

Stick Talk DO WE DARE LOVE THE SHOOTERS?

9 PRINCIPLES OF FIREARM HARM REDUCTION

STICK TALK IS CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS, POLITICAL EDUCATION, AND SKILL ACQUISITION ABOUT GUNS DESIGNED WITH AND FOR YOUNG BLACK AND LATINX PEOPLE WHO CARRY THEM.

ALL DE-IDENTIFIED QUOTES ARE FROM YOUNG BLACK AND LATINX PEOPLE FROM POOR AND WORKING-CLASS NEIGHBORHOODS WHO ROUTINELY CARRY GUNS FOR PROTECTION; WHO ARE OFTEN BOTH AUTHORS AND SURVIVORS OF GUN-RELATED HARMS; AND WHO ARE EXCLUDED FROM DECISION-MAKING THAT DIRECTLY AFFECTS THEIR LIVES AND NEIGHBORHOODS.

1. Build on the lived experiences, critical consciousness, leadership, and instincts for individual and community safety of those who are at greatest risk of exposure to lethal violence.

2. Respond to communities where Black and Latinx people illicitly possess and use firearms with the same open-heartedness and empathy that is usually reserved for communities where white people illicitly possess and use opioids.

Nationally, the opioid epidemic claims white lives at nearly the same rate (78%) that the urban gun violence epidemic claims Black lives in Chicago (80%). But while white poor and working-class people who have easy access to illicit opioids are met with decriminalized needle exchanges and methadone clinics, Black poor and working-class people who have easy access to illicit firearms are met with heightened criminalization and surveillance.

"WE LIVE IN A PLACE WHERE WE ALL STRAPPED."

"I STRAP UP EVERY MORNING - BRUSH MY TEETH, GET DRESSED, GRAB MY HEATER. I GOT TO, I CAN'T LEAVE THE HOUSE WITHOUT IT. OUT HERE IT'S EITHER SHOOT OR BE SHOT."

3. For young Black and Latinx people, carrying a gun for protection is a rational response to the state's refusal to keep them safe.

The systems that serve and protect white civil society do not serve or protect young Black and Latinx people; their distrust and hatred of the police is inherited and continually renewed. The sense of safety that a firearm offers far outweighs the legal consequences of possession.

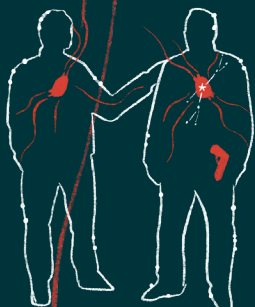
4. Among young people who have grown up chronically exposed to community and police violence, illicit firearm use and illicit opioid use co-occur and interact. Chronic exposure to violence during childhood can produce two contrasting stress responses in adolescents and young adults: fight-or-flight and dissociation. Illicit gun users often express both behaviors: they move through the world in a sustained state of hypervigilance, constantly looking over their shoulders, while concurrently self-medicating with opioids to numb themselves to grief, anxiety, guilt, anger, dread, and paranoia.

"WE BEEN GETTING SHOT AT, OUR HOMIES BEEN GETTING KILLED IN THE STREETS ALL AROUND US. WE ALL GOT TRAUMA AROUND GUNS."

5. In neighborhoods where everybody got guns, both the bipartisan criminalization of firearm possession and abstinence-only gun education fail to make people safer.

Conservative approaches to urban gun violence that expand policing and surveillance work in concert with liberal gun control

"I GOT PROGRAMMED, GROWING UP IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD. WE CAN'T 'TURN THE OTHER CHEEK.'"



policies like stringent age restrictions and sentencing enhancements. Both processes of criminalization disproportionately target and incarcerate poor and working-class people of color, particularly Black men with felony records. Meanwhile, non-profit professionals and providers' insistence that illicit gun users put down the weapons – which they carry for protection – in order to receive resources and support is dangerous and unethical.

"DID MY ANCESTORS
HAVE GUNS?"



6. Integral to the work of preventing the premature deaths of young Black and Latinx people is reducing their exposure to the police.

As Mariame Kaba explains, "The only way to diminish police violence is to reduce contact between the public and the police." And harm reduction interventions have improved public health and community safety outcomes by securing decriminalized spaces. In international urban contexts, for example, safe consumption sites provide an unhurried, non-compulsory, and non-judgmental environment in which drug users can use their pre-obtained illicit drugs and learn practices to minimize the risks they face without being policed or surveilled.

"I'D LIKE TO KNOW HOW DID ALL THESE
GUNS GET INTO MY COMMUNITY. WHERE
ARE THEY COMING FROM?"

7. Invite illicit gun users to learn about the weapons they routinely carry, lay claim to the resources they need, and develop strategies to make their neighborhoods healthier and more peaceful even if they are not interested in putting the guns down.

Structure critical conversations, political education, and skill-building opportunities that avow the easy availability of illicit firearms and are inclusive of those who use them.

"HOW DO I STORE MY PIECE? I
WORRY ABOUT MY BABY SISTER FINDING IT
WHENEVER IT'S AT THE HOUSE"

8. Vitalize community-controlled responses to gun-related conflicts and harms by making places where illicit firearm possession is not criminalized or stigmatized as immoral.

"WE TRYING TO MAKE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT GUNS
ACCESSIBLE SO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU CAPABLE OF,
AND KNOW THE POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY WE
HAVE WITH GUNS."

without fear of interaction with the police – to mourn loved ones who have been shot; cultivate a shared analysis of gun violence; and devise strategies for community safety and collective care.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore: "A geographical imperative lies at the heart of every struggle for social justice; if justice is embodied, it is then therefore always spatial, which is to say, part of a process of making a place." Establish neighborhood-based sites where illicit gun users can gather with elders, mothers, and formerly incarcerated people – and

"WE NEED DECRIMINALIZED SPACES WHERE WE CAN
TALK ABOUT THESE ISSUES SAFELY AND COME TO
TERMS WITH THE GUNS IN OUR REALITY."



9. De-police and de-professionalize: the problem is less the amount of gun-related conflicts than the overabundance of professionals employed to manage them.

There are too many credentialed specialists working the crisis: punishing, studying, diagnosing, representing, rehabilitating, providing services to, and writing grants about those who are intimately affected by urban gun violence. To honor community self-determination and to clear the ground for the emergence of multigenerational, local leadership, the police are not the only ones who must be dislodged from Black and Latinx neighborhoods. Instead of doing their jobs to maintain their positions and their organizations, uninvited professionals of all stripes must practice relinquishing authority, resources, and expertise.

