

# **GANGS**

## **A Community Response**

**Crime and Violence Prevention Center  
California Attorney General's Office  
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# *GANGS*

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# Introduction

Gangs have spread from major urban areas in California to the suburbs, and even to our rural communities. Today, the gang life style draws young people from all walks of life, socio-economic backgrounds and races and ethnic groups. Gangs are a problem not only for law enforcement but also for the community. Drive-by shootings, carjackings, home invasions and the loss of innocent life have become too frequent throughout California, destroying lives and ripping apart the fabric of communities. As a parent, educator, member of law enforcement, youth or concerned community member, you can help prevent further gang violence by learning what a gang is, what the signs of gang involvement and gang activity are and what you can do to stem future gang violence.

*Gangs: A Community Response* discusses the history of California-based gangs, and will help you identify types of gangs and signs of gang involvement. This booklet includes information on what you and your community can do to prevent and decrease gang activity. It is designed to answer key questions about why kids join gangs and the types of gang activities in which they may be involved. It suggests actions that concerned individuals, parents, educators, law enforcement, community members and local government officials can take and provides additional resource information.

Our hope is that this booklet will give parents, educators, law enforcement and other community members a better understanding of the gang culture and provide solutions to help prevent young people from joining gangs and help them to embark on a brighter future.

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# Chapter 1

# **Gangs, Crime and Violence**

No one is immune from the impact that gangs can have on a community. Gang violence is widespread, dangerous and deadly in many California communities.

Gangs are not a big-city or an inner-city problem, any more than they are a problem of a particular race or culture. Gangs cross all racial, ethnic, socio-economic and geographic boundaries. Gangs are not gender specific. They exist in urban, suburban and rural communities.

While many who join gangs are unmarried, unemployed and school dropouts, today's gang members can also be parents, students, employed and educated. In fact, some gang members are honor students in high school, college students and even active members of the U.S. military.

Belonging to a gang severely harms a young person's future. Gang members often socialize only with other gang members, reinforcing their limited view of life. They frequently establish a lifelong pattern of involvement with the criminal justice system. They may commit serious and violent crimes that lead to lengthy incarcerations. They may be injured for life, or killed. Their gang membership may place an entire family household at risk. Gang members who do make it to adulthood sometimes become dependent on alcohol and drugs. For some, the gang lifestyle is passed down as a family tradition leading to generational gangs.

To prevent the devastation of crime and violence caused by gangs, and of lost human potential by so many young people, we must respond together, as parents, family members, friends and community. The first step is to take a candid look at our own families and the community around us. Understanding and accepting what might be happening even within our own families is an important step that helps us prepare an effective personal and community response.

A community response means that all of us — parents, youth, clergy, businesses, community-based organizations, educators, law enforcement and local government — work together to prevent gang violence. We now know that there are many potential ways to steer youth away from gangs, and to help those already involved to leave a gang. We have the power of giving at-risk youth options, opportunities and alternatives to gang life. But to do this, we need to take action as a team. Impacting the life of just one young person is a success.

## **California Gang History**

Although the nation's first modern-day criminal street gangs — of Irish, Italian and Jewish descent — formed in the early 1800's in the Five Points area of New York, the first California gangs formed in the early 1900's in the Los Angeles area.

Even though California-based gangs are not the oldest in the nation, they are probably the most copied of all gangs. In California, early Mexican gangs became the model for all other gangs that followed.

Early California gang members were caught between two worlds. Their Mexican heritage provided a rich, family-oriented culture, but Western customs and education forced a change in these young people that caused stress within the traditional family structure. While attempting to adapt to this change, the children became strangers both to their own families and to their new

homeland because they were not fully accepted into the culture.

Add social dysfunctions, such as class distinction, bias and prejudice, and an “us versus them” attitude developed. The result is that some of these young people formed gangs. Initially, most gangs formed for protection, but quickly as gang membership grew, rivalries developed and violence escalated. While violence in the early 1940’s involved fist fighting, today it includes extremely violent and deadly acts, often perpetrated with guns.

Even in today’s 21<sup>st</sup> Century society, immigrant or refugee groups can experience alienation. While social and cultural family stress has been a factor in the formation of many different types of gangs, it is not the sole reason that gangs form. Joining and maintaining membership in a gang is motivated by many other reasons.

Some gang members report that they joined a gang because of a belief that they are missing something at home. It may not be money or material things, but a sense of belonging. Other members report that they wanted to escape an abusive home. Others were curious about the gang life. Some have joined a gang to earn money by selling drugs or committing crimes; others because their parents, brothers or sisters were members. Unfortunately, in gang-infested neighborhoods, some young people join a gang for protection. If they don’t, they or their family members may become victims of gang-related crime. Because there are many reasons that youth join gangs, there are many potential solutions to steer them away from gangs.

## **Recognizing Denial**

One of the most difficult issues to deal with in identifying gang members is denial. No one wants to announce to family, friends or a community, “my son or daughter is in a gang,” or “we have a gang problem.” It is important to recognize that a family’s

personal gang problem is related to the community in which that family lives. In small cities or rural areas, too often terms like “wanna be’s,” “misguided youth groups” or “street corner groups” are used to avoid recognizing a real gang problem. Terms like these only aid in the spread of denial. One of the first steps in addressing gang problems in your family, school or community is overcoming this denial.

Overcoming denial begins with becoming informed about gang culture activity and membership in your community. For example, some gangs are not considered a threat to the community and so are not targeted by law enforcement or the community for prevention and intervention programs. In reality, these gangs are a potential serious threat because gangs frequently use violence to settle disputes — violence that eventually will affect the community. An honest community assessment identifies these types of gangs, and potential future problems.

## **Partnerships for Prevention**

Second, a collaborative approach that stresses partnerships between concerned individuals, community organizations and government agencies is often the best solution. Collaborative approaches usually involve the police, schools, churches, local government, parks and recreation, community-based organizations, businesses and programs working with parents and youth.

An effective strategy deals with gang problems on three levels: prevention, intervention and suppression. **Prevention** programs or measures focus on youth before they are involved in gangs to help steer them away from gang involvement. **Intervention** approaches focus on helping young people get out and stay out of gangs. **Suppression** efforts are designed to protect the public from violent and criminal gang activities. All three approaches are necessary in order to address the different degrees to which youth become attracted to, involved in or threatened by gangs.



It is important not to wait for violence to occur. Family and community members should take action at the first sign of gangs in a community. Many times these signs are overlooked because they are not considered to be gang-related or a threat to the community. These signs can include, but are not limited to, graffiti vandalism, petty thefts, fights at school and delinquent behaviors. Many gangs evolve through a maturing process. When gangs first form, they usually do not immediately engage in drive-by shootings, robberies and murders. It takes time for gangs to develop a reputation on the streets. It is during this time that prevention, intervention and suppression programs have the greatest impact. Yet, because of denial, all too often this opportunity is missed. Many programs that target gang activity sometimes begin only after a major incident, such as a death or a shooting.

Once people come together, an assessment of the level of gang problems in the community will help answer many questions like: How many gangs are in my community? What kinds of gangs? What types of problems are associated with the gangs in my community? Are the gang problems new and emerging, or have they been entrenched and steadily growing? When the answers to these questions are completed, you and other concerned community members will have a better foundation to develop solutions to those problems.

## **What is a gang?**

The ability to properly identify a gang is an essential part of any community collaborative approach. The definition of a gang may change by geographical area; by jurisdiction; and even between health, school and law enforcement agencies.

Some street gangs are continually involved in more serious crimes, including assault with a deadly weapon, robbery, home-invasion robbery, homicide, drug-related crimes, drive-by and walk-up shootings, arson, intimidation of victims and witnesses

and vehicle theft. Having a history of this type of criminal activity could qualify the gang to be reclassified as a criminal street gang, as defined in the California Penal Code.

Criminal street gangs are defined by California Penal Code section 186.22 (f) as:

“any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, having as one of its primary activities the commission of one or more [specified] criminal acts, having a common name or common identifying sign or symbol, and whose members individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal gang activity.”

The specific crimes associated with this Penal Code Section are listed in Penal Code Section 186.22 (e).

For the purposes of this publication let us use a more basic definition:

***A group of three or more***

(adult/juvenile/male/female)

***In association with each other***

(on regular or part-time basis)

***Some type of identifier***

(like a name, sign, symbol or color)

***Committing crime***

(any crimes — misdemeanor, felony or against county/city ordinances)

Many communities still use the standard of felony criminal activity to qualify a group as a gang. However, criminal activity does not have to involve a felony for a group to be classified as a gang.

Many gangs still form along ethnic and racial lines. Some youth join a gang for economic motives, or for the glamour, excitement or “high” achieved by committing acts of violence and participat-

ing in crimes. "Turf" is not a requirement, nor are special characteristics relating to education, gender or social status. Today, some gangs allow anyone to join, and have adopted different membership and operating strategies. These gangs may claim an entire city as their turf and allow mixed-race members in a traditional ethnic-based gang. These groups are known as "hybrid gangs."

Some examples of gangs based on ethnic ties include:

### **Asian**

(includes Korean, Vietnamese, Hmong, Cambodian, Thai, Laotian, Filipino, Samoan, South Pacific Islanders, Japanese or Chinese) Well-known Asian gangs include the: Asian Boys and Wah-Ching.

### **African American**

Well-known gangs include: The Crips and Bloods

### **Hispanic**

Well-known gangs include the: White Fence, Los Vatos Locos, 18<sup>th</sup> Street and Marasalvatrucha or MS-13; Sureno-13 and Norteno-14.

### **White**

(includes White Supremacist, Satanic, Punk or Heavy Metal) Well-known gangs include the: Insane White Boys, or the PENI Skins, short for Public Enemy Number One; and the NLR or Nazi Low Riders.

Other gangs identify themselves by a name derived from a street, neighborhood or housing project where they are based; a rock band; the activity they are involved in; the ethnicity of the membership; or a telephone area code. Gang names can change as the gang's activities or membership does.

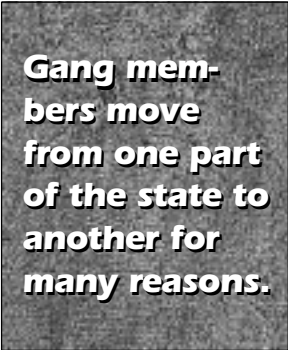
## **Age**

Many people believe that most members of street gangs are juveniles. This is not true. A high percentage of gang members

in the United States are between the ages of 14 and 24. Why is this fact important? This is the most active age for criminal behavior in the country. Substance abuse problems for this age group are also increasing. With these demographic and substance abuse trends converging, it is easy to see the potential impact of street gangs to create further violence in the future.

## **Gang Migration**

In the past, migrating gang members have not been a large problem for communities and law enforcement. Today, gang migration is causing a significant effect on communities in many parts of the state. Gang members move from one part of the state to another for many reasons. Commonly, it is the movement of the family. Often, if a family moves in search of employment, a new start or better living conditions, so do family members who belong to local gangs. There is a tendency for these gang members to establish a clique, or set of gang members, in the new area where they live.



**Gang members move from one part of the state to another for many reasons.**

Young people new to a neighborhood are easy targets for existing gangs. If there are no gangs in a neighborhood, gang members who have migrated to these new communities might start a gang. Sometimes, the relocated youth bring with them a reputation of being a member of a specific gang. In the culture of gangs, this reputation can bring "status" to those individuals and danger to your communities.

For example, some southern California gang members have slowly and sporadically moved to areas east and north of Los Angeles. Their presence, in some cases, has led to an increase of violence and other crimes between them and the northern California gang who already lives in the area.

## Chapter 2

# Types of Gangs in California

In today's street culture, gangs can be based on ethnic origin, such as: African-American, Asian and Hispanic. Gangs can be categorized as female, Goths, Skinhead, Tagger Crew, Tag Bangers and Party Crew gangs. Within these categories there are a number of separate groups called "cliques" or "sets." In California, street gang membership has reached approximately 300,000, with about 6,100 different gangs.

### **African-American**

African-American gangs first appeared in southern California in the 1920's. They were not like the Bloods and Crips that are well known today. It is believed that the first Crip gang was formed in late 1969. During this time in Los Angeles there were many African-American gangs, and they all were rivals with each other.

The Crips outnumbered the rest of the African-American gangs. Because of this and the fact that the Crips had become the common rival between the remainder of the gangs, the first Blood gang was formed. The Blood gang was an alliance formed by all the other gangs who did not want to be part of the Crips.

As the Crip and Blood rivalry intensified, gang assaults became increasingly more violent. Crip and Blood gangs also got involved in the distribution and sale of drugs. The illegal trafficking of drugs became a major factor that intensified the rivalry between the two gangs.

## **Asian Gangs**

California is home to the majority of Asians who live in the United States. Types of Asian gangs include Korean, Chinese, Japanese, South Pacific Islander and Indo-Chinese. Some Asian gang members mimic western gangs in dress style, the use of tattoos, graffiti and criminal behavior. Other Asian gangs develop expertise in particular crimes, such as home invasion robberies, credit card and check fraud and computer chip thefts.

The Indo-Chinese gangs have members from the Vietnamese, Cambodian, Minh and Hmong who immigrated to the United States after the fall of Saigon in 1975. Refugee and immigrant families experienced a similar culture shock as Mexican immigrants did in the early 1900's. As a result, some Asian youth established and joined a gang. The first Indo-Chinese Asian gangs appeared in southern California between 1978 and 1980. Culture and language barriers have made it difficult to monitor, investigate and prosecute Asian gang members.

## **Hispanic Gangs**

Hispanic gangs are established throughout the state. Hispanic gangs use graffiti to mark the boundaries of their turf. These marks serve as a warning to rival gangs, a welcome greeting to peer gang members and often a form of intimidation to the citizens who live within the boundaries of the turf. Hispanic gang members often consider themselves the "policemen" of their neighborhoods. Thus, they are motivated to protect these areas. The turf is also known as the "barrio," a Spanish word for "neighborhood."

As makeshift guardians of their barrio, Hispanic gang members are expected to defend it against any type of intrusion. The mere presence of a rival gang, the crossing out of their gang graffiti, a derogatory look, an insult to a girlfriend — all have been motivations for gang-related attacks. Many Hispanic gangs are generational. California has third- and fourth- generation

Hispanic gang members. For many Hispanic young people, belonging to a gang is considered a normal part of life.

All Hispanic and some other gangs in the state use this north/south polarization. The symbols of a separation can be found in gang graffiti, tattoos, drawings, written material, music lyrics, clothes, audiotape and CD album covers. These symbols are generic indicators of gang affiliation. The presence of these types of signs alone does not confirm or negate gang membership.

## **Female Gang Members**

While female gang members account for less than 10 percent of California's total gang population, sadly females, especially in Asian and Hispanic gangs, have moved away from the traditional role of being merely girlfriends of gang members. There are no stereotypes for female gang members. Some female gang members are gainfully employed. Females have formed their own gangs and also have become members in traditionally all-male gangs. Caucasian and African-American females have also formed their own gangs. A few females are members of tagging crews.

In some instances, female gang members have been co-leaders of a gang that has both male and female members. Female gang members have been known to carry weapons and drugs for their gang. Today, in some gangs the female members are treated as equal to their male counterparts. In a few instances, female gang members have been arrested and convicted of gang-related murders, drug sales, attempted murders and assaults. Tragically, some of these females are mothers of small children and still active with a gang.

## **Goths**

Although they have been around as long as other gangs, around 1995 groups of young Goths made their reappearance on the

street scene. Since then, the Gothic movement has gained popularity and is based on particular music. The dress style is meant to be shocking, and the music focuses on the darker side of life, sex and death. Most of the members of the Gothic movement are law-abiding young people. However, a few Gothic groups have been involved in criminal activity, including murder.

Goths often dress in black clothing; wear black lip stick and finger nail polish; dye their hair a blue, red or black color; or wear heavy white makeup. Many Goths enjoy other forms of body modification, like branding, body piercing and tattoos. Almost all Goths are Caucasians. The membership is split just about equally between males and females. The majority of Goths are not a problem for law enforcement.

## **Skinheads**

Skinhead gangs constitute a small percentage of gangs in the state. The typical Skinhead has adopted a particular philosophy of life, involving pride in the White race and a hatred of Hispanics, Asians, African-Americans, Jews, gays and lesbians. Most Skinheads believe that these groups are responsible for current societal problems, including most of the crime.

Skinheads may voice their opinions at public rallies, on cable TV, on the Internet and through music. Several bands cater to this particular style of music. The music may have a heavy metal sound, but employs the use of racist lyrics to help spread the word of the racist movement.

Of all gangs, Skinheads are most likely to be involved in bias-motivated attacks. These assaults may be classified as hate crimes because gender, religion, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation motivated the criminal behavior. Such crimes may include vandalism of a Jewish synagogue, graffiti vandalism, cross burning, assault and even murder. These types of crimes can



disrupt an entire community because the crime is directed not only against a single victim but against all members of the victim's population.

## **Taggers**

In tagging crews, also known as "graffiti vandals," the individual members are called "taggers." Many tagging crews initially formed for the sole purpose of placing their names or slogans in as many visible locations as possible. Sometimes individual crews would have a contest or "battle" with each other. They would try to get their tag and crew name up as many times as possible within a specified geographical area and time. The winners could play for cans of spray paint, or the losing crew members would have to join the winning crew or the losing crew might have to give up its current name. Initially, tagging was conducted by individuals or crews who had no specific gang affiliation.



However, fatal violence began to occur among tagging crews. Rivalries have intensified, and some tagging crews have begun to claim turf-like traditional gangs and regularly arm themselves with guns.

## **Tag-Bangers**

Some tagging crews started to act more and more like gangs. As a result a new type of tagging crew, called "tag bangers," formed. The emphasis is still on tagging, but members of these crews carry guns and other types of weapons. They also initiate and respond to gang violence just like any other gang. In fact, these tag-banger crews now act just like a gang. Some tag-banger crews have a formal association with well-known and established gangs. In a few instances, for prosecution purposes law enforcement has classified tag-banger crews as violent street gangs, based on the Penal Code definition.

## **Party Crews**

In the early part of 1990, another type of crew formed. These co-ed groups called themselves "party crews." When party crews first formed the rivalry between them was based on which crew could sponsor the best party. Soon, people attending the party started to sell balloons full of nitrous oxide (laughing gas). Others sold drugs and others supplied alcohol. A small entrance fee was required to get into the party. To the sponsor the party became a money-making enterprise.

Add to these ingredients intensified rivalries between party crews, gang members from different gangs attending the party and/or party crew members themselves who were also members of a gang and it is no surprise that violence began to escalate. Soon, gang violence was common at party crew parties.

No matter what the ethnicity or characteristics of the gangs in your community, identification is a key step in reduction of potential violence.

## Chapter 3

# Signs of Gang Membership

While street gangs share some common behaviors, customs and practices, a gang in a particular community may also have some unique characteristics specific to that gang. There is no universal way to determine gang membership or affiliation. Some gang members have many classical gang membership signs, others may only have one or two gang characteristics and others may not display any.

Ultimately, gang membership is determined by the behavior and attitude of the individual. The signs of gang membership can be an extension of that state of mind. Today, because of prosecutorial efforts and law enforcement pressure many gang members attempt to conceal their membership by shying away from displaying popular forms of gang indicia. The determination of gang membership or affiliation should be made on a case-by-case basis. Following are some commonly found signs of gang membership and affiliation:

### **Moniker**

Gang members commonly, but not always, have a nickname or moniker. The name may highlight a real or imagined special physical, personal or psychological trait. A gang member called "Silent," for example, may be known for being quiet all the time. A gang member with the name, "Psycho," may be known for acting crazy or violent. However, it is not necessary to have a moniker to be a member of a gang. Similarly, just because a young person has a nickname doesn't mean that child is a gang member.

## **Gang Attire**

Many gang members wear distinct clothing styles. Clothing is like a street uniform. It helps identify peer and rival gang members. Stylized gang clothing is a non-verbal way of indicating gang membership.

Some common gang attire, such as the three-quarter-length cut-off pants and knee-high socks, has become a popular dress style for many young people throughout the country. Many of these young people are not gang members. When a non-gang member wears gang-type clothing, real gang members can believe that the wearer is involved in a gang and may put the wearer of gang clothing in harm's way.

Other gangs prefer baggy or "sagging" pants or baseball caps turned at an angle. Some wear particular brands of shoes, pants, shirts or professional sports gear. The gang may pick a college or professional sports team whose logo, uniform color combination or initials have specific meaning to them. Wearing this type of clothing can help conceal their membership and association from parents, teachers and police.

Another example of stylized gang clothing is plaid Pendleton shirts which can be worn loose or un-tucked. The Pendleton shirts become a form of gang uniform. A gang may even choose a certain color. Gang graffiti, symbols, messages or names can also be written or embroidered on tee-shirts, sweat shirts, jackets, pants and baseball caps. Other identifying items include belt buckles with the gang's initials, key chains, starter jackets (team jackets) and red or blue bandanas called "rags." The color of the clothing depends on the type of gang. Kaki-colored pants with a white tee-shirt are considered a neutral uniform. Some gangs are no longer wearing their colors in order to deceive law enforcement.

Not all gang members are obvious in their dress or manner, so some are not immediately recognizable by their attire. Anyone can wear gang-style clothing. For that reason, wearing gang-style clothing itself should not be used as the only evidence to support gang membership.

## **Hand Signs**

Hand signs were used by the ancient Chinese Triads to show their membership. Today, hand signs can be used as a greeting to a peer gang member, a way of challenging a rival gang or a form of intimidation to non-gang members. Hand signs vary, depending on what type of gang is using them. Commonly, letters of the alphabet or numbers are formed by using the fingers and hands. Gang members display hand signs at citizens, police and other gang members. Sometimes, this action is referred to as "throwing a sign." Occasionally, a story is told using hand signs; some gangs refer to this as "stacking."

## **Graffiti**

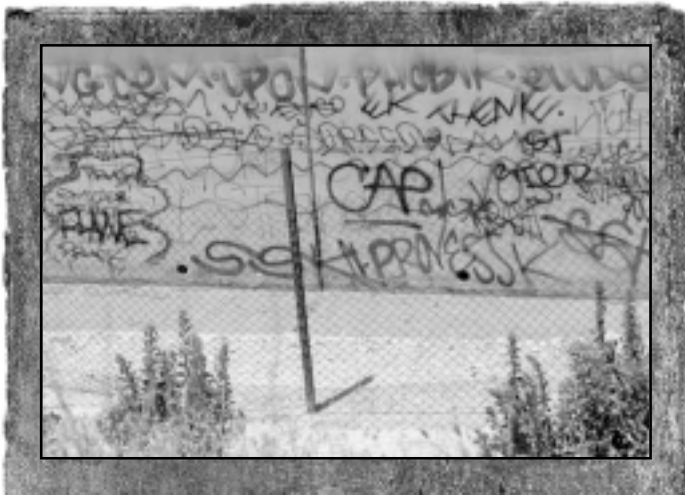
Gangs use graffiti to identify themselves and their territory. With graffiti, they mark their territory or turf, declare their allegiance to the gang, advertise the gang's status or power, announce their presence, challenge rivals and announce working relationships between gangs. Graffiti is also used to intimidate the residents who live in a gang-controlled area.

Graffiti can also be used to communicate messages and to show alliances or conflict between gangs. The graffiti may indicate the gang's name; the member's nickname; a declaration of loyalty; a memorial to a slain gang member; threats, challenges or warnings to rival gangs; or a description of criminal acts in which the gang has been involved.

Gang graffiti can be found on neighborhood walls, fences and mailboxes. It may also be found on clothing, athletic shoes, notebooks, plastic glasses, photographs and bedroom walls.

The graffiti may be disguised or hidden from parents. Graffiti is sort of the newspaper of the gang culture.

The color of the graffiti might also be an indicator of what type of gang is present. A red color may show that a Blood or Norteno gang is present in the area. Most gang graffiti is written with black-colored paint, but commonly, gang members who write graffiti use whatever color of paint is available. In the gang culture no insult ever goes unanswered. One way of insulting or disrespecting a gang is to cross out its graffiti.

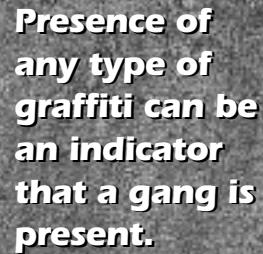


Graffiti can also be used for other reasons. If certain kinds of symbols or words are used by Skinhead gangs, graffiti can be evidence of a hate crime. The presence of hate graffiti is intended to cause fear and intimidation among an entire minority group, even though a single victim may be the target of the graffiti attack.

In addition, taggers can use graffiti to gain fame and notoriety. Taggers choose names, slogans and pictorial graphics in an attempt to create an identity and make themselves known. Their principal crime is vandalism and their targets are often highly

visible like public transportation vehicles, billboards, benches, walls and freeway signs.

Hispanic gang graffiti is often written in blocked or Old English letters and tends to be very stylized. Some Asian gangs, particularly Laotian and Cambodian gangs, use the block style of graffiti. African-American and White gang graffiti tend to be similar to one another using a simple style of writing, although Skinhead graffiti may include racist symbols or other graphically violent language. The color of the graffiti may be an indicator of gang affiliation. Crips use blue and Bloods use red. Graffiti may also take on specific characteristics of a particular gang like a unique symbol or use of numbers or letters.



**Presence of any type of graffiti can be an indicator that a gang is present.**

Gangs purposely vandalize and destroy public and private property in order to enhance their reputation. Of equal concern with property damage is the violence associated with gang graffiti. Some adults believe they do not have to worry as much about graffiti in the neighborhood. They believe the graffiti is from a tagging crew rather than an indication of gang presence. However, the presence of any type of graffiti can be an indicator that a gang is present and can be an important source of information for both law enforcement and community members. Graffiti is gang-related whether it is written by street gang members, taggers or tag bangers.

When a neighborhood is marked with a gang's graffiti, that graffiti indicates territorial dominance, and the entire area and its inhabitants become potential targets for violence, because rival gangs sometimes identify everyone in the neighborhood as part of the gang and, therefore, a potential threat and target. Anyone on the street or in his or her home can become a target for drive-by attacks by rival gang members.

## **Jewelry**

Jewelry used by gangs may be expensive or cheap. Certain gangs use gaudy jewelry, such as heavy gold rope chains, earrings and large gold or diamond rings. Some jewelry may have unique designs on rings, necklaces or bracelets. The designs can be numbers or symbols that are associated with a particular gang. For example, the five-point star is used by northern California Hispanic and the Chicago-based Latin Kings street gangs. The happy- and sad-face theatrical masks refer to the gang life style — smile now, cry later. Some gang members may also wear religious symbols, like crosses. The religious symbols have nothing to do with the gang life, but may simply show a belief in a particular religion.

## **Weapons**

Weapons used by gangs can include shaved-down baseball bats, sections of pipe taped at the ends, spiked wristbands, Chemical Mace, knives, handguns, sawed-off shotguns and automatic firearms such as Uzi machine guns, AK-47 assault rifles, pistols or 9-millimeter semi-automatic handguns. Gang members have also used homemade bombs and Molotov cocktails. In a few instances gang members have been arrested with hand grenades. Some weapons can also be made of non-metallic substances, like plastic knives. These can easily pass through metal detectors. Weapons can also be concealed, like a knife in a pen or in a lipstick holder or in the air-conditioning duct of a car. Guns have been concealed in video cameras, air tire gauges, pagers and even cellular telephones. Concealing weapons has become a common practice among many gangs.

## **Tattoos**

Tattoos can indicate gang affiliation or geographic origin. Tattoos can be crude or elaborate, and placed on any part of the body. They can be numbers like 666 (mark of the beast), 14, 13, or 88 (the eighth letter of the alphabet, H). For white



supremacists, 88 refers to HH or "Heil Hitler." The tattoos may also indicate the gang name by using letters of the alphabet to abbreviate it. Or, letters of the alphabet may be used to indicate a particular gang philosophy. For example, SWP could mean Supreme White Power or Salvadorians With Pride.

The tattoo can be of a cartoon-type character like a bulldog or a well-known criminal. Gang tattoos have included pictures of wild animals like panthers or tigers, or mythical animals like dragons. Other gang tattoos can be a five-point crown or a five-point star.

These symbols normally mean nothing to a non-gang member. However, to gang members they are a code that identifies their gang, their gang rivals and their gang affiliation, and is a way to affirm their membership. Some gang members' bodies have become just another canvass for graffiti.

## **Body Modifications**

Some gang members purposely scar their bodies instead of applying tattoos. Some even burn themselves with cigarettes on their hands, arms and legs to show that they are a member of a gang. The burn marks may be in specific patterns like three dots or five dots. The action of burning shows that the person is committed to his or her gang. Sometimes a gang member may brand the gang's symbol somewhere on his back or arms. Others may use a knife or a razor blade to etch designs or marks on their bodies. These later form large scars.

Generic forms of gang tattoos and body modifications by themselves are not evidence of gang membership. Combined with gang-specific tattoos, brands or burns, generic signs may be used to help determine gang membership.

## **Gang Slang**

Many gang members have adopted a verbal code that applies to their gang.

Using a specific gang term does not by itself determine gang membership. Crips might greet each using the word, "cuzz." Bloods might use the word, "blood." A gang member saying that he is "Sureno" indicates that he is from southern California, as opposed to one who says he is "Norteno," which means that he is from northern California. Literally hundreds of words are associated with the gang culture. While the use of gang slang can be an indicator of gang membership, some gang slang has become a popular and is used by the general population.

## **Photographs**

Many gang members keep photo albums with pictures of themselves and their fellow members. These pictures may show individual members of the gang, the style of clothes that are acceptable and the gang's hand sign or graffiti, and may also show gang members posing with weapons or committing crimes. To be in a gang photograph, a member has to be trusted by the gang. Photographs memorialize a moment in time for the gangs and are kept as mementos. Many gangs also use video cameras to record their activities. In one instance, a gang member videotaped his burglary of a southern California resort hotel. He



then added music and turned the videotape in as a school assignment for which he received an "A."

## **Music**

The gang culture is often spread through the music and entertainment industry, which can facilitate the influence of the gang culture on the general population. Some young people identify themselves with the fictional life style of a character in a movie or of a rap artist. The lyrics of any type of gang-related music can be motivating to the listener. Most adults think of "Black gangster rap" when referring to gang music, but every type of gang has a style of music that reflects that particular gang's life style.

CD's have now become the standard media for the music industry and much of the movie industry. It might be helpful if parents listened to the music listened to by their children. The characteristics and the lyrics of this type of music refer to gang philosophies and activities and can influence behavior. In Texas, a man killed a state trooper and used as his defense that the gangster rap music he was listening to motivated him to commit the murder.

## **Other Signs**

Other signs of gang membership include fingernails painted a certain color, colored shoelaces in athletic shoes and specific hairstyles, such as a group of females all dyeing their hair the same color. Some gang members subscribe to or buy certain types of magazines that cater to their gang life style, just as a sports fan might subscribe to a sports-related magazine. Today, anyone can access Web sites to sample and purchase all types of gang-related music. Hispanic gangs from northern California and southern California have their own style of Hispanic gangster rap. White supremacists sell all styles of hate music using the Internet. Taggers, Bloods and Crips can all use the Internet to buy their style of music.

## **Technology**

Even the advancement of technology has an impact on the gang culture. The use of e-mail has become a common way to communicate. Many gang members use cellular phones, pagers and scanners to socialize, plan criminal activities, sell drugs and warn each other of pending rival gang or police contact. Gang members often communicate, recruit, socialize and sell drugs using the computer. The World Wide Web brings people together who are thousands of miles apart. Now, gangs have the opportunity to have a world-wide impact by using the Internet. Some gangs take advantage of this capability and publish their own web page to show off their gang. These web sites feature photographs of gang members holding weapons, displaying hand signs and demonstrating gang graffiti. Often, there are links to other gang web sites.

## Chapter 4

# Gang Mentality and Behavior

As mentioned before, behavior ultimately determines gang status. Part of the analysis to determine gang membership is the identification of gang indicia which can aid in identifying gang behaviors. There are several common behaviors that gang members share. These particular behaviors are not displayed all the time. Collectively, these behaviors build the gang mentality.

### **Attitude**

Gangs normally project an arrogant and defiant attitude in an attempt to intimidate others, especially in a public place and while in the presence of other gang members. Attitude is displayed when an impression can be made, to create fear and intimidate others. Attitude helps enhance the individual gang member's reputation and, in turn, helps create the gang's reputation within the community. Most gang members are opportunists who take advantage of a situation that will allow them to enhance their reputation.

### **Respect**

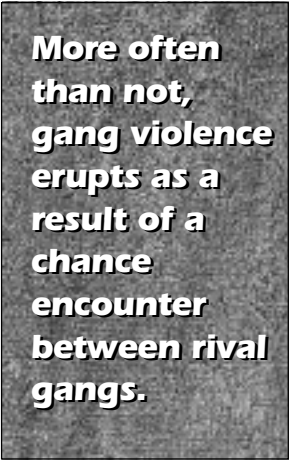
Maintaining respect is a fundamental goal for gang members and plays a role in gang behaviors. To lose face, to get challenged, to be made fun of, to have your girl friend leave you for another, to be stared at too long and not respond are all ways that gang members think they lose respect. Gang members have a misguided sense that the gang they belong to and they themselves lose respect if any insult goes unanswered. This belief causes gangs to respond, often violently, to minor incidents, like

those mentioned above. If a gang member feels that he or she will lose respect, they are motivated to prevent that from happening because they are protecting their own and the gang's reputation and respect. For this reason gangs will use violence almost anywhere. This violence can take place in schools, shopping malls, movie theaters, parks, freeways, fast food locations, theme parks and restaurants.

## **Pay Back**

"Pay back" is also known as retaliation. If a member of a gang is attacked, the gang responds, usually in an escalated manner. An attack on an individual gang member is viewed as an attack on the entire gang. The attack itself is a form of insult and the street gang mentality is that no insult goes unanswered. Retaliation attacks can cause a cycle of violence to develop between gangs. Contrary to a popular myth, violence does not occur every day, all day, between gangs that are fighting. Retaliatory attacks are often planned. Gangs usually wait to gather intelligence about their rival, or to collect weapons. They also attempt to avoid being discovered by the police. Sometimes a whole year will pass before a retaliatory "pay back" occurs. At other times, the response is immediate.

More often than not, gang violence erupts as a result of a chance encounter between rival gangs. An ongoing rivalry between gangs turns violent after they accidentally meet at a mall, movie theater, school, restaurant or amusement park. Even when gang members are socializing they are ready and prepared to protect themselves. Because of ongoing rivalries and the concept of pay back, rival gangs that



**More often than not, gang violence erupts as a result of a chance encounter between rival gangs.**

accidentally meet often fight it out. Unfortunately, the gangs seldom, if ever, worry about the venue where they meet. Being prepared often means that some of the gang members are armed. A shooting can happen and innocent people can end up hurt, or killed.

## **Back Up**

Belonging to a gang requires members to help their fellow gang members. In gang terminology this is referred to as “back up.” Gang members willingly put themselves in harm’s way to assist peer gang members. It is like a baseball team’s dugout emptying to fight the opposing team after their batter gets hit with a pitch. The manager did not give an order or direct the players to run out and fight. They did it on their own, to back up their fellow ball player and to let the other team know that they are not intimidated or scared. They want to earn the other team’s respect.

This same behavior occurs within the gang culture. Gang members help each other in the commission of crime and protecting each other. There are no written rules or orders. It is understood that one gang member helps the other. “Back up” in a street gang occurs without the direction of a leader or co-leader. Not to back up a fellow gang member would damage the gang member’s reputation, and the one who failed to provide “back up” would lose the respect of peer gang members. In the gang sub-culture, a member could be disciplined for this.

## **Leadership**

Most street gangs have no formal leadership structure. Often, the most active or the most violent gang members lead the gang. The rest of the membership looks up to these individuals, who are sometimes known as “shot callers.”

Some street gangs have an identified person who is in charge. Gang members in these types of gangs follow orders to complete a crime. For these gangs, going to commit a crime is referred to as "going on a mission." There are no formal titles, but there is a formal structure to the group.

Other gangs use titles similar to the rank structure of the U.S. military. These gangs operate with a para-military style of leadership. A few street gangs even require written reports after the commission of a crime.

## **"Joining" a Gang**

To join a gang a potential member has to prove that he or she is worthy of membership. One initiation ritual is known as a "jump in." This is a process whereby a new member allows himself or herself to be beaten by three to four other gang members, for a specific amount of time. Being able to take this physical punishment is a sign of a member's strength, courage and heart. Passing a "jumping in" is important. It is another way to pass a first test of loyalty. This ritual has also been called a "beat in." Members do not necessarily have to be jumped in to be a member of a gang.

There are other ways to join a gang. A new member could be sponsored by an existing member. This new member could be a family member, or someone who is well known by the rest of the gang. New gang members can also commit crime to show their loyalty and willingness to back up the gang. The crimes can range from shoplifting beer, to graffiti vandalism to murder.

If several people start their own gang, they are considered the original members or original gangsters. This term is sometimes abbreviated as "OG." Some gang members literally grow up in a gang family. Mother or father or both, along with siblings, all belong to the same gang. These individuals are sometimes referred to as being "generational" gang members.



New female gang members can complete any or all of the previously mentioned initiation rituals. Prospective female gang members can also be "sexed-in" to a street gang. Any number of male gang members of the same gang can be sex partners for the new female member. The number of male partners can be as high as 14 or 15. Female gang members who are sexed-in sometimes are treated differently than those females who are jumped-in. Some gangs even videotape these initiation rituals.

## Chapter 5

# Why Youth Join Gangs

Young people join gangs for a variety of reasons, which can be influenced by conditions in their family, school and neighborhood. A vulnerable child seeks love, protection and the acceptance of his or her peers. Youth, who lack parental guidance and support, or opportunities for positive involvement with their peers, often turn to a gang to meet these needs. Once a child is lost to a gang, it is hard to get him or her back because the gang can literally become a surrogate family for that young person. The loyalties, love and dedication normally found in traditional nuclear families are transferred to the gang family. Members can develop intense bonds with other members and feel a need to protect them. Many times, problems at home act as a cohesive factor for gang members.

Other reasons for joining a gang include: excitement, physical protection, peer pressure, family tradition, perceived financial gain, an avenue to gain "respect," being wanted and valued by a group, being feared by others, getting girl friends, gaining notoriety or out of boredom. Many gang members doubt their ability to achieve at school or to obtain job skills and employment. Many prospective gang members are youth who are not successful at school and are not receiving the attention and support they feel they need from their family.

Gang involvement and violence may be symptomatic of family, social or psychological dysfunction. The impact of these problems can be prevented and minimized by authority figures and community leaders understanding the dynamics of gang behav-

ior. This understanding includes learning how to deal with gang behaviors and finding out what alternatives and resources are available to change them.

## **Behavior changes**

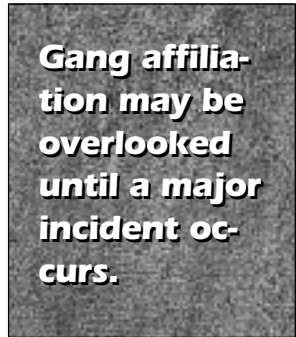
At school, the young person who joins a gang often exhibits signs of his or her new status. He or she may wear gang clothing and become disrespectful toward the teacher and others. The new gang member may intimidate or fight other students to gain a reputation for being tough. He can pick on a particular victim and constantly harass that youth.

Being a school bully helps establish a reputation for a willingness to engage in violence. Eventually, the new gang member will beat up the victim. But, before doing so, the gang member will announce his or her intentions to friends and other students so they can be there to cheer the gang member on and spread the word about his or her "toughness." Word of these actions quickly travels within the gang street culture. "Respect" is being established for the new gang member and the gang. If there is no intervention, these actions can establish an environment of fear at school, around school and within the community.

When at home, the new gang member's defiance may or may not manifest itself in violence. This depends on his or her relationship with parents and other family members. However, if the family attempts to interfere with the child's gang involvement by setting limits and increasing supervision, repeated confrontations may occur. If there are strong family ties, many male gang members still maintain a degree of respect for their mothers. Sometimes, mothers can have a profound impact on their involved gang member son or daughter. Even if a young person resists the family influence a parent should not give up on family support. But family members should try to understand the difference between family support, denial and acceptance.

New gang members want to prove themselves and are eager to assist in gang-related crime such as thefts, drugs sales and assaults. In an effort to establish "respect" and trust, gang members often assist in major assaults such as drive-by shootings.

Gang members can be respectful to staff and do not necessarily disrupt classroom activities. Doing well in school does not disqualify a person from being a gang member. Many gang members do not drop out of school and often maintain good grades. In such cases, gang affiliation may be overlooked until a major incident occurs. There have been convictions of high school and college students, who had excellent grades, and who have worked and volunteered in the community, for gang-related crimes and murders. Some gang members lead double lives. A few gang members have been employed at Fortune 500 companies, as well as local and state agencies.



**Gang affiliation may be overlooked until a major incident occurs.**

Parents and teachers should not jump to hasty conclusions about their children and gangs. The warning signs of gang involvement can be similar to normal behavior during adolescence. The key is to question the behavior if it appears to go beyond the norm. Staying well informed about your child's activities both in and outside of the home will help you determine whether your child might be involved in a gang. If not informed, parents can form incorrect conclusions or fall prey to denial.

## **Signs that a Youth May Be Involved in a Gang**

Gang involvement can begin as early as elementary school. Children as young as seven or eight years old have been recruited to work for gangs and have become gang members.

Parents and educators should watch for signs that their children or students may be involved with gangs. Changes in a child's behavior or activities which can be early warning signs of gang involvement, include:

- Decline in grades.
- Change of friends.
- Truancy.
- Keeping late hours.
- Alcohol and other drug use.
- Having large sums of money or expensive items which cannot be explained.
- Developing major attitude problems with parents, teachers or others in authority.
- Glamorizing gangs.
- Secretive or an abrupt change of behavior.
- Withdrawing from the family.
- Abrupt changes in music tastes, clothing styles.
- The presence of body modifications, including tattoos, scarring, burns and brands.

**Tell-tale signs of gang membership can include:**

- The presence of gang graffiti in the bedroom or on books, clothing, athletic shoes, posters and bedroom walls.
- Wearing gang clothing or an importance placed on a certain color(s).
- The use of hand signs to communicate with other gang members, siblings, teachers and parents.
- Having photos showing gang names, slogans, insignia, hand signals or individuals involved in gang activities.
- Using gang-style language.

- Getting gang tattoos or gang insignias.
- The disclosure of gang membership to police, teachers, siblings or parents.
- Witnesses connecting the individual to gang activity.
- Participating in gang activities
- Associating with known gang members
- Contacts by the police
- Withdrawing from the family
- Secretive or an abrupt change of behavior

Once in a gang, the child's behavior can change either gradually or suddenly, but it generally follows a pattern. To be accepted by the gang, the new member must adopt a defiant attitude toward authority figures. This defiance may be expressed by disruptive or violent behavior at school or at home. It may also lead to frequent contacts by the police or a probation officer.

## Chapter 6

# Prevention: Take Action!

The key to prevention is taking action! Prevention is part of a formula to building healthy communication and reducing gang activity. Everyone and every community can work on solutions to minimize problems. Effective anti-gang efforts begin with partnerships among parents, schools, law enforcement, religious institutions, community organizations, businesses and youth. The key is that individuals and the community take action. The most important thing an individual, a group or an organization can do is get involved.

### **What Parents Can Do**

Parents who suspect gang activity should take steps to intervene. Any concerned parent, teacher or community member can get involved in stemming gang membership. The following are some suggested steps:

- Increase your awareness of your child's belongings, clothes and room. It is OK to look at what is in your child's room.
- Know who your child's friends are and where they "hang out," especially after school.
- Meet the parent(s) of your children's friends, know where they live and get a telephone contact number.
- Be willing to identify and address the dynamics within your family, as well as factors within the neighborhood and school, that could be contributing to your child's gang involvement. This process is more difficult to do because you have to be candid and refuse to let denial affect your assessment.

- Talk with your child or teenager. Get answers to your questions about their behavior and discuss the consequences of being in a gang. At the same time let them know you love and care for them. Give them a sense that, together, you can work things out. Don't be afraid to say, "I am sorry," when appropriate.
- Talk with school officials and counselors. Understand what is required of your child at school. Know the homework and assignment schedules. Hold your children accountable for their school work.
- Ask teachers if they are aware of campus problems and if there are school programs that will help. Parents and concerned citizens can volunteer help with these programs. It is important for parents to get involved with your children in school and after-school activities.
- Let your child participate in band, school sports or after-school clubs.
- Join the PTA and get involved at school, even if it is for one hour a week or a couple of hours a month. Participate in activities at school, if at all possible, because it shows your children that you care.
- Volunteer time at your child's school whenever possible. Showing an interest and taking part of a child's life in this manner can have a profound effect on a child's future.
- Contact your local law enforcement agency or juvenile probation department. These agencies may have a crime prevention or gang specialist who can give you up-to-date information. Just as important, these agencies know about any current gang problems or areas where gangs have had an impact.
- Call your local community-based organizations. Many have experience with gang problems and can give you valuable guidance. For those communities that do not have one, think about forming one. Local Boys and Girls Clubs, churches and schools often act as a hub for such organizations.



- Go to your religious leaders for advice. These leaders may know of programs that help neighborhood children stay out of gangs. Many faiths today have special programs for young people.
- Report and document any graffiti in your neighborhood or on local school grounds. Then, remove the graffiti as soon as possible. Keep the photograph in a file with the date, time, location and who took the picture. Let the police know about the incident.
- Establish volunteer programs for young people. Let young people tutor other younger children. Let them volunteer at hospitals, youth and senior centers or animal shelters. These activities help young people develop a sense of community. When they have invested their time and effort in something, it will have value to them. These activities can also give the young person a sense of self worth, value and direction. These activities also make the participant feel needed.

## **What Communities Can Do**

Parents, educators, law enforcement officers and other community members can do a great deal to prevent gang involvement or reduce existing gang problems. You do not have to act alone. Family and community members can join together to make a difference. They can help establish a community action committee with members from law enforcement, city government, schools, clergy, the district attorney and the probation department. The purpose of a committee can include awareness, education and inter-community cooperation in monitoring gang activity and in coordinating or developing intervention and prevention programs. To help prepare for this task you can:

- Learn more about gangs.
- Call 911 immediately when there is an emergency in your neighborhood. Don't be afraid to get involved.
- Contact your local law enforcement agency for up-to-date information on gang activity. Crime prevention or gang

specialists can help your neighborhood plan ways to fight gang activity. They can also help you organize.

- Start a Neighborhood Watch Program in your neighborhood. This program helps counteract the gang's use of fear to control a neighborhood. A united neighborhood is one of the most effective weapons to help curb the impact a gang can have.
- Initiate a graffiti abatement or clean-up program. Get rid of gang graffiti. Paint over it. A graffiti-free neighborhood signals to gang members that it is your neighborhood, not theirs!
- Know where your children are. Compile a parent telephone tree list. This effort will enable parents to contact other concerned parents. Parents need to talk with each other about where their children are and what they are doing.

When gang incidents occur in your neighborhood, cooperate with the police or sheriff's department. Your help may prevent others from becoming victims of gang violence. Any information about gang crimes, wanted suspects or violent gang activity should be reported to the police. This report should be made



even if your own son or daughter is involved. Reporting your own child is a tough decision and does not mean that you do not love your child or that you do not care. In fact, it demonstrates your desire to hold your child accountable, to force him to face the consequences of his action — which may be the very experience he needs to change. Making a difference in your community begins at home. Fighting crime and dealing directly with violent gang members are best left to experts trained to deal with those situations.

Youth loitering after school or hanging out on corners provides a breeding ground for gangs. Communities can offer young people alternatives to gang involvement. These include organized activities for children and teenagers through recreation departments, schools, churches and youth organizations. These programs should operate during the prime time that most juvenile crime is committed — after school, between the hours of 2:00 PM and 8:00 PM. Communities should seek support from local businesses and industries to help employ and train youths. Together, you and your community can:

- Conduct an accurate assessment of the level of gang problems both in the community and at schools. Share information among parents, community residents, school personnel and law enforcement, to improve your ability to develop strong positive programs that address your community and school needs.
- Ensure that youth have ample recreational activities and after-school programs.
- Work with your school, law enforcement and religious and city officials to ensure that youth are provided with a safe and structured environment for social and recreational activities.
- Work with law enforcement to establish supervised, constructive late-night alternatives like nighttime basketball games, competitive drill teams or dance programs.
- Encourage older youth to work with younger youth in recreational and other activities.

- Provide gang prevention education and training to parents, youth and others in the community.
- Provide services to youth, especially at-risk youth.
- Provide employment opportunities for youth.
- Establish a tattoo removal program.

## **What Schools Can Do**

During the 1940's the top discipline problems at school were noted as talking, chewing gum, making noise, running in the halls, wearing improper clothing and not putting paper in waste baskets. Today, student discipline problems and issues involve absenteeism, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, gang violence, vandalism, suicide, rape, robbery, assault, bombings, abortion, AIDS, venereal disease, extortion and murder. School-age children are much more aware of social problems and more sophisticated than school-age children 60 years ago.

Today's schools face increasing challenges in making children feel safe at school so that they can concentrate on learning. Students must learn why certain behaviors may be dangerous to them. For example, why shouldn't a student hang around known gang gathering locations? Why shouldn't a student wear gang attire? The gangs on the street assume that someone is part of a gang if he or she is seen at known gang locations and/or dressed like a gang member. By being at a gang hangout or dressing like a gang member a student becomes a potential target for a rival gang.

A student who is not a member of a gang should never claim gang membership or association. By doing so, the student becomes a target for a rival gang or the gang itself. Normally, a gang punishes a person who claims membership when he or she is not really an accepted member. When gangs are attacking other gangs, there is never a check to find out if the victim is

really a gang member or not. About 50 percent of the victims of deadly gang violence are not gang members.



Schools and school districts are constantly burdened with the problem of finding answers to these complex gang and violence problems. Many schools implement a variety of prevention strategies that include graffiti removal teams, school safety policies banning gang attire and symbols on campus and gang resistance curricula. Parents and other community members can work with schools to develop strategies involving prevention, intervention and suppression. These measures can include:

### **Prevention**

- Targeted prevention programs
  - For students
  - For parents
- Mentoring
- Positive activities (such as the arts, sports and community services)
- After-school programs
- Staff awareness of early indicators of gang membership

- Referral system
- Violence prevention curriculum
- Youth development (such as critical thinking, interpersonal and other skills)
- Utilize youth as a resource (i.e., in making decisions and developing policies)
- Build parent awareness

### **Intervention**

- Team approach (parents, school staff, community leaders, youth and law enforcement working together)
- Early identification of at-risk youth
- Referral and tracking system
- Student assistance service
- Pull-out programs
- On campus suspension/expulsion
- Parent involvement/skill development
- Mentoring
- Tutoring
- Support

### **Suppression**

- Policies aimed at reducing gang activity
- Suspension/expulsion
- Consistent enforcement of laws
- Prescriptive Re-entry Service Contracts for students suspended or expelled

These strategies can help you and schools:

- Develop a school and law enforcement partnership to promote a safe campus.
- Sponsor training on gang issues for parents and teachers.

- Start a volunteer parent participation program at school to assist in tutoring or lunch-hour monitoring.
- Use parents and volunteers to help monitor campuses and bus stops.
- Develop conflict prevention and resolution classes for students, parents and school personnel.
- Develop translation programs for non-English speaking parents.
- Start before- and after- school and weekend programs to give students a safe place for study, tutoring programs and social and recreational activities.
- Start drop-out prevention programs.
- Allow School Resource Officers to teach on campus.
- Develop a dress code for school and enforce it.
- Advise the students of the rules and consequences for violations.
- Ensure student safety and security in the restroom area.
- Have a mechanism in place where students and faculty can anonymously inform school officials if a dangerous weapon or bomb is on campus.
- Build cultural awareness and civic respect.

## **What Local Government Can Do**

Local government can help in the formation of committees for the coordination and planning of prevention, intervention and suppression programs. Qualified members of government agencies can be selected to represent their agency. Normally, these committees should include: law enforcement agencies, prosecutors' offices, the probation department, schools, community-based organizations, parks and recreation agencies, religious organizations, local businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, neighborhood watch groups, parent groups, student groups and the news media.

Intervention and prevention programs should be custom tailored to a community's needs and resources. The input of concerned parents and community members can make a community-based collaborative successful.

These committees should meet on a regular basis to exchange information, coordinate activities and plan a comprehensive community response. A suggested planning process includes the following steps:

- Identify the nature and location of the problem and contributing factors. The input of members of the community is needed. Community members are the eyes and ears for law enforcement. Sharing their knowledge of criminal activity can help with this assessment.
- Develop strategies to address the problem and reduce or eliminate the contributing factors. Your community may have a special need that other communities do not require. Community input can help define and customize a solution that will be the most beneficial to the youth in your community.
- Determine the resources necessary to implement the strategies. Locate available resources at the local, state and federal levels.
- Implement activities in coordination with other agencies. This is the key to make a community collaborative work in implementation. Your involvement is needed to make this happen.
- Evaluate the results of activities and revise strategies, as needed.
- Establish a telephone hotline for citizens to call in tips; emphasize that the appropriate agency will follow up even on anonymous tips.

One activity that the local anti-gang coordinating committee should maintain is a list of all the organizations and individuals in





the community that are conducting anti-gang efforts and are in the position to assist these efforts, or are interested in assisting. This list can become a community resource for parents, teachers and concerned citizens. The anti-gang efforts of a community will gain momentum as more agencies and groups become involved in the committee. The effect from these efforts may take some time to be realized, so don't get discouraged.

### **Intervention: Get Involved!**

There is no single intervention program or strategy that can assist everyone who wants to leave a gang. The longer a person is a member of a gang, the more difficult it is for them to leave.

**Difficult, but not impossible.** The key to leaving a gang is up to the member. First, he or she has to have the desire to leave. A gang member cannot be forced to leave his/her gang. Remember, for many members, the gang has become like a replacement family.

Intervention programs can focus on a number of potential issues for those who want to leave a gang. Programs that have been successful have included a combination of goals that included

tattoo removal, encouraging youths to obtain a high school diploma or GED, establishing employment opportunities, assuring that the youth cooperate with probation/parole and helping youth obtain a valid driver's license. Many ex-gang members want to work, and education improves the ability to secure better paying jobs.

Often, gang members believe that once a young person joins a gang, the only way out is death. While this is not true, many gang members believe this myth. Some gang members feel that they should "jump-out" of their gang. The jump-out ritual is similar to the jumping-in initiation, except that it can be more severe. Some gang members will choose this way of leaving a gang because they feel they still will have the respect of the gang after they leave.

Many gang members have simply walked away from the gang to take care of their children. Getting a job and being a responsible parent have been valid reasons for many members to leave their gangs.

Joining the armed forces can be a beneficial experience to some gang members because military life can provide the training and discipline needed to navigate through life. Military life can pay for continued education and assistance for veterans who want to purchase a home. The cost for these benefits is active military duty. For some male and female gang members this experience can provide a valuable opportunity to leave a gang.

Having an arrest and conviction record can limit chances for employment and advancement, especially if the gang member has felony convictions. Having a juvenile or adult record may impact entrance into the military or a public service job. There are legal remedies to seal a juvenile record or downgrade a felony to a misdemeanor after successful completion of probation. This procedure is not valid for all felony crimes and cannot be used in every case.

For gang members who really want to leave the gang life, intervention programs can have a great deal of success. Successful intervention programs often include:

- Tattoo removal
- Education – obtaining a GED or high school diploma
- Medical/dental/optical services
- Valid California driver's license
- Employment
- Counseling/mental health
- Intensive supervision (probation/parole)

Medical, dental and optical professionals sometimes donate their services to intervention programs. Graduating from high school may take getting prescription glasses so the student can read, or treating a tooth that needs a filling. Normally not noticeable, these problems can become major hurdles for a gang member. Sometimes gang members who are leaving a gang need assistance solving some of life's simpler problems. For those who have a substance abuse problem, additional help may be needed. Having a GED or high school diploma can assist a gang member in getting a job.

Being on probation or parole and following all conditions is necessary if these programs are to be completed successfully. Mental health contact may also be important. The length of gang membership may determine what type of experiences the person has gone through. Some gang members suffer from Post Traumatic Stress due to witnessing events that traumatized them. A counselor who specializes in these issues may help keep the gang member on track.

Finally, tattoo removal is important because the removal is not only symbolic of leaving the gang, but also allows the person to stop advertising his or her gang affiliation. Removing the tattoo greatly decreases the chance of rival gang contact, increasing the safety of the ex-gang member and those around him or her.

Intervention programs may take some time to complete and require a considerable amount of effort. Gang members who enter these programs should be made aware of these challenges. A program person should be assigned to each case to aid in and monitor the process. Typical out-of-custody intervention programs cost less than half the cost of incarceration. These programs treat the entire family and help it to become self-sufficient.

Special consideration should be given to females in intervention programs. Females, in general, may have unique health problems. In addition, some female gang members are mothers of infants or small children. Being a single parent could present special issues for program design and implementation.

## **Conclusion**

Many view gangs as an inner city problem, or as law enforcement's responsibility. With the spread of gangs and increasing gang-related violence, we can no longer afford to deny their presence and hope for the best. Joining or belonging to a gang not only subjects the member's family, friends and neighbors to potential crime and violence, it also can deprive young people of their potential by inhibiting their education and squelching their employment opportunities. All of us — parents, youth, clergy, businesses, educators, law enforcement and local government — can work together to steer youth away from gangs and to help those already involved to leave a gang. Together we can give at-risk youth our time, attention and alternatives to gang life.

# Appendix

## Resources

Check with your local law enforcement agency, probation department, District Attorney's office, school district or county office of education to obtain additional information on local gang prevention, intervention and suppression programs.

### State Agencies

#### Office of the Attorney General

Crime and Violence Prevention Center  
P.O. Box 944255  
Sacramento, CA 94244  
Phone: (916) 324-7863  
Fax: (916) 327-2384  
<http://safestate.org>

*Develops educational materials, conducts research and provides gang and other crime and violence prevention information and resources to government agencies, law enforcement and the general public.*

#### California Department of Justice

Division of Law Enforcement  
Criminal Intelligence Bureau  
P.O. Box 160967  
Sacramento, CA 95816  
Phone: (916) 227-1240

*Provides confidential gang intelligence information to federal, state and local law enforcement agencies investigating or prosecuting gang-related criminal activities.*

**School/Law Enforcement Partnership**

Office of the Attorney General  
Crime and Violence Prevention Center  
P. O. Box 944255  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2550  
Phone: (916) 324-7863  
Fax: (916) 327-2384  
<http://safestate.org>

or

**California Department of Education**

Safe and Healthy Kids  
1430 N Street, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
Phone: (916) 319-0920  
Fax: (916) 319-0218

*A cadre of professionals, which provides youth-serving agencies to promote safe schools, improve school attendance and encourage good citizenship.*

**Office of Criminal Justice Planning**

Gang Violence Suppression Branch  
1130 K Street, Suite 300  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
Phone: (916) 327-3682  
<http://www.ocjp.ca.gov>

*Provides funding for local anti-gang programs, including suppression, intervention, education, enforcement, prosecution and probation efforts. Maintains an information clearinghouse on anti-gang efforts.*

**California Department of Transportation**

Division of Maintenance  
Office of Roadside Maintenance  
1120 N Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

or

**California Department of Transportation**  
P.O. Box 942873, Sacramento, CA 94273-0001  
Phone: (916) 654-4470  
Fax: (916) 653-1294  
<http://www.dot.ca.gov>

*Oversees a statewide anti-graffiti committee and works closely with local government or graffiti abatement.*

## **State Organizations**

**California Gang Investigators Association**  
Safe Streets Bureau  
3010 East Victoria Street  
Rancho Dominguez, CA 90221  
Phone: (310) 603-3105  
Fax: (310) 639-2469  
<http://cgiaonline.org>

*Provides information and training to law enforcement agencies regarding gangs.*

**California District Attorneys Association**  
731 K Street, Third Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95814-3402  
Phone: (916) 443-2017  
Fax: (916) 443-0540  
<http://www.cdaa.org>

*Provides training and information to prosecutors' offices on issues dealing with the prosecution of gang members.*

**California State Juvenile Officers Association**  
**Northern**  
PO Box 14163  
Fremont, CA 95539  
**Central**  
P.O.Box 1206  
Fresno, CA 93175-1067

**Southern**

P.O. Box 86122  
Los Angeles, CA 90086-0122  
<http://www.csjoa.org>

*Provides statewide training conferences for juvenile law enforcement officers. The organization also provides speakers on community education and social opportunities for networking.*

**T.A.G.N.E.T. (Tagger and Graffiti Network Enforcement Team)**

John Maxwell  
Los Angeles Sheriff's Department  
Safe Streets Bureau  
3010 East Victoria Street  
Rancho Dominguez, CA 90221  
Phone (310) 603-3100  
Fax: (310) 639-2650

*Provides intelligence information on taggers, tagging crews and graffiti to local law enforcement.*

**Violence Prevention Coalition of Greater Los Angeles Area**

3530 Wilshire Blvd. Suite #800  
Los Angeles, CA 90010  
Phone: (213) 351-7888  
Fax: (213) 351-2713  
<http://www.vpcla.org>

*Provides information and strategies on community efforts to prevent violence.*



## **Federal Agencies**

### **U.S. Department of Justice**

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

810 Seventh Street N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20531

Phone: (202) 307-5911

Fax: (202) 307-2093

<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org>

*Provides funding for community-based, agency-based and school-based youth crime/gang prevention and intervention efforts.*

### **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

Family and Youth Services Bureau

Mary E. Switzer Building

330 C Street, S.W., Room 2120

Washington, D.C. 20201

Phone: (202) 205-8102

Fax: (202) 205-9721

[www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov)

*Provides funding, training and resources for local gang prevention efforts throughout the nation.*

### **Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives**

United States Department of Treasury

(800) ATF-GUNS

650 Massachusetts Ave., NW

Washington DC 20226

Phone: (800) ATF-GUNS or (202) 927-5000

Fax: (202) 927-5611

[www.atf.treas.gov](http://www.atf.treas.gov)

*Maintains a nationwide tollfree number for citizens to report illegal activity involving guns. Also provides training to law enforcement on GREAT, anti-gang school curriculum.*

### **National Criminal Justice Reference Service**

P.O. Box 6000

Rockville, MD 20849-6000

Phone: (800)851-3420 or (301)519-5500

Fax: (301)519-5212

[www.ncjrs.org](http://www.ncjrs.org)

*Provides federally funded resources offering justice and substance abuse information to support research, policy and program development worldwide.*

### **U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Clearinghouse**

810 Seventh Street, NW Fourth Floor

Washington, DC 20531

Phone: (202) 616-6500

(800) 688-4252 or 638-8736

Fax: (202) 305-1367

[www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA)

*Provides information on a wide range of programs and initiatives, and up-to-date and bibliographic information on crime, drugs, gangs and related crimes.*

## **National Organizations**

### **Boys and Girls Clubs of America**

National Headquarters

Gang Prevention/Intervention Through Targeted Outreach Program

1230 West Peachtree Street, NW

Atlanta, GA 30309

Phone: (404) 487-5700

Fax: (404) 487-5789

<http://www.bgca.org>

*Provides training and technical assistance to Boys and Girls Clubs in communities throughout America to reach out to youth at risk of gang involvement.*

**National Association of School Resource Officers**

PO Box 39

Osprey, FL 34229

Phone: (888) 316-2776

Fax: (352) 369-8519

<http://www.nasro.org>

*Provides information and training to law enforcement officers who want to become certified school resource officers.*

**National Crime Prevention Council**

1000 Connecticut Ave., NW, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor

Washington, D.C. 20036-5325

Phone: (202) 466-6272

Fax: (202)296-1356

[www.weprevent.org](http://www.weprevent.org)

*Provides information and training regarding crime prevention issues including drug and gang problems.*

**National School Safety Center**

141 Duesenberg Drive, Ste. 11

Westlake Village, CA 91362

Phone: (805) 373-9977

Fax: (805) 373-9277

<http://www.nssl.org>

*Offers print resources on gangs and technical assistance to community groups on how to address the gang problem in a community or school setting.*

**The National Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTA)**

330 North Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100

Chicago, IL 60611-3690

Phone: (312) 670-6782 or (800) 307-4782

Fax: (312) 670-6783

<http://www.pta.org>

*Provides several documents on gangs and schools, highlighting successful initiatives that have been implemented by local parent groups nationwide.*

**Police Executive Research Forum**

1120 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 930

Washington, DC 20036

Phone: (202) 466-7820

Fax: (202) 466-7826

[www.policeforum.org](http://www.policeforum.org)

*Offers a variety of publications and background information on how law enforcement agencies can effectively deal with the gang problem.*

## **Online Resources**

### **Official California Legislative Information**

<http://www.leginfo.ca.gov>

*Official site maintained by the Legislative Counsel of California which provides up-to-date information on legislation and California laws.*

### **PAVNet (Partnership Against Violence Network)**

Phone: (301) 504-5462

[www.reeusda.gov/pavnet](http://www.reeusda.gov/pavnet)

*Provides a virtual library of information about violence and youth at-risk, representing data from seven different federal agencies. Provides clear and comprehensive access to information for states and local communities*

### **Quick Guide to Violence Prevention Programs at California's Open Door Providers**

[www.safetynetinstitute.net/publications/vpquickguide102501.PDF](http://www.safetynetinstitute.net/publications/vpquickguide102501.PDF)

*Provides reference guide to various programs throughout California to help troubled youth.*

### **Tattoo Removal**

12027 Venice Boulevard

Los Angeles, CA 90066

Phone: (310) 915-8060

[www.tattooremoval.org](http://www.tattooremoval.org)

*Provides information on various tattoo removal programs*

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Additional copies of this publication can be downloaded from [www.safestate.org](http://www.safestate.org)