the person would cause that individual or that individual's family or household members in reasonable fear of death, criminal sexual assault, or bodily injury.  
(*Code of Virginia* § 18.2-60.3(A))

## Penalties for stalking, *cont.*

- If a person is convicted for a second offense of stalking committed within five years of the prior stalking conviction, the person is guilty of a Class 6 felony.  
(*Code of Virginia* § 18.2-60.3(B))
- When a person is found guilty of a stalking offense, in addition to imposing a sentence, the court issues a protective order prohibiting contact between the defendant and the victim or the victim's family or household member.  
(*Code of Virginia* § 18.2-60.3(D))

## TEENS AND VIOLENCE

# Threat

- In general, a threat is a communication threatening to kill or do bodily injury to another person or any member of that person's family, when that communication places the other person in reasonable fear of death or bodily injury to himself or herself or his or her family. (*Code of Virginia* § 18.2-60). Threats can be written or verbal.
- If the threat is written, the person is guilty of a **Class 6** felony.
- If a written threat is made on school premises, at a school-sponsored event, or on a school bus, it is a **Class 6** felony, even if the person who is the target of the threat doesn't receive the threat. (*Code of Virginia* §18.2-60(A) (2))

## Threat, *cont.*

### Verbal Threats

- A verbal threat to kill or do bodily injury to (1) any school employee while on school property, at a school-sponsored activity, or while on a school bus; or (2) any healthcare provider, is a **Class 1** misdemeanor. (*Code of Virginia* § 18.2-60(B)).
- In addition, any verbal threats, or the use of obscene or indecent language with the intent to coerce, intimidate, or harass another person, made using a telephone or a citizens band radio, is a **Class 1** misdemeanor. (*Code of Virginia* § 18.2-427).

TEENS AND VIOLENCE

## Threat, *cont.*

- Any spoken threats, or the use of obscene or indecent language with the intent to coerce, intimidate, or harass another person, made using a telephone, constitute a **Class 1** misdemeanor.

*(Code of Virginia § 18.2-427)*

## TEENS AND VIOLENCE

# Robbery with assault

It is a felony to commit robbery by:

- causing serious bodily injury or death of a person (**Class 2** felony)
- using or displaying a firearm in a threatening manner (**Class 3** felony)
- using physical force that does not result in serious bodily injury or displaying a deadly weapon that is not a firearm in a threatening manner (**Class 5** felony)
- using threat or intimidation or other means not involving a deadly weapon (**Class 6** felony)
- The range of punishment for committing robbery with assault is imprisonment for life to any term not less than one year. (*Code of Virginia* § 18.2-58(B)).

## TEENS AND VIOLENCE

# Abduction

It is a **Class 5** felony to seize, take, transport, detain, or secrete another person by force, intimidation, or deception, and without legal justification or excuse, with the intent to deprive such other person of his or her personal liberty or to withhold or conceal him or her from any person, authority, or institution lawfully entitled to his or her charge.

*(Code of Virginia § 18.2-47)*

- This is a **Class 1** misdemeanor if committed by a parent or guardian.
- This is a **Class 6** felony if committed by a parent and if the child is removed from the Commonwealth of Virginia.

# What teens can do about violence

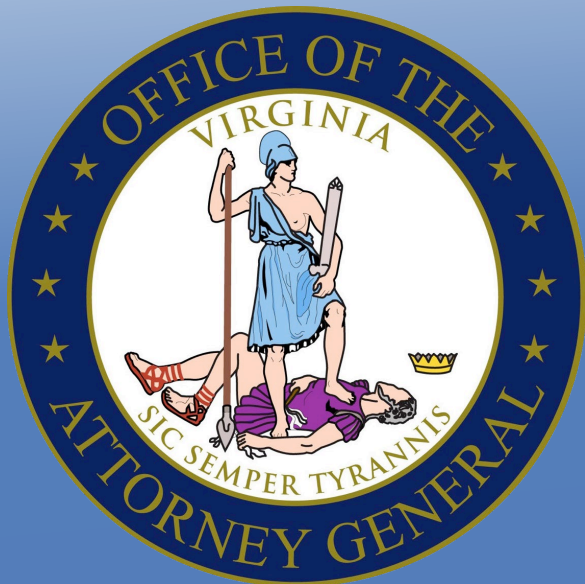
- Make a commitment not to contribute to violence in any way.
- Get positively involved in your school and community.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Learn about ways to resolve arguments and fights without violence, and encourage your friends to do the same.
- If someone is threatening you and you feel that you are in serious danger, do not take matters into your own hands.
- If you know someone is planning to harm someone else, report him or her.
- Take initiative to make your school or community safer.

TEENS AND VIOLENCE

# Review and recap

You have learned:

- How violence impacts young people.
- About Virginia laws defining violent crimes and related penalties.
- What teens can do to prevent violence.



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For more information about Virginia laws that affect  
teens, visit [virginiarules.org](http://virginiarules.org)