

Gangs



What are youth gangs?

A youth gang is a group of people who get together on a regular basis to carry out violent, illegal, or anti-social activities, including intimidation, assault, vandalism, burglary and murder.

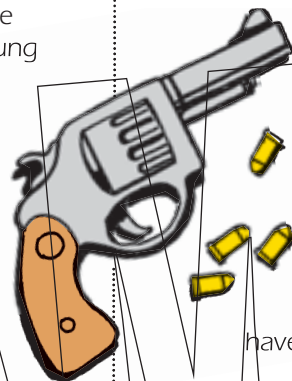
Gang members come from all races and social classes. They can be male or female, starting as young as 7-years-old.

Each gang has a name, a shared form of identification, such as clothing, hand signs, alphabets and other graffiti, and a particular turf or territory.

What is gang graffiti?

Spray painting graffiti or "tagging" is one of the main ways that gangs communicate. Graffiti is the gang's newspaper, a way to spread information about meetings, drug dealing and turf locations. Graffiti and other gang-related vandalism destroy neighborhoods and cause damage that is a financial burden to everyone. Graffiti also disrespects other gangs, provoking violent fights that threaten innocent people.

Why do young people join gangs?



Many young people are unaware of the dangers involved with gangs. They may not know how much their future can be affected by missing school, abusing drugs and having a criminal record. Many young people are never discouraged from joining a gang. Once they're a member, they feel unable to leave. Young people involved with gangs need parents, caregivers and other concerned adults to recognize this and help them find a safe way out.

Gangs give young people an identity, a sense of power, and a feeling that they belong to a family. Many young people are pressured into joining a gang, especially when they have a skill the gang needs.

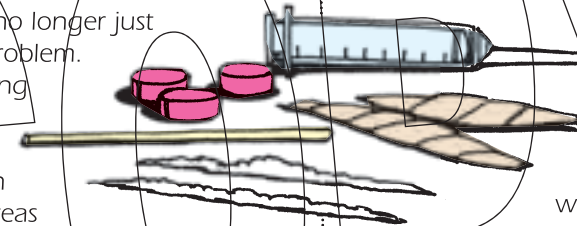
are luring away our children with false promises of safety and protection.

Gangs offer a deceptive sense of family and belonging. Young people don't realize that the relationship comes with a price...until it's too late. Forced to commit violent and illegal acts, they put themselves at risk of imprisonment and death.

Why should we be concerned?

Gangs are no longer just an urban problem. Because gang activity is spreading to suburban and rural areas across the country, everyone is at risk. Gangs often move around in order to recruit new members and increase their turf. Although gangs primarily victimize each other, anyone can be the victim of a gang-related carjacking or drive-by shooting.

Gang members contribute to the growing drug epidemic by using and selling illegal drugs, such as alcohol and cocaine.



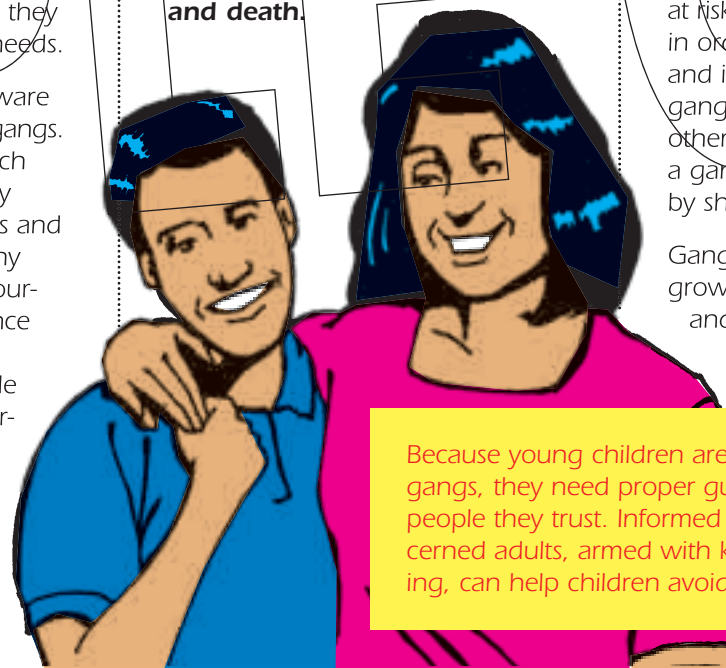
What can parents do?

Listening and asking questions are the most important things a parent can do to keep their children out of gangs. Ask your children what they know about local gangs, and listen to their concerns. Let them offer suggestions for avoiding gangs and resisting pressure to join.

Be a positive role model. Encourage participation in healthy activities that will build self-esteem. Establish firm rules and follow through when those rules are broken. Stress the importance of a good education, and help your children set reasonable goals. Praise your children when they succeed and offer support, not criticism, when they fail.

Meet with teachers to discuss your children's progress or problems. Teachers can give good insight to changes in your children's behavior and choice of friends. Join a parent support group and share information on gang and drug abuse prevention. Invite local businesses, community agencies, students and local law enforcement to meet with schools and parents.

Because young children are especially vulnerable to gangs, they need proper guidance and support from people they trust. Informed parents, caregivers and concerned adults, armed with knowledge and understanding, can help children avoid this deadly lifestyle.

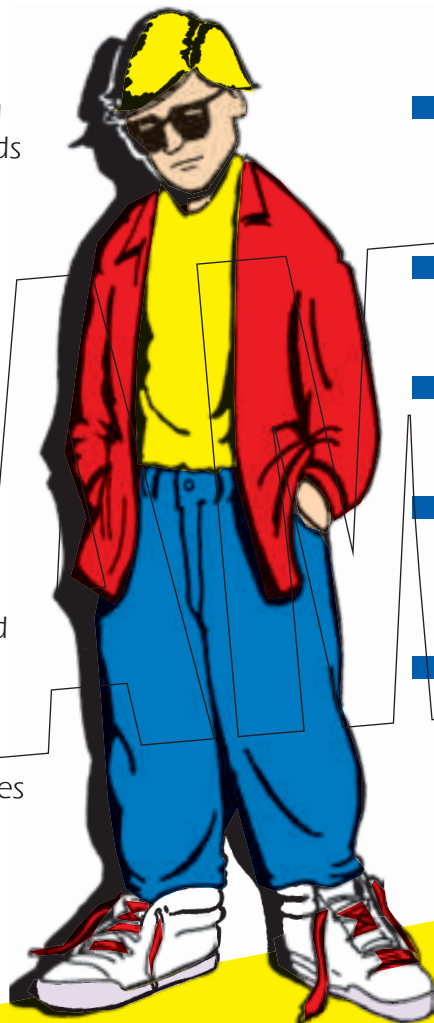


What are the

Signs

of gang involvement?

- Hanging out with a new group of friends
- Showing a change in personality or behavior
- Abusing alcohol or other drugs
- Frequently bruised or injured
- Using unusual hand signs, nicknames or street language
- Carrying guns, knives or other weapons



- Writing strange symbols (graffiti) on notebooks and folders
- Withdrawing from family members or friends
- Having trouble at school with grades or discipline
- Obtaining money and valuables without your knowledge
- Wearing tattoos, jewelry, hairstyles, or clothing that identify a particular gang

If you suspect that your child is involved in gangs, contact the school or your local law enforcement agency immediately. Early intervention is essential.

Gangs Impact the Entire Community – Be a Part of the Solution!

- Learn to identify the signs of gang activity.
- Give children the love and attention they deserve.
- Provide youth with positive alternatives to gang involvement.
- Work with law enforcement and other concerned citizens in gang prevention efforts.
- Project a clear message that gangs will not be tolerated in your community.

HOW TO TELL IF A KID IS IN A

Gang

AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT.

SKILL BUILDER



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