

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

WHY CPTED?

Community violence generally happens outside the home in public spaces. Most community violence involves a relatively small number of people as victims or perpetrators, but its effects impact entire communities, eroding public health, causing economic disruptions, and contributing to lasting individual and community traumas. Community violence intervention strategies often focus on the individuals who commit violence, but another key strategy is to disrupt the public spaces where violence most commonly occurs. CPTED offers a method to analyze such places and identify physical interventions to make them safer, often a more effective and sustainable approach than pursuing individuals. When done right, CPTED strategies rely on local community members to guide the efforts. CPTED strategies can also counteract overpolicing and unnecessary arrests by reducing calls for service and law enforcement attention to public spaces.

WHAT IS CPTED?

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a crime prevention strategy that considers how the design of the physical environment, including buildings or spaces in a community, can minimize opportunities for crime to occur in specific places.

In practice, CPTED principles can be used to make spaces more clearly visible and more inviting to a wide range of users, activating spaces and encouraging legitimate uses. It can also be used to define privately controlled areas, reclaim vacant or deteriorated spaces for community use, and ensure that the community appears clean, orderly and well-maintained. These activities convey a sense of pride and ownership, discourage trespass, and make spaces less conducive to illicit activity. CPTED can help communities turn liabilities into assets, but it must be used with care. The use of CPTED principles should not make residents themselves unwelcome in their community's spaces.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

CPTED IS BASED ON FOUR CORE PRINCIPLES:

- **NATURAL SURVEILLANCE:** Design features that increase visibility within and between areas so people moving through spaces in the community can see and be seen. Related strategies include: clearing overgrown vegetation that obstructs sightlines, installing or improving lighting, and designing buildings so their entryways can be seen from the street.
- **NATURAL ACCESS CONTROL:** Visual demarcation of public and private space to suggest that an area is controlled and discourage trespass. Related strategies include installing fences and landscaping. These can be symbolic rather than actual barriers, such as flower beds, low hedges and unlocked, ornamental fences.
- **TERRITORIAL REINFORCEMENT:** Design elements that extend the visual sphere of influence and conveys that property is owned and cared for and is not conducive to criminal or nuisance activity. Related strategies include: converting vacant lots into public space such as parks and gardens and neighborhood branding and identity-building design elements like special pavement treatments. Territorial reinforcement can also be achieved through activities like holding events in parks and public spaces to bring more life and vibrancy to the area.
- **MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT:** Regular caretaking that sends a message that disorder is not tolerated. Related strategies include: clean-up and board-up of vacant properties, neighborhood trash clean-ups, and beautification efforts like planting flowers and installing public art.





CPTED principles offer useful ways to make communities safer for their residents. Communities around the world have incorporated these principles into their crime prevention efforts successfully. But they must be designed and carried out thoughtfully so their application does not reinforce racist systems and structures. CPTED is too often used to criminalize the behaviors and the very existence of BIPOC people. Done right, however, CPTED is as much about engaging residents and helping communities to flourish as about physical changes to space.



CPTED WORKS BEST WHEN PLANNERS:

1. rely on **residents as leaders** of the process;
2. incorporate CPTED as **part of a** more comprehensive and inclusive **revitalization strategy**;
3. **use a range of data** to determine where to focus and identify the most appropriate interventions; and
4. work in **partnership with community-based groups** representing residents, property owners, and local government.

DOs & DON'Ts

Tips for using CPTED effectively and fairly

DO center community members' experience, knowledge and desires in the CPTED planning process. Residents are best suited to know how spaces in their community are used, who is using them, and what their needs are. A community-led process will help guide the application of CPTED principles in ways that aren't oppressive.

DO focus on how these principles can develop community assets and activate community spaces. Design that encourages community members to gather and enliven spaces like gardens and parks will naturally bring more life and more visibility and vibrancy that discourages unsafe activity.

DO create events and opportunities for residents and community members to gather and know one another. Social cohesion is a key factor in community safety and stability.

DON'T use CPTED principles to foster a mindset in which every passer-by is suspicious. Use care in thinking about the natural surveillance principle and don't use it to justify harassment.

DON'T create fortress-like developments that emphasize the concept of defensible space in a literal way and render space uninviting or unusable to the people who live there. The point of Defensible Space theory is not to wall everything off, but to use subtle visual cues to demarcate public and private space.

DON'T foster a perception that newly renovated or designed spaces are "off-limits" or not intended for neighborhood residents' use. Community spaces need to be *for* residents, not protected *from* residents.

DO ensure that the goal of your process is to truly help community members be and feel safer, not just to make it easier for police to arrest people.

DO consider equitable distribution of resources and making sure when there are resources to do projects like this, they are distributed equitably thru the project and not just to one group or one neighborhood.

DO respect the social contract. The greatest defense against crime and disorder is a vibrant, engaged community. The space in which people live has a profound impact on how life is lived there. Focus on the community impact of your strategies, not just the individual property or action. For example, placing spikes on a bench might keep people from sleeping on the bench, but it does not solve the underlying issue of homelessness.

DO think about how small changes to space can have beneficial impacts on community. Subtle visual cues such as different paving patterns can encourage travel in one direction or area and discourage it in others. Basic cleanup and greening in vacant lots has been shown to reduce crime in and around them.

DON'T confuse CTPED principles for the tools that are commonly used to implement them. Creating common space that is sterile and floodlit is not the same as natural surveillance, for example. Lighting is a tool that can be used to impact it, but there are less literal and more equitable ways to achieve it. Those also often end up being more effective.

DON'T rely on only one voice or one set of voices in your community engagement process. Ensure that BIPOC and longstanding members of the community are at the table as well as both owners and users of space, not just developers or new residents

DON'T overlook the fact that legitimate uses of space and activities that are legal can sometimes be perceived as disorder. Engaging a wide range of neighborhood voices in the planning process can prevent missteps that might occur when only outside, “expert” voices are listened to. These include eliminating natural gathering spaces for neighbors or blocking access to pathways resident use to travel throughout the neighborhood.

DON'T believe that “broken windows” is all there is to CPTED. Fixing broken windows and removing graffiti in the New York City subway accompanied a profound change in safety, but people do not live in the subway. Over-policing broken windows while simultaneously neglecting the social aspects of community life will result in sterile, lifeless spaces that are not safer for neighborhood residents.

Examples

5 WAYS LOCAL COMMUNITIES HAVE USED CPTED PRINCIPLES

CPTED activities can range from very small investments to parts of large-scale, comprehensive revitalization plans. Here are examples of how four communities used CPTED to improve surroundings for residents.

1. Neighbors in the Newhallville community of [New Haven, Connecticut](#) helped transform a notorious drug market into a neighborhood gem by planting a pollinator garden, installing better lighting and pedestrian pathway improvements.
2. In [Providence](#), a community-based nonprofit developed new affordable housing on vacant land overlooking a once-deserted public park. The reclaimed park, with a playground and multi-use path, is now an integral part of the neighborhood.
3. Partners in [San Antonio](#) cleaned up vacant lots that were attracting illicit activity and converted them to community space with the installation of gardens, a mural, new fencing, better lighting and changes in pedestrian access.
4. Partners in [Brooklyn](#) engaged neighborhood youth to design and program a community space in an abandoned lot. The young people led an effort to clean up the area, transform it with artwork, and establish the Marcus Garvey Youth Clubhouse. The Clubhouse engages young people living in the nearby Marcus Garvey Apartments in public art and community projects.
5. In [Philadelphia](#), the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's LandCare program helps "clean and green" vacant lots to create community green space and discourage unwanted activity.

Additional Resources

[Primer in CPTED](#) from the International Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Association

[Using CPTED in Problem Solving](#), a free downloadable publication from the U.S. Department of Justice Community-Oriented Policing Services (COPS) office

The [SafeGrowth](#) website, which includes video tutorials, podcasts and training opportunities on using CPTED-style principles in "21st century cities."

The [CITYGrip portal](#) includes information on the basics, benefits and common pitfalls of CPTED.