WHAT IS A GANG?

A street gang is 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, or as juveniles commit an act that if committed by an adult would be a criminal act.

WHAT IS GANG ACTIVITY

Activities that gangs are involved in include fighting, vandalism, graffiti, armed robbery weapon offenses, auto theft battery and drug dealing. Not all gang members are engaged in illegal activities. Criminal activity is usually committed by gang members for monetary benefit to either the gang itself or to an individual member.

WHAT’S A GANG STRUCTURE?

Peer pressure plays an important role in a decision to join a gang. Gang members come from all walks of life, from low income to high income. Some gang members have relatives who belong to a gang. Gang members are placed in the following categories:

1. “Leaders” are usually the oldest members with extensive criminal backgrounds. They direct the activities and recruitment of the gang members. Each gang has a particular command structure.

2. “Hard-core members” are usually the most violent members of the gang with criminal backgrounds. They generally commit the more serious crimes and are behind the drug dealing trade for the gang. They intimidate the younger members of the gang and show them what is required to display loyalty to the gang.

3. “Fringe and/or marginal members” are usually the youngest and the newest members of the gang with little criminal backgrounds. They may have joined the gang or are thinking about joining the gang. They may only be involved temporarily or on a limited basis, or they may progress into hard-core members.
WHAT ARE COMMON IDENTIFIERS?

Gang members use graffiti, hand signs, jewelry, tattoos, clothing and colors to mark their membership in a gang and to communicate their gang affiliation to others. Each gang has their own graffiti, signs and colors.

HAND SIGNS

Called "stacking," hand signs are used to communicate within the gang and as a challenge to rival gangs. Forming letters and/or numbers with fingers makes these signs.

TATTOOS

Tattoos are used to mark one's body to indicate membership in a particular gang. The tattoos can include the name, initials, street of origin or symbols of a gang. Some tattoos are professionally drawn while others are homemade.

COLORS

Most gangs have particular colors that they use to identify themselves. Many of the gang members will frequently dress in these colors.

CLOTHING

Some gangs use particular sports team clothing to represent their gang by picking a team that uses the particular colors associated with gangs. They may also pick out a team’s clothing because of the symbol represented by that team, such as the five-point star used by the Dallas Cowboys.
JEWELRY

Gangs are usually divided into two groups, the folks and peoples. Jewelry with a six-point star indicates membership with a gang related to the folks, while a five-point star is associated with peoples.

STREET NAMES

Members of gangs use street-names with each other. They are used to conceal identification from law enforcement. Sometimes gang members use addressers such as "folks" and "people" when talking to each other. NOTE: The wearing of particular items of clothing should not be used alone as an indication of gang involvement. Current clothing style imitates gang membership.

WHAT ARE SIGNS OF POSSIBLE YOUTH INVOLVEMENT?

1. Baseball caps worn distinctively to the left or the right
2. Tattoos of stars, pitchforks, or unexplained symbols
3. Jewelry, including rings, earrings, and necklaces with nicknames, stars, and pitchforks or unexplained initials or symbols
4. Money from an unexplained source
5. Certain clothes with particular colors and sport team identification, which are the only type a child will wear
6. Youth fails to go to school regularly or stops attending.
7. Youth shows a significant change in attitude and a strong disrespect for authority. (Police, Administration, and Parents)
8. Youth speaks of the need of protection and the need to carry a weapon.
9. Youth rejects the natural family in favor of new "family" of peers and older adults.
WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

Have the Right Attitude
- You play a major part in keeping gangs out of your family’s life.

The “W’s”
- Where your child is
- What he or she is doing
- Who he or she is with

Be involved in your child’s life
- Show interest in your child’s school work or hobbies.
- Work to build open, ongoing communication with your child.
- Listen without being quick to judge.
- Set aside a time for positive family activities.
- Monitor what your child watches and listens to, especially TV shows, music, and movies that promote gangs or are full of violence.
- Encourage your child to spend time wisely—studying, doing chores, or participating in sports, hobbies, art, scouts, or volunteer groups.
- Teach good values and responsibility.
- Be consistent about discipline.
- Hold your child accountable for his or her behavior.
- Teach your child respect for others and authority.
- Establish clear limits and rules; expect your child to follow them.

Helpful Link

Gangs Or Us website
http://www.gangsorus.com/

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