

## WARNING SIGNS THAT SOMEONE HAS JOINED THE GANG LIFESTYLE

- Mentions peers with gang affiliations
- Unexplained injuries consistent with those incurred during a fight
- Begins to carry weapons
- Showing unusual interest in particular colors of clothing or logos, which is not easily explained
- Unusual hand signals in photos or videos
- Unexplained cash or goods in their possession
- Withdrawn from family and/or old friends
- Declining behavior

## WHAT FAMILY CAN DO TO PREVENT GANG INVOLVEMENT:

- Educate yourself about local gang involvement
- Understand why someone might join a gang
- Spend quality time with impressionable youth
- Be interested in youth's academic and extracurricular activities
- Discuss dangerous behaviors openly and without judgment
- Encourage participation in community activities

## WARNING SIGNS OF GANG ACTIVITY IN AN AREA:

- Increase in property crimes i.e., thefts, vandalism, etc
- Increase in crimes against persons — assaults, carjackings, etc.
- Increase in unexplained foot traffic or loitering in an area
- Increase in appearance of graffiti or "Tags," in particular the use of combinations of letters, numbers, symbols, logos, etc.
- Local residents being intimidated i.e., being discouraged from or harassed for interacting with law enforcement or other government or community-based organizations

## WHAT INDIVIDUALS CAN DO TO PREVENT OR COUNTERACT GANG ACTIVITY IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS:

- Take action and be interested in your community
- Develop a relationship with local law enforcement
- Have open dialogue with law enforcement and government officials
- Encourage others to stand with you against illegal activity in your neighborhoods
- Form neighborhood groups to address problems and make local law enforcement part of these meetings



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Source: U.S. Department of Justice

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An Internationally Accredited Agency

SHP-543 9/2025



What You Should Know About

# GANGS



## WHAT IS A GANG?

A gang is an ongoing, organized association of three or more persons — some are formal and others, informal, but most have a common name or common signs, colors, or symbols. Typically, members or associates individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in criminal activity.

## HOW DID GANGS BEGIN?

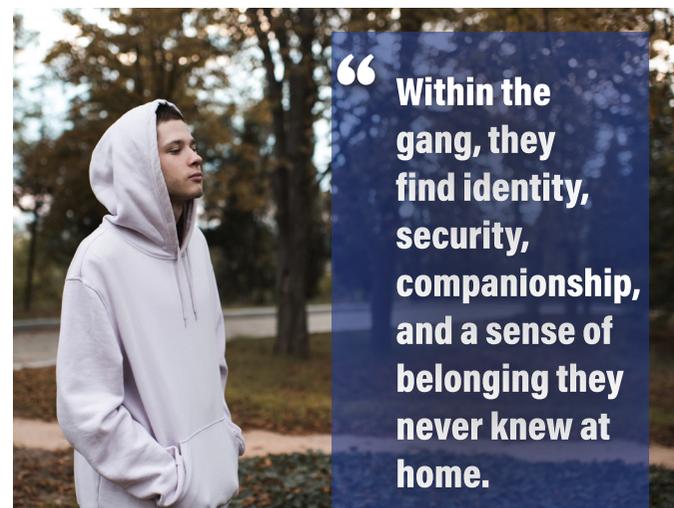
Gangs started in this country about the time of the Industrial Revolution, when people left their rural homes for the city. There was inadequate housing and few jobs available, so the unemployed turned to crime to survive. After a short time, individuals found safety in larger numbers. They began to band together, thus forming gangs. Early gangs were made up of the poorest people—usually Irish, Italian, and Polish. However, gangs in the United States have evolved to include people from all ethnicities, cultures, and socio-economic classes, as well both genders. Gangs flourished and continued to grow well into the 1950s. Generally, gangs fought in large groups and covered large territories. They were well-disciplined. Their weapons consisted of bats, chains, and fists. Gangs diminished in size in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but reappeared in the late 1970s tougher and more violent than ever. In the 1980s, gang fights escalated to include guns. The availability of vehicles and increased use of guns resulted in more drive-by shootings. In the 1980s and 1990s, gangs included more younger and older members, as well as an increased number of members with prison records or ties to inmates. Weapons became more lethal; alcohol/drug use and drug trafficking more prevalent. Some gangs have evolved into organized criminal enterprises and extend beyond international borders. The multinational gangs can be sophisticated and have vast resources. However, gangs remain mostly comprised of young people seeking attention and interaction not found within their immediate family.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF GANG MEMBERS

Lack of education or educational opportunities;  
Lack of job opportunities or skills;  
Absence of sufficient, positive adult role models;  
Lack of family support;  
Low self-esteem and the absence of a feeling of empowerment;  
Drug and alcohol abuse; and  
Lack of opportunities for pro-social interactions

## WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE JOIN A GANG?

The reasons for joining a gang may range from wanting to have a good time to pursuing entrepreneurial ventures that may require a considerable commitment to delinquent or criminal activity. These reasons for gang participation, coupled with a society that is more violent and one that glamorizes gangs and criminals on television and in movies, make it no surprise that our youth are in gangs. Within the gang, they find identity, security, companionship, and a sense of belonging they never knew at home. Still other youths join gangs merely for survival or protection from other gangs. The gang may also represent a way to succeed and obtain material possessions the youth would not otherwise have.



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## IN WHAT TYPES OF ACTIVITIES ARE GANGS INVOLVED?

**Social** — Some gang activity may be socially motivated or include parties, dances, and athletic events. Members share the same feelings and ideologies and are seldom delinquent.

**Delinquent** — These gang members engage extensively in property offenses and in serious crimes. They are sometimes termed "serious delinquents". Drug use and sale are relatively unimportant.

**Violent** — Violence in gangs and in their activities is extremely common and is done for gratification or retribution.

**Drug Activities** — The main motivator for the gang's existence is drugs. Their greatest financial success has come from increased involvement in narcotics trafficking. When these gangs first became involved with trafficking, the predominant drugs were marijuana and PCP. This trend has progressed to include cocaine, fentanyl, heroine, methamphetamine, prescriptoin drugs, and synthetic drugs.

## WHAT ARE LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS DOING TO COUNTERACT THE APPEAL OF GANG ACTIVITY TO YOUTH?

Participating in a community awareness campaign.  
Contacting parents to alert them that their children are involved with a gang.  
Sponsoring gang hotlines.  
Organizing athletic events between police and gang members.  
Making presentations about gangs in schools.  
Gang task forces — these are used to identify members and their operations.  
Neighborhood watch programs.  
Suppression.

## HOW CAN GANG ACTIVITY BE CURBED?

Social Programs  
Establishing Community Centers  
Employment Assistance  
Dropout Services  
Mentor Programs  
Recreational Activities  
Family Intervention/Training  
Substance Abuse Counseling  
Group Homes  
Self-Help Programs  
Counseling Services For Gangs, Families, Communities, & Teachers  
Educational Programs  
Rehabilitation Programs

