

## Gang Prevention

Children join gangs for a variety of reasons, which make perfect sense to the child at the time. The following are some common reasons why our youth may become involved with gangs:

- Family issues/Lack of positive communication
- Naivete/Lack of realization of the hazards
- Low self-esteem
- Inadequate adult supervision
- Need for attention & respect/Wants to be somebody
- Desire for friendship & a sense of belonging
- Peer pressure
- Fear/Need for protection
- Excitement and sense of power
- Fad/Media glamorizing gangster life
- Financial benefit

It is a serious error in judgment to regard street gangs, drugs and guns as problems exclusive to the inner city areas. Ask your child to be completely honest with you and learn from them the following:

- (1) Do you know any gang members?
- (2) Do you know where you can buy drugs?
- (3) Do you know where you can buy a gun?

Don't be surprised when your child answers yes to any or all of the questions. This does not necessarily mean that your child is a gang member. He/she may just be aware of the surroundings. Gang involvement can begin as early as elementary school. Children ages 7 and 8 are being recruited to work for gangs because the criminal justice system may not severely punish juveniles. Become more attuned with your child and their leisure activities. It's a parent's best defense against gang recruitment.

Talk to your child about his/her social life away from home. Listen carefully when your children talk to you. TAKE THEM SERIOUSLY then CONFIRM THEIR STATEMENTS. Communication is essential for maintaining a positive relationship with your children.

Kids know more than you think about street gangs, drugs and guns, but are often reluctant to talk about them to parents for fear of punishment. Let your children know that it is okay to talk about issues that trouble them. Make them understand that you are there to help.

Always remember that gang recruitment can begin at an early age. It is never too early to inform your child about the existence and inherent evil of gangs and the danger involved with being a gang member. Don't let gang leaders be their first educator. Let your child know that you have no tolerance for gang behavior at home or in the community. The illusion of gang respect and peer acceptance within the gang is a false one and dangerous to your child's well being.

Know what your child keeps in his/her room. Watch for the telltale gang emblems drawn on notebooks or other personal items. Become familiar with their friends and parents and always maintain a phone number and address file. Know where your kids spend their time. Be aware of their appearance, including their dress pattern and the type of jewelry they wear. Get in the habit of asking your children before they go out:

- Where are you going?
- Who are you going with?
- How are you getting there?
- When will you be back?
- How can I reach you in an emergency?
- Establish a curfew and make them adhere to it.

Encourage your child to become involved with sports or educational activities. Do not allow them to become bored. Become acquainted with your local school administration and the teachers. As a parent or educator, join a neighborhood watch program in your area, or become a volunteer for activities which offer positive alternatives to gang involvement.

## Helping Your Children Stay Gang Free

**Discourage your children from hanging out with gang members.** Meet and get to know your children's friends and their families. If your child chooses friends that are gang members, then your child will probably become involved with the gang and its activities.

**Keep your children busy.** Occupy your child's free time by getting them involved in after school programs, sports, church activities, etc.

**Develop and keep good communication with your children.** GOOD communication is open, frequent and takes on a positive tone and allows children to come to you and discuss any topic or problem. It does **not** condemn or put down opinions

**Spend time with your children.** Plan activities the entire family can enjoy. Spend some time alone with your child. Expose your children to places or interest outside your local neighborhood. Choose something different from their everyday life.

**Do not let your children stay out late and spend a lot of unsupervised time in the streets.**

**Do not let your children dress in gang style clothing.** If your children dress like gang members, they may be expressing an interest in gangs. They may also attract the negative attention of gang members. If a rival gang's colors are being worn, this could lead to a reprisal.

**Set limits for your children.** Children need to understand what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. This should be taught in their early years.

**Do not let your children write gang names, symbols or graffiti on their books, papers, clothes, bodies, wall, or any other place.** They must respect themselves, their property and that of others.

**Develop an anti-gang environment in your home.** At an early age, clearly and continually express to your child that you disapprove of gangs, gang activities, and any member of your family becoming involved with a gang.

**Learn about gangs in your community.** Learn how gang members dress, speak, act, and where they can be found in your community. Attend informational meetings and become an informed parent.

**Participate in the education of your child.** Take an interest in your child's education. Visit their school, meet their teachers and attend PTA meetings. Show your children you are concerned.

### **Are Your Other Children Safe?**

When someone associates with gang members or joins a gang, their family may be adversely affected. Just hanging around with gangs increases your child's exposure to alcohol, drugs, weapons and violence. Gang activity also dramatically increases the possibility of dropping out of school and going to jail and prison.

Parents, family members and friends of gang members could experience any or all of the following:

- Fear for their safety and that of other siblings.
- Damage to personal property from graffiti and other forms of vandalism.
- Financial liability for damage caused by children.
- Trauma, grief and depression over the injury or loss of a loved one.
- Having to pay for hospital bills or funeral expenses because of gang activity.
- Family members suffering personal injuries that could cause disability or death.

Gang members become involved in illegal activity, they are often in and out of jail and can not hold a regular job or they become disabled due to gang activity and become a burden to their family.

### **Warning Signs of Gang Involvement**

Below are some warning signs of gang involvement. Most children will exhibit one or two of these signs as part of their normal growth patterns. However, if your child exhibits several of these patterns there may be cause for concern.

The risk factor becomes amplified if you live in an area where there is a high level of gang activity or your child has low self-esteem. If there is a lack of alternative activities such as after school programs or sports programs that your child can participate in or if they have too much unsupervised time.

The key is to be aware, know your child, be involved in their life, and keep the lines of communication open.

- Change in behavior
- Grades drop
- Truancy
- New "FRIENDS"
- Phone calls asking for someone unknown or a street name
- Threatening phone calls to family and/or child
- Use of slang
- Don't want to tell you where they go
- Becomes defiant to you and all authority figures
- Wearing only certain colors
- Symbols appear on personal possessions
- Graffiti appears in room or on books
- Photos of unknown friends
- Flashing hand signs when seeing friends
- Tattoos
- Freely admitting being with gang members
- Unexplained money or expensive possessions

# **Harford County Sheriff's Office**



## **Gang Prevention Information**

**Intelligence Unit 410-879-0280**  
**TIPS Lines 410-836-7788**  
**EMERGENCY 911**

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