

WHAT IS A GANG?

A gang is a group of people who claim a territory and use that territory to make money through illegal activities, like selling drugs. Gangs can be organized by race, ethnicity, or the type of crimes they commit. They almost always have a street presence, meaning that they are visible members of the community.

HOW DO YOU TELL IF SOMEONE IS IN A GANG?

Some people think that you can recognize a gang member just by the way they look. This isn't true. While some gang members might identify themselves with certain types of colors or clothing, others may not wear anything that shows a gang affiliation. Gang members can be male, female, white, black, Native American, Asian, or Hispanic. It's not what a gang looks like that makes them a gang – it's what they do.

IF SOMEONE YOU KNOW HAS JOINED A GANG, THEY MIGHT START:

- Hanging out with a new group of friends and isolating themselves from their family and other friends.
- Behaving differently than they normally do. This could include being more aggressive or confrontational. They might stop participating

in activities that they used to enjoy.

- Carrying weapons.
- Using a new nickname.
- Getting tattoos of gang symbols or signs.
- Wearing clothing or jewelry that identifies a particular gang.
- Using hand signals or unfamiliar words when talking with friends.
- Disrespecting authority figures, including parents, teachers, and law enforcement officers.

WHY DO PEOPLE JOIN GANGS?

Too often people join gangs because of the myths surrounding gangs, not the facts behind gangs. And without the facts, they aren't getting the whole picture.



IT'S NOT WHAT A GANG LOOKS LIKE THAT MAKES THEM A GANG – IT'S WHAT THEY DO.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Go to www.intheknowzone.com for more information on substance abuse. Increase your knowledge using the information, statistics, images, and links. Test your understanding with a quick quiz.

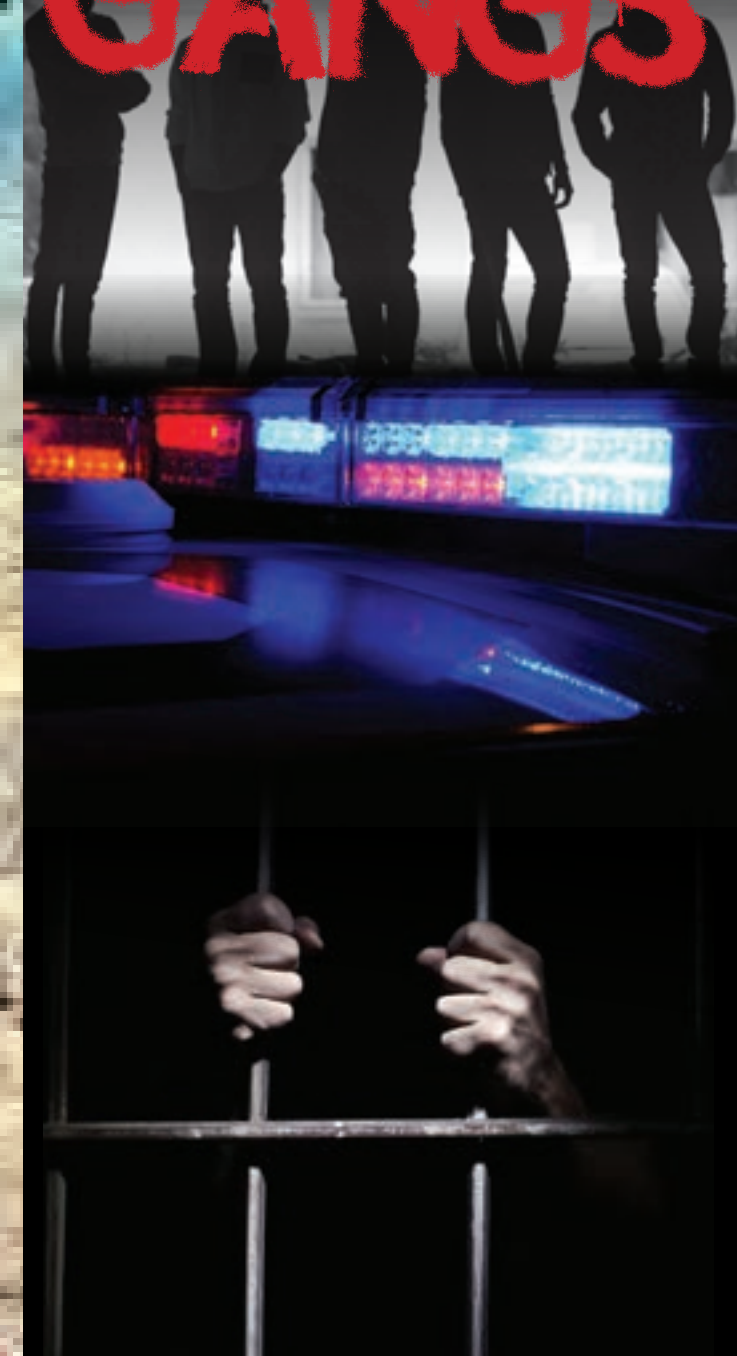
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THE FACTS ABOUT

GANGS



MYTH #1

A gang is just like any other club, where you can belong and feel accepted.

FACT

You can be accepted into a gang, but not without first going through some sort of initiation. Gang initiation usually involves committing some type of crime. It could be burglary, assault, or murder. Sometimes, new members even have to be beaten up by all the other gang members. With initiation, you'll also have to stop hanging out with or dating people outside of the gang. You will make friends with fellow gang members. But more importantly, you'll make lots of enemies – all the members of rival gangs.

MYTH #2

I'll become rich, powerful, and respected if I join a gang.

FACT

Most gang members don't make much money from gang activities. Money that comes from illegal activities is usually given to higher-ranking gang members. These members are also the ones who have the most "power" within the gang. Of course, the richest and most powerful gang members are those who have been in the gang the longest. They are also more likely to end up doing time.

In gangs, respect really means fear. You'll have to commit crimes as a way to make other gang members fear you. If you fail to maintain your dangerous persona, you won't be "respected" anymore and you'll lose any sort of acceptance you felt you had.

MYTH #3

I will be safer because my gang will protect me.

FACT

Once you join a gang, you become a target for rival gang members. This means you're more likely to be injured or killed because of your affiliation. Rival gangs can make it unsafe to leave your neighborhood and there might even be rival members at your school. Gang violence can happen anywhere, anytime – so gang members have to constantly be on alert in order to protect their lives.

MYTH #4

This neighborhood is so boring, there's nothing better to do than join a gang.



FACT

While it might seem that a neighborhood doesn't offer any other options to keep busy, the truth is that communities frequently have many different activities. Libraries, swimming pools, and youth sports programs are often available. You can also start a new hobby or volunteer in your community. All of these are much safer alternatives to joining a gang.

MYTH #5

A gang is just like a family.

FACT

If families forced people to commit crimes for love and respect, then maybe this myth would be true. Real families love and accept you for who you are – they don't use you for their own personal gain. Gangs have rules and discipline just like families. But the repercussions from breaking a gang rule is likely to be far more severe than what you'd face from breaking a family rule.

MYTH #6

Leaving a gang is easy.

FACT

Gangs don't want to lose their members, so they might resort to threats or violence to keep you from leaving. They could even target your family. Rival gang members

won't care if you left the gang, only that you were part of it at one point. When you leave a gang, you might have to leave your community in order to be safe.

Leaving a gang is difficult, but not impossible. You can get help when you decide to leave the gang life.



MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICES!

- Don't be afraid to use your common sense and think for yourself.
- Stay away from people who pressure you or make you feel uncomfortable.
- Avoid known gang members and places where gangs hang out.
- If a gang asks you to join, say "no." Be polite but firm and get help from an adult if they won't take no for an answer.
- Talk things out when you have a problem.
- Let a trusted adult know if you see kids with drugs or weapons.
- Value the person you are and believe in yourself.

initiation

rival gangs

violence