



A Safe City

Basic Awareness & Strategies for Parents

Why Children Join Gangs

- Fad
 - Media Influences
 - Copy Cat Behaviors
- Excitement
- Family Issues
- Fear/Protection
- Notoriety
 - To be somebody
 - To be known
- Peer Pressure
- Sense of Belonging
 - Not Part of the School
 - Not Part of the Society
- Sense of Power
- Power in Numbers

Warning Signs of Gang Involvement

What is a gang? It is often described as a group of three or more individuals with a common interest, bond, or activity characterized by criminal or delinquent conduct. Gangs usually have a group name or designation.

The following describes potential indicators of gang interest or involvement. These indicators should be considered as a group. One or two indicators taken alone does not necessarily suggest a youth is involved in a gang.

Gang trends change and different areas of the country may be experiencing different indicators.

Defiant Behavior

Most youth express defiant behavior from time to time. Gang involved youth are extremely defiant of authority figures and will at times challenge authority or make threats against authority figures.

Change in Dress

Many gangs use colored clothing, sports team logos on clothing, a certain style of clothing, or clothing accessories to denote gang membership. If the youth in question begins dressing in only one certain style or color, parents and teachers should begin to take notice and ask why the youth is dressing differently. A child that likes a certain sports team and dresses with that teams logo is exhibiting normal behavior. However, if the child does not follow sports and still dresses in sports team logo further inspection is warranted.

New Friends

The child may begin to associate with a new group of friends and if these friends all dress in similar styles or colors, parents and teachers should begin to discuss why the child is associating with this new group of friends. If the new group of friends are gang members, then the chances for the child to be involved with a gang goes up significantly. Parents should not allow their child to associate with this group.

Tough Image

Gang involved youth believe that a very tough, mean or aggressive image is very important. Children that are becoming gang members will begin to act very tough, often times using curse words and using a defiant posture whenever they are confronted.

Starts Using A

Nickname

In the world of gangs you are not anyone until you have earned a nickname. Gang members refer to each other by nickname. In some gangs, youth do not know the real names of members but just the street name or nickname. Parents and teachers should be aware of different type of gang nicknames and should not allow children to use nicknames that are associated with gangs or violence such as "Lil Killa", "Sniper", "C-dog", "B-dog", "Psycho", etc.

Loss of Self Identity

Gang members live and die for the gang. In some cases it becomes very difficult for gang involved youth to do anything without their fellow gang members. These children begin to lose focus on what their life was like before the gang. It becomes very hard to separate themselves from the gang. They will always refer to the gang.

Secrecy

Many gang involved youth possess gang related paraphernalia, pictures, samples of graffiti, etc. These youth may hide gang paraphernalia, drugs or weapons in the house. They may not want parents to see graffiti written on clothing, backpacks, furniture or the walls of bedrooms.

They may try to get a lock on the bedroom door or threaten parents if they try to get into the bedroom.

Money

Some youth get involved with gangs to make money illegally. Crimes may include armed robbery, selling drugs, being a look-out for drug dealers, auto theft/burglary, etc. Parents should be concerned over unexplained money or material goods such as jewelry, radios, televisions, computer games, etc.

Awareness

Excessive Sleeping

Research indicates that teenagers naturally need more sleep than adults. However, gang members like to hang out late at night. In addition, gangs may commit crimes such as drive-by shootings or graffiti late at night. Thus, gang members are often up until early in the morning and may sleep until noon or beyond. Excessive sleeping may also indicate alcohol or other drug use.

Cuts and Bruises

Gang members tend to get into more physical confrontations than positive groups such as the Boy Scouts. Fights may occur between gang members in the same gang, or with rival gangs, or even with individuals that are not part of the gang world. Be aware of unexplained cuts and bruises, especially on the knuckles and hands (from hitting objects or people).

Tattoos

Gang members use tattoos to demonstrate what gang they belong to. Younger gang members may use a pen or magic marker to draw the gangs name or initials on their body. They may also draw their gang nickname and use other gang slogans for their tattoos. Older individuals may "carve" or "brand" gang related

symbols or words into their skin. Eventually this behavior will lead to the individual getting a permanent tattoo. A youth that proudly displays a fake or real gang tattoo is demonstrating that they are currently involved with a gang.

Graffiti

Like tattoos, graffiti can be the name of a gang, initials, numbers or symbols that are associated with the gang. Graffiti is not just written on the walls of buildings but can be found on books, notebooks, backpacks, clothing and furniture. Graffiti is used to mark gang territory or demonstrates involvement in gangs. Youth that are involved with gangs will generally have graffiti written on personal possessions.



Practicing Behaviors

Just as youth are interested in sports will practice that sport, youth interested in gangs will practice gang related behaviors. They will usually practice graffiti writing on paper or notebooks. Some parents have reported finding their son or daughter staring into a mirror. These youth are practicing a tough and menacing stare often referred to as "mad-dogging". Youth just beginning gang involvement will spend hours practicing the hand signs of the gang.

Grades Drop

Generally speaking, gang members do not like succeeding in school. Gangs view anyone that does well in school as a nerd and often refer to someone doing well in school as a "school-boy" or "school-girl", both are considered derogatory terms. In addition, because of late night activities or alcohol and other drug use, students may not be able to concentrate on academics.

One indicator by itself does not mean that the youth in question is involved in gangs. A good example of this is the baggy style clothing that started as a gang indicator, but is now a fashion trend for many youth.

Signs of Alcohol and Other Drug Use

Gang members have easy access to alcohol and other drugs. Some gang members get involved with gangs just to "party".

Alcohol consumption causes a number of changes in behavior. Even low doses significantly impair the judgment and coordination required to drive a car safely. Low to moderate doses of alcohol can increase the incidence of a variety of aggressive acts. Moderate to high doses of alcohol cause marked impairments in higher mental functions, severely altering a person's ability to learn and remember information. Very high doses cause respiratory depression and death.

Gangs and Children: What can parents do?

1. Attention

Positive attention vs. negative attention. Gang members will take time to give new "recruits" attention.

- Remember to praise your child daily.
- Have genuine concern and interest in the things that are important to your child.

2. Communicate

- Do not just talk at your child, but talk with them.
- Listen and value what they have to say.
- Encourage them to discuss all problems, small or large, with you.
- Do not trivialize or put them down when they discuss problems or concerns.
- Set aside a given time each day to have a conversation with your child (discuss how their day went).

3. Love

Let your children know that you care for and love them. Many children seek out gangs to fulfill the need for love and family support.

- Give frequent hugs (especially after bad days).
- Show them that you are genuinely interested in their lives.
- Remember to articulate your love for them (not just by actions).

4. Discipline

Discipline and structure in the household will allow your child to develop self-limits.

- Discuss the house rules with your children.
- Set realistic limits.
- Teach them what acceptable and unacceptable behaviors are.
- Write out the consequences of unacceptable behaviors.
- Be fair and firm.
- Be consistent.
- Establish and enforce a curfew.

5. Become Aware Of Gangs

"You can't fight what you don't see", or "change what you don't know."

- Organize or attend meetings that give a local perspective on what types of gang activities are occurring in your area.
- Learn how gang members dress.
- Identify the names of local gangs and what their places look like.

Breaking The Negative Group Influence

Youth must stop wearing gang related identifiers

Youth must understand the differences between a group of friends and a gang

Youth must understand the real consequences of gang involvement

Youth must take responsibility for his/her actions

Youth must set realistic goals

Youth must understand the dynamics of peer pressure

Youth must learn resistance skills and practice those

Youth must establish interests in positive activities

Youth must build ties to positive groups

Youth must bond to positive role models

Schools and communities must strengthen protective factors that foster resiliency

6. Know Who Your Child's Friends Are

Peers play an important role in your child's development. If your child hangs around gang members, then he/she has a strong chance of becoming a gang member.

- Do not allow your child to hang around gang members or "wanna be's."
- Do not allow them to go to houses that have gang members living in them due to the negative influences and danger involved.
- Become familiar with their friend's families and how they feel about gangs and drugs.

7. Self-Esteem

A sense of positive self-esteem will prevent your child from seeking negative self-esteem.

- Take time to let your child know that they are special.
- Teach them to feel good about themselves. Find the positive in them and recognize it.
- Words can be very powerful.
- Minimize the negative comments
- Maximize the positive comments
- Give them hope for a bright future.

8. Anti-gang Self-Concept

A child that believes that gangs are negative and believes that they will not become members will not join a gang.

- Let your child know that anything associated with gangs is negative and self destructive.
- Do not allow them to write gang names, initials, or other gang related graffiti.
- Do not allow them to take a gang type nickname (Lil 'Killa, C-Lok, Ant-Dog).
- Do not allow them to flash gang hand signs.

9. Anti-Gang Home Environment

If you allow gang paraphernalia into your home or allow your child to behave like gangsters, you are allowing your child to become a gangster. Instead:

- Let your child and their friends know that your house is an anti-gang home.
 - Do not allow anyone to bring paraphernalia into your home. This includes magazines, pictures, drawings, articles of clothing, and anything with gang writing or graffiti on it.
 - Get involved in the community
 - A strong united community will force gangs to move or disperse.
 - Get to know your neighbors.
 - Form support groups
 - Form or join neighborhood watch groups
 - Discourage gangs from "kickin' it" in your neighborhood.
 - Have graffiti removed as soon as possible.
Graffiti removal parties are a great start!
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10. Supervision

Children are more apt to become involved in gangs and other delinquent behaviors when they are left alone

- Keep your children active in positive alternatives.
- Get them involved in supervised activities such as after school programs, sports, clubs (Boys & Girls Clubs), scouting, church activities, or volunteer for community service.
- Do not allow them to stay out late.
- Know where they are, where they are going, and with whom.
- Check up on them periodically.

11. Education

Most gang members do not do well in school and seek to improve their self-esteem in negative ways.

- Take an active interest in your child's education.
- Help them with homework assignments or studying for tests.
- Read books with your child.
- Visit educational places such as museums or the library.
- Visit local colleges.
- Become active in your child's school (especially middle school).
 - Become acquainted with the staff.
 - Become a member of the PTA.
 - Attend school events and activities
- Stress the importance of a good education and remind them of the opportunities that an education can give them.

12. Attitude/Value

A positive attitude towards self and others and a strong sense of ethical and moral values will enable children to make correct decisions in avoiding gangs and drugs.

- At an early age teach your children to respect themselves and others.
- Teach them about what is right and wrong.
- Teach them to care about others.
- Allow them to believe in themselves.
- Let them have hope for a positive future.
- Stress a positive outlook on life and the future.
- Stress good work habits in academics and employment.
- Teach them that through hard work and effort they can become anything they want (except a gang leader).

13. Social Problem

We must all work together!

Provided by the Longmont Police Department in partnership with the Longmont Violence Prevention Group. Our thanks to the San Diego County Office of Education and Well-Being Juvenile Court and Community Schools for the use of their educational materials.

For more information please contact the L.P.D. Community Services Division at 303-774-4440.

How To Control Children's Exposure To Media Violence

1. Set guidelines about what is appropriate viewing in your family. Apply to all media: cartoons, videos, movies, video games, magazines and comic books.
2. Help children select programs within your families guidelines.
3. Be aware of what children are watching outside of your home or while you are not around.
4. Be a good role model when making your own viewing selections.
5. Watch TV with your children and discuss how they feel about the program, what they know, what they do not know, etc.....
6. Use a VCR to tape or show appropriate programs.
7. Encourage children to become involved with a variety of positive activities other than TV, videos and video games.
8. Communicate and share with other parents.

Adapted from **Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence In The Media**

Local Agency Resources:

Alternatives for Youth
Longmont, Colorado
303-776-8184

Boulder County Mental
Health
Intervention Division
Longmont, Colorado
303-678-6200

Longmont Youth Services
City of Longmont
Longmont, Colorado
303-651-8580

Graffiti Reporting
& Removal
G.E.A.R.
303-774-GEAR

In an
emergency,
please dial
9-1-1

St. Vrain Valley Schools
Longmont, Colorado
Student Assistance
303-682-7319

Community Relations
City of Longmont
303-651-8444

Neighborhood
Resources
City of Longmont
303-651-8721

Longmont Police Department
Community Services Division
Longmont, Colorado
Web: [ci.longmont.co.us/
police.htm](http://ci.longmont.co.us/police.htm)
303-774-4440

El Comite'
455 Kimbark Street
Longmont, CO
303-651-6125

Additional Readings:

The American Street Gang
by Malcolm Klein

Gangsta in the House
by Mike Knox

Gangs In America,
by C. Ronald Huff

Monster, An
Autobiography of a Gang
Member
by Kody Scott

8 ball chicks
by Gini Sikes
Do or Die
by Leon Bing

Life In The Gang - Family,
Friends, and Violence,
by Scott H. Decker and Barrick