



GANG PREVENTION TIPS FOR PARENTS

WHY DO KIDS JOIN GANGS?

Young people (as young as nine or ten) join gangs for reasons that make sense to them, if not to adults. The reasons they give vary...

- to belong to a group
- for excitement
- for protection
- to earn money
- to be with friends

SOME SIGNS OF GANG INVOLVEMENT:

- specific colors or emblems on jackets, hats, etc.
- special hand signals
- unique symbols and lettering on tattoos
- gang symbols such as graffiti on walls, books or clothing
- clothing (hats, bandanas, etc.) suggesting group or gang involvement
- possession of unexplained or large sums of money
- changes in attitude, violent reactions, disruptive behavior, refusal to respond to authority (teachers, police, parents) etc.
- secretive behavior by your child regarding activities and locations
- changes in friends or friends who are not brought home
- truancy or poor school performance
- phone calls from individuals who either refuse to identify themselves, give unusual nicknames, or use a nickname to identify your child
- negative contact with school officials and law enforcement officers
- involvement with known or suspected gang members
- interest in or possession of weapons (guns, knives, etc.)

SHARPEN YOUR SKILLS AS A PARENT

Many gang members say they join gangs because it offers them a feeling of support, caring, belonging, and a sense of purpose--all the things typically provided by parents. Odds are the better you are at providing these needs, the less attraction your child will find in gang membership. Parenting skills are especially important.

- Talk with and listen to your child. Schedule quality and quantity time with each child.
- Place a high value on education and help your child to do his or her best in school. Do everything possible to prevent your son or daughter from dropping out of school. Take an active interest in education and grades.
- Help your child identify positive role models and heroes, especially people in your neighborhood.
- Do not be a “*Do as I say, not as I do!*” kind of parent.
- Do everything possible to involve your child in supervised, positive group activities.
- Praise your son or daughter for doing well, and encourage him or her to fully develop their skills.
- Know your child’s friends and their families.
- Don’t forget to talk about gangs. The best time is before there is a major problem.

Tell your child that...

- you disapprove of gangs
- you see him or her as special and worth protecting
- you don’t want to see him or her hurt or arrested
- you want to help with his or her problems
- family members shouldn’t keep secrets from each other
- you and other parents are working together against gangs

FOUR THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP KEEP GANGS OUT

- 1) Develop positive alternatives. What activities currently exist for after-school involvement? What can you do to support them? What recreational facilities exist for young people? Support positive youth-related activities, such as sports, scouting, social clubs, church groups, and after-school programs.
- 2) Support anti-crime programs such as crime and delinquency programs that discourage gang involvement. Invite efforts in your community to combat graffiti and vandalism. Keep your community pleasant, neat and well cared for.
- 3) Work with your local police and start or join a Neighborhood Watch Program. Statistics show that an active Neighborhood Watch Program deters crime. Is suspicious activity reported to police in your neighborhood or does it go unreported? Do you report suspicious groups and activity that you observe?
- 4) Take a zero tolerance stand on any gang related activity and share your views whenever and wherever appropriate.