What You Should Know About Gangs

INSIDE:

- What is a gang?
- Signs a child may be involved in gangs
- What can parents do
- Available resources

Provided by:
The Central Valley Gang Impact Taskforce
The Central Valley Gang Impact Taskforce (CVGIT) is a multi-agency collaboration between local, state and federal law enforcement agencies. The ultimate goal of the taskforce is to eradicate gangs from our community.

Modesto Police Department
Stanislaus County Sheriff's Office
Ceres Police Department
Stanislaus County Probation Department
Stanislaus County District Attorney's Office
California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
Federal Bureau of Investigation
This booklet was designed to provide parents and teachers valuable information about gangs. By understanding gangs we become empowered to prevent gangs from spreading.

**Gang Awareness: A Parent's Guide**

**Table Of Contents:**

- Introduction 4
- How Gangs Have Spread 5
- What Is a Gang 6
- Why Do Our Children Join Gangs 7
- Signs Parents Should Look For 8
- Signs Of Gang Membership 9
- What Parents Can Do 14
- Local Resources 15
In California, gangs have spread from the big cities of Los Angeles and San Jose to the suburbs and rural communities in the Central Valley. Because the "gang lifestyle" has been glamorized in the media (movies, music, television, etc.), it has drawn people from all social, economic, and racial backgrounds. Unfortunately, the gang lifestyle is not a trend or phase. It is a dangerous choice of life, which can destroy families and eventually lead to incarceration or death.

Gang members are violent. They attempt to hold a community hostage by intimidation. They will engage in acts of violence, such as assaults, drive-by shootings, car-jackings, and home invasions in order to oppress neighborhoods or public gathering places. If gangs are allowed to exist, they will erode the quality of life in the communities in which they reside. Because of this threat, community members must work together to eliminate the gang infestation in our society.

As a parent, you can help prevent the spread of gang violence by learning what a gang is, recognizing important and dangerous signs, and being aware of resources available within our community. By preventing and deterring your own children from joining a gang, you are eliminating the spread of gangs and insuring your child has a positive future.

A high percentage of gangs members in the United States are between the ages of 14 and 24.
How Gangs have Spread

Gangs have been able to spread for many reasons. One main reason gangs have been allowed to grow is due to the lack of knowledge parents have about gangs. Parents need to be aware of the danger signs their children may display. By recognizing the signs early, parents are able to intervene and steer their children back on track. Knowing what to look for is crucial. If parents know what the symptoms look like, they will be able to treat the problem.

Denial is another barrier that has allowed gangs to continue. No parent wants to admit that their daughter is a gang member or acknowledge that their son is engaging in gang activity. Parents who look away from the problem are condoning the problem. Parents who are able to acknowledge a problem, once it is discovered, have taken a positive step towards curing the problem. Parents need to know they are not alone. There are resources available, which are designed to deter children away from gangs. These programs are not effective, if parents do not take advantage of them.

Parents must take action at the first sign their child may be involved in gang activity. The signs might start off as appearing minor in nature, such as vandalism, fights at school, poor school attendance, or delinquent behavior at home. A child may also begin to regularly wear clothing in red or blue colors. These signs may be early indicators of gang involvement.

Although these incidents may seem minor and are often overlooked, it is during this period that prevention and intervention programs have the most impact. Parents should take advantage of this opportunity.
What Is a Gang?

A basic definition of a criminal street gang is:

- **A group of three or more persons** (Adults or juveniles, males or females)
- **Have a common name, sign, or symbol:** (Airport Nortenos, Asian Boyz, Oak Street Posse, etc.)
- **Engage in criminal activity:** (Commit crimes)

Although traditional street gangs have often segregated themselves by ethnicity or race, some gangs are allowing mixed race and mixed gender membership. Gangs will traditionally identify themselves and their gang with the street, neighborhood, or city they live in.

Criminal Street Gangs are defined under the California Penal Code section 186.22 (f)
Many kids join gangs for a variety of reasons, which can be influenced by their schoolmates, neighborhood, or family. A vulnerable child may turn to gangs for the perceived security, "love", and acceptance of his or her peers. Kids, who feel they lack this attention and support at home, will turn to gangs as an alternative.

Other kids join gangs for the excitement, family tradition, or possible peer pressure. They may be bored at home and have several hours a day of unsupervised free time.

Parents and authority figures can make a positive impact on at-risk children if they are able to recognize warning signs and treat the problem immediately.
Signs Parents Should Look For

Behavior changes
- Decline in grades
- Change of friends
- Truancy
- Staying out late
- Use of alcohol or other drugs
- Having money or new items, which cannot be explained.
- Growing attitude conflicts with parents/teachers
- Abrupt change in behavior (secretive)
- Withdrawing from family
- Abrupt change in music and clothing style
- Tattoos or body markings

Signs of possible gang involvement
- Fighting at school or while out with friends
- The presence of gang graffiti in the bedroom, on clothing, walls, books, backpacks, etc.
- Wearing clothing of a predominant color
- Practicing or use of hand signs
- Possession of photographs showing gang members
- Presence of gang tattoos
- Admitting gang membership
- Contacts with police
- Associating with known or suspected gang members
While street gangs share some common behaviors and practices, many gangs will have unique characteristics specific to their gangs, such as hairstyles, clothing, or tattoos. The following are examples of signs of possible gang affiliation or membership.

**Clothing**

Many gang members will wear distinct clothing as a nonverbal way to identify themselves as being affiliated with a gang. Sometimes the clothing attire will be an accessory, such as shoelaces, belts, or jewelry, which are often overlooked by the untrained eye. Gang members use this unique dress to help them identify their friends and rivals.

Gang members will also write, draw, or embroider graffiti, gang names, initials, signs, and/or symbols on their clothing, shoes or jewelry. In addition gang members will wear clothing predominantly of a certain color.

Many gang members prefer to dress in “baggy” pants and oversized shirts, sweaters, or jackets. Baggy clothing helps them conceal weapons, which can be readily available.
Nicknames
Many gang members will choose, or be given a nickname (moniker) by their peers. The nickname may draw attention to a physical characteristic, personal trait, or a behavior. It is important to know that having a nickname is not required by a gang and at the same time just because someone has a nickname, does not in itself mean the person is a gang member.

Hand Signs
Gang members will often use hand signs to identify their gang. They will form letters or numbers by using their fingers. This type of communication is often used as a challenge to rival gang members or as a way to intimidate citizens or police.
Graffiti
Gangs will use graffiti to identify their presence in a neighborhood and to claim that territory. They rely on graffiti as a way to communicate with fellow or rival gang members. They will also use graffiti as a form of intimidation towards citizens or law enforcement. If graffiti is allowed to be displayed in a neighborhood, it is a sign to gang members that citizens in the neighborhood have closed their eyes to crime. This message will empower gang members and they will increase their criminal activity in the area.

Parents need to be aware of graffiti in their neighborhood and surrounding neighborhoods. If graffiti is seen displayed, it must be immediately removed. Parents can call the city or county graffiti abatement for removal. By keeping our neighborhoods clean of graffiti, we are helping to keep our neighborhood free from gangs.

The presence of any type of graffiti in a neighborhood may indicate the presence of gang activity.
Tattoos
Gang members will use tattoos as a way to express their affiliation with a gang and identify the gang's geographical origin. Tattoos may display the gang's name, the abbreviated version of the gang's name, the gang member's nickname, the neighborhood or city they are from, or if the individual has spent time in prison.

Gang tattoos come in many types and styles, such as pictures, letters, or numbers. Tattoos often have hidden messages and symbols, which are normally overlooked by non-gang members. To gang members and trained law enforcement, however, the tattoos contain valuable information about the gang member and his gang.
Photographs / Video Recordings

Gang members often keep videos, photographs, and photo albums, which depict themselves and their fellow gang members. These pictures and photo albums often contain graffiti writings on them, which identify the gang or the gang members who are pictured in the photographs. The gang members are often seen making hand signs or wearing gang clothing. Gang members use photographs and videos to memorialize the moment in time. They will keep these items as mementoes or trophies.
What Parents Can Do

Parents should be aware of the potential hazards of gang involvement and be proactive in their children's lives and activities. The following are a few suggestions for concerned parents:

- Increase your awareness of your children's belongings, clothing, and bedroom.
- Know where your children are and whom they are with.
- Get to know your children's friends and the parents of your children's friends.
- Talk to your child and become/remain involved in their lives.
- Talk with your child's schoolteachers and counselors.
- Become familiar with any school programs designed to deter gang involvement.
- Encourage and allow your child to join after school sports or school sponsored programs.
- Report graffiti in your community to the graffiti abatement department.
- Become familiar with gang prevention programs sponsored by your local police department or probation department.

• **BE A POSITIVE ROLE MODEL**

Parents who suspect their child may be involved in gang activity should not hesitate to intervene.
# Local Resources

## Alcohol Abuse:
- Alcoholics Anonymous  
  - Stanislaus County Mental Health  
  - Stanislaus Teen Recovery Center  

## Drug Abuse:
- Center For Human Services  
- Family Services Agency  
- Crisis Line  

## Counseling:
- Center for Human Services  
- Sierra Education Services  
- Sierra Vista Children's Center  
- Stanislaus Behavior Health Center  
- Turning Point Community Program  
- Counseling Services for Spanish  

## Tattoo Removal:
- Chuck Muncie Youth Foundation  
  - (510) 457-9880  

## Others:
- Youth Court  
- Modesto Diversion  
- Ceres Diversion  
- Graffiti Removal (Modesto)  
- Graffiti Removal (Stanislaus County)  
- Police Athletics League (Modesto)  
- Police Athletics League (Stanislaus Co)