

Gang Prevention and Awareness:

This information was developed as an awareness guide to help suppress gang violence in our communities and our schools. The referral telephone number will place you in contact with people who can help. Cooperative efforts of law enforcement, education and the community will clearly define the problems so they can be dealt with effectively.

What Is A Gang?

Gangs are usually formed according to ethnic or racial guidelines, although there seems to be a current trend to form gangs for economic reasons. A gang is a group of people who form an allegiance for a common purpose and engage in violent, unlawful, or criminal activity. A gang may or may not claim control over a certain territory in the community.

Factors Contributing To Gang Affiliation

Parents should look for change in behavior and lifestyle of their child. Contributing factors which can place a youth at risk include ineffective parental skills, history of family gang involvement and evidence of parental abuse or neglect. This type of dysfunctional family atmosphere affects the youth's school behavior, leading to poor academic achievement and early anti-social behavior. The at-risk youth now becomes a personal risk. The youth will display low self-esteem and may begin experimenting with drugs and alcohol. As the youth searches for his or her new identity, he or she usually isolates himself or herself with others experiencing similar social and personal problems. Youth exposed to these influences without guidance may have a tendency to accept and legitimize gang activities. The youth will flourish and strive in his or her newly found status. This self rewarding status guarantees the youth's indulgence with the gang culture.

Signs of Gang Involvement

Certain signs indicate gang involvement in our community or on school campuses. Parents should be aware of these warning signs and should be ready to employ the appropriate prevention and intervention strategies. These warning signs include:

- 1) An "informal" dress code that is followed by your child, and his or her associates (hats, jewelry, shoelaces, colors, tattoos and insignias, etc.).
- 2) Street slang, use of new nicknames and hand signs.
- 3) Newly acquired and unexplained "wealth" often displayed, worn or shared with peers.
- 4) Graffiti on personal property, book covers, notebooks and clothing. This graffiti may include initials, numbers, names, expressed racism or hatred of different groups or cultures.

Effect of Gang Involvement

Gang membership extracts a terrible toll from the lives of all who are in contact with the member. Families of gang members must be concerned for their own safety as well as that of their son or daughter who is a gang member. Friends who are not involved with gangs are cast aside and soon the youth's only friends are gang members. Gang membership, although a temporary phase for some youths, will shape the individual's future. Formal education is discarded because it is counter to the gang's objectives. Gang members who are not killed or seriously injured or incarcerated often develop patterns of alcohol and narcotics abuse, and extensive police records that limit future employment opportunities.

Gang Activity – What Gangs Do

Many gang activities are consistent with those engaged in by a large portion of society. But, when a gang member is involved in a weekend party, fund-raising car wash, or even a family or neighborhood picnic, the potential for violence and criminal activity is far greater than for any other group of people. Gang members seek confrontations with rivals. The resulting violence often claims innocent victims. Gang violence varies from individual assaults to drive by shootings. Some gangs are involved in the sale of drugs, extortion, robberies, motor vehicle thefts, or other criminal activity for monetary gain. While gang violence and criminal activity often make headlines, vandalism in the form of graffiti and the wanton destruction of public and private property is often done in the furtherance of the gang's reputation.

How to Discourage Your Children From Joining Gangs

Discourage you children from hanging around with gang members. Meet your children's friends. Find out who they are, what influence they have on your children and how they and your children spend their free time. If your children choose friends that are mostly from gangs, then your children are properly involved or will become involved in one also.

Occupy your children's free time. Give them responsibilities at home. Get them involved in after-school sports, city/county recreation, community events, and other busy activities.

Develop good communication with your children. Good communication is open and frequent, and it takes on a positive tone. It allows your children to come to you to discuss any topic or problem. It does **not** condemn or put down. Good communication allows you to tell your children that you love them.

Spend time with your children. Plan activities that the whole family can enjoy. Spend time alone with your children. Expose them to different places outside of your neighborhood: parks, the beach, the mountains, camping trips, etc.

Do not buy or allow your children to dress in gang style clothing. If your children dress in gang style clothing, they are expressing an interest in gangs and will attract the attention of gangs. If they are in the wrong neighborhood at the wrong time, they could be victimized or killed.

Set limits for your children. At an early age, children need to know what acceptable behavior is and what is unacceptable behavior. Do not allow your children to stay out late or spend a lot of unsupervised time out in the streets.

Do not allow your children to write or practice writing gang names, or symbols, or any other gang graffiti on their books, papers, walls or any other place.

Teach your children respect for others' property. Develop an anti-gang environment in your home. Clearly and continually begin to express to your children **at an early age** your disapproval of gang activity and of any family members joining a gang.

Learn about gang and drug activity in your community. Learn how gang members dress, how they speak, their behavior and their activities. Attend information meetings, read articles related to gang activity.

Be an informed parent.

Where To Call For More Information Or Help:

Soledad Police Department:

Emergency – 911

Non-Emergency 831-755-5111

Investigation Division - California Gang Reduction, Intervention, and Prevention Program (CalGRIP): 831-223-5130

Other Agencies:

Empowering South Monterey County for Peace Project: 831-223-5165

Graffiti Abatement Program: 831-223-5120

Monterey County Probation Department: 831-755-3900