

# Harford County Sheriff's Office Special Investigations Division

**Criminal Intelligence Unit**  
*Gang Recognition*

# Introduction

The Harford County Sheriffs Office continues a proactive stance on gangs and gang activity in Harford County. Over the past few years, the migration of gangs and the criminal culture they teach has expanded into suburban areas of the Baltimore Region. The citizens of Harford County are requested to assist us with identifying gangs and gang activity and/or graffiti within our County. The following presentation is designed to give you an overview of the indicators of gang activity.

# What is a gang?

The definition accepted on a national level and adopted by the Sheriff's Office is:

Gang – A group or association of three or more persons who may have a common identifying sign, symbol or name and who individually or collectively engage in, or have engaged in, criminal activity which **creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.**

National Alliance of Gang Investigators Association

# Why join a Gang?

Gang members identify the following as reasons why they joined a gang:

- Structure – gang provides rules to live by
- Nurturing – gang members speak about how they love each other, fills void of a family
- Sense of belonging – social interaction with other members
- Economic opportunity – money generated from illegal activities
- Excitement – to escape boredom

# Gang Mentality - Influences

Gang members often emulate what they see. The proliferation of the “Gangster or Gangsta” lifestyle in today’s entertainment industry is an example. The music channels, videos and concerts also sensationalize the lifestyle. The clothing industry markets brands and lines to capture the look of a gang member. It is a popular style with today’s youth, whether displayed by gang members or unaffiliated youth.

# Criteria to Determine a Gang Member

Several identifiers are required to classify someone as a gang member:

- Self-admission of membership
- Gang related tattoo's
- Group photographs of gang and gang members
- Possession of gang symbols and documents
- Observed with other known gang members

# Tattoos

Tattoos signify a rite of passage for a gang member. They represent status in the gang and must be earned by the members. A “beat down” or act of violence will take place if a gang member does not obtain permission before getting a tattoo. Tattoos are frequently disguised or hidden and are a starting point in the identification of an active gang member.

# Graffiti

Graffiti is the “Newspaper of the Streets”. Graffiti is usually the first sign that a gang has moved into a specific geographic region. It is utilized by the gang as a warnings to rival gangs, to issue challenges, and as a show of disrespect to other gangs in the area.



# Graffiti

It is important to recognize gang graffiti and report it to the police. Once the graffiti has been documented by the police it needs to be removed or painted over. By covering up the graffiti you will eliminate another gang disrespecting it, spraying over with their gang signs and symbols, and the violence that may ensue.

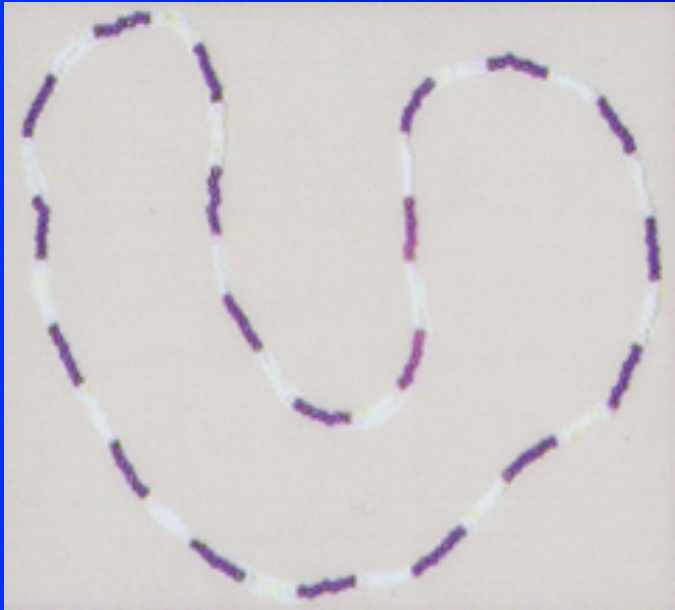
# Colors

It is important to realize that just because an individual is wearing or displaying certain colors they *are not* a gang member. The totality of the circumstances dictates the classification of a subject as a gang member.

The following are examples of gang symbols, graffiti, and clothing exhibited in Harford County.







*To report suspected gang activity please call the Sheriff's Office Intelligence Unit at 410-879-0280 or information may be left anonymously on our tip line 410-836-7788.*

*To report a criminal act please call 410-838-6600*

*or*

*in an emergency please dial 911.*

The background is a dark blue gradient. A thin, light blue curved line starts from the top left and arcs towards the center. A larger, light blue shape, resembling a stylized 'C' or a partial circle, is positioned in the lower right quadrant, overlapping the main text area.

“Denial will cause your gang presence  
to become a gang problem”