

Stay informed, involved, and aware. Help your children choose to refuse gang membership by becoming more involved in their lives, by building their self-esteem at home, and by working to combat the gang problem in your community. See other side for more tips as well as SIGNS OF POSSIBLE GANG INVOLVEMENT and HOW TO PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN.

Many experts (and kids themselves) believe the gang problem is growing, with gangs networking across the U.S.A. rather than being confined to certain communities as in the past. And older gang members recruit younger ones to do their criminal acts, including drug trafficking and shootings. The average age of a shooter in a street gang is now 9-11 years old.

Gangs often have guns and drugs, exposing kids to the dangers of both. Members can be seriously hurt or killed during gang fights or criminal acts. Gang membership can also hamper education, since schools are viewed negatively by gangs. Extensive police records limit future employment opportunities. Families of gang members also face danger for their own safety from feuding gang members.

Among the risk factors are: a) lack of adequate community youth support systems and too much unsupervised time, b) poverty, c) lack of self-worth, d) poor decision-making and communication skills, e) domestic violence at home, f) media that glorifies violence, g) parent denial of a gang problem. Gang membership could also be considered a form of survival, if living in a gang-infested community.

Kids join for many reasons, and each case is individual. However, reasons include: excitement and fun, a sense of belonging, companionship, peer pressure, attention or status, financial gain, intimidation, protection, and a failure to realize what being in a gang means. Living in a gang-infested area or having a family member in a gang increases the possibility of a kid joining one.

Gang members generally range in age from 13-21 years old, but can be as young as 9 years old. Those who join gangs often have low self-esteem, feel unloved at home, do poorly in school, and have a hard time making decisions and communicating with others. Many come from single-parent homes. Most gang members are boys, but 10% of all gang members are girls and the number is growing.

Gangs are groups of people who form an allegiance for a common purpose and commit violent, unlawful or criminal activities. Today's street gangs may claim control over a certain territory in their community, and create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation there. Gangs are often involved with narcotics, which bring them a profit.

SOME COMMON GANG SLANG WORDS

GANG BANGER: An active gang member
HOME BOY or HOME GIRL : Gang member
JUMP IN: Gang initiation
NUT UP: Angry
OG: Original gang member
PACKING: Gang member with gun
RAG: Color of a gang
SHOOTER: A gang member who uses a gun
TAGGER: Someone who uses graffiti
WANNABE: Youngster who wants to be a gang member

PULL

WHAT ARE
GANGS?

WHO
JOINS
GANGS?

WHY DO
KIDS JOIN
GANGS?

WHAT RISK
FACTORS
LEAD TO GANG
MEMBERSHIP?

WHAT ARE
THE DANGERS
OF BEING IN A
GANG?

HOW BIG
IS THE
PROBLEM?

HOW CAN
YOU HELP?

FACTS TO KNOW

LOUDOUN COUNTY JUVENILE COURT SERVICE UNIT

18 East Market St.
Leesburg, Virginia 20176
(703) 777-0303

Many parents refuse to recognize their children's gang involvement until it is too late. Be alert to signs of possible gang membership. See **SIGNS OF POSSIBLE GANG INVOLVEMENT** on the back of this guide.

Develop an anti-gang environment at home. Don't let children dress in gang-style clothing. Read articles to children about gangs and help them see the natural consequences of actions.

Set a good example. Deal with anger in a healthy way, so children learn from you. Limit your intake of alcohol, and don't do other drugs. If you have a problem with drugs, get help. If necessary, work on your own self-esteem or anger control. Keep stress manageable.

Encourage children to be involved in athletics and other health-oriented group activities so they can gain a sense of belonging that way. Take elementary students to college/high school games to promote an interest in sports. Host gang-free parties for children old enough for them.

Children on the average see 8,000 murders on TV by the time they are ten years old. Watching violence on TV makes viewers become insensitive to it. Music and video games also glorify violence. Know what your children are seeing, hearing, and playing. Say no to violent media.

Help children develop respect for each other's property and pride in their community. Give them responsibility at home and reward them for a job well done. Teach them to set positive goals for themselves, to hold high standards, and to prepare for a positive future.

Don't let children stay out late or spend a lot of unsupervised time in the streets. (Most gang members start with curfew violations.) Don't allow children to write gang names, symbols or any other gang graffiti on their books, papers, clothes, bodies, walls or any other place.

Plan activities the whole family can enjoy. Expose children to different places outside of your neighborhood, such as parks, museums, the beach, and the mountains. Let children know you want to be with them.

Develop open, frequent communication with your children. Be positive, allow your children to come to you to discuss any topic or problem. Tell your children that you love them. Allow them to express themselves.

Know who your children are hanging out with and how they and your children spend their free time. If children choose friends that are mostly from gangs, they are probably involved or will become involved in gangs, too.

Become active in your children's education and in your community. Organize or join neighborhood watch groups. Discourage gangs from hanging around your area. When incidents occur (i.e.: vandalism, loitering and drug activity) report them to law enforcement officials at once.

Find out about gang and drug activity in your community. Learn how gang members dress, speak, and behave. Attend informational meetings and read articles related to gang activity.

PULL

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

BECOME INFORMED

GET INVOLVED

KNOW YOUR CHILDREN'S FRIENDS

COMMUNICATE

SPEND TIME TOGETHER

SET LIMITS

TEACH GOOD VALUES AND RESPONSIBILITY

MONITOR MEDIA

ENCOURAGE HEALTHY ACTIVITIES

BE A ROLE MODEL

SAY NO TO GANGS

AVOID DENIAL

SIGNS OF POSSIBLE GANG INVOLVEMENT

1. Sudden poor school grades and disinterest in school.
2. Withdrawal from family activities.
3. Use of unknown vocabulary (gangs have many slang words).
4. Sudden change in friends.
5. Evidence of drug abuse.
6. Sudden affluence.
7. Use of hand signs.
8. Desire for excessive privacy.
9. Having a new nickname.
10. Developing a bad attitude towards family, school and authorities.
11. Purchase or desire to buy clothing of all one color or style.
12. Wearing altered headwear (gang members often put gang information on the inside band of ball caps).
13. Changing appearance with special haircuts, eyebrow markings or tattoos.
14. Use of gang graffiti on folders, desks, walls, and buildings.
15. Staying out later than usual.

FACTS TO KNOW

PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN

For their own safety, tell children:

- Don't wear clothing in colors or style that is gang related.
- Don't associate or attend parties with gang members or Wannabe gang members.
- Don't hang out on street corners where gangs are active.
- Don't approach individuals in cars who seemingly want information
- Don't take part in writing graffiti or hang around walls marked with it.

FACTS ON GANGS
WHAT EVERY CITIZEN SHOULD KNOW