

TOGETHER AGAINST GANGS - TOGETHER AGAINST GANGS -  
**TAG**  
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# PARENT'S HANDBOOK

# GANGS

STOP!

LOOK!

LISTEN!

Remember when one of the most important pieces of advice we gave our children was to stop, look both ways and listen before crossing the street. Now we have to warn them about drugs, sexually transmitted diseases, gun – and GANGS!

Gangs are what TAG and this handbook are all about. Our goal is to take you from “know” to “no”, because we believe recognizing gang activity in our neighborhoods and schools, and understanding gang behavior in our children are the keys to keeping our communities gang-free.

## gang n.

a group of teens or young adults who share common interests and identity—who are deliberately involved in illegal activities.



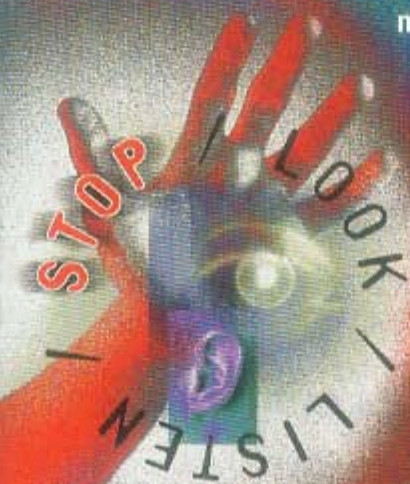
# GANGS

## A BRIEF HISTORY

Before we can protect our children from gangs, we need to understand what a gang is and how it operates.

In America, even as early as the 1700s, people from the same race or ethnic background often socialized and lived together in "gangs" for companionship and protection. It wasn't until the 1800s that the word "gang" started being used to describe a group of people who engaged in criminal activities.

Today's definition of a youth gang is an anti-social, loosely organized group of two or more individuals – usually between the ages of 11–24 – who frequent a specific territory, adopt similar clothes, mannerisms and speech, and engage in delinquent or criminal activity for money, respect or reputation.



**NO PLACE IS  
IMMUNE  
THERE ARE MORE THAN  
25,000 GANGS NATIONWIDE...**

The latest statistics provided by the National Youth Gang Center reveal that there are more than 25,000 gangs nationwide, with a total membership of more than 600,000. It's suggested that these figures may be conservative estimates since communities tend to under-report gang activities. The total gang population of the United States may actually be between 850,000 to 950,000.

Gang activities range from the not-so-serious (hanging around, talking slang and flashing hand signals ) to the criminal (writing graffiti, burglary, assault, drug dealing and murder). It's important to realize that delinquent and criminal gang activity almost always leads to a life of crime – or worse. In fact, 99 percent of drive-by shootings are gang-related.

Gangs cut across all economic, ethnic and racial lines – it doesn't matter whether children come from the ghetto or middle-class suburban neighborhoods, they are at risk of being recruited by a gang.



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Gangs attract confused and troubled young people. Those at risk include:

- Children who feel as if they don't fit in anywhere – or belong to anyone
- Youths who are poor, bored, deprived, abused
- Teens who feel scared, hopeless and helpless
- Kids with too much unstructured time on their hands – and too little adult supervision

Angry, frustrated kids looking for a substitute family and an alternative to poverty and boredom—these are the types of kids gangs recruit.

## WHO JOINS A GANG?

### CONFUSED AND TROUBLED YOUTH

*"My family was never there."*

*"I was picked on as a kid."*

*"My dad's an alcoholic."*



**"PEOPLE MADE FUN OF THE WAY I LOOKED"**

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Take those kids we just described, offer them a place to hang and a group to belong to. Treat them with respect; then show them what they could have: money, cars, drugs and girls. This is the recipe gang members use to turn normal, unsuspecting kids into law-breaking dropouts and drug users.

## A RECIPE FOR DISASTER

*"All the girls like him – you know he gets a lot of drugs – why don't I do it?"*

# A RECIPE FOR DISASTER

Remember, children join gangs for a variety of reasons: identity, discipline, money, security, recognition and love. If they aren't having these needs met at home and school, they'll go somewhere else.

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## THE PRICE OF ADMISSION

*"When you join a gang, more than three-quarters of the time the most common initiation is to get beaten up severely."*

*"They held me down; I was gang raped into the gang."*

*"Girls do the same stuff guys do, but they're more vicious."*

Many of today's movies and rap artists glamorize the gang lifestyle. The harsh reality is that the gang culture thrives on brutality. In fact, most gangs "welcome" male members by "beating them into the gang."

Being in a gang is not just for males anymore. Experts say that between 10 and 15 percent of the US gang population are girls. While they usually join for the same reasons as boys, quite often they are searching for protection. But there's nothing safe about their initiation – rape by half a dozen different guys is common.

Once they join a gang, new members realize the respect, reputation, cars and girls come with a price tag.

They find themselves involved in burglaries, car jackings, drug deals, assaults and drive-by shootings. Those who join for protection soon find they've traded one fear for two. Now they have to worry about being arrested and violence from enemy gangs.

Loyalty to the gang replaces family allegiance. Defending the gang's "turf"—which could be anywhere from a street corner to a shopping mall, a school hallway to gang members' girlfriends—becomes a primary focus.

## THE PRICE OF ADMISSION

*If they tell you, 'Show me your courage, go shoot somebody,' you gotta do it, or else..."*

"...I WAS GANG RAPED INTO THE GANG"





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## LITTLE ONES DO THE DIRTY WORK...

*"The ringleaders  
get the young kids  
to go out and  
commit the crimes."*

By offering an element of love and acceptance, older gang leaders manipulate the littlest gang members into committing the serious crimes. It's critical to understand that gangs are run by criminals who are only interested in money and maintaining their gang lifestyle. They DO NOT care about these kids. They choose the youngest ones because they know if they're caught, they'll be sent to a detention center and released within a relatively short period. However, in Florida, when a known gang member commits a crime, penalties tend to be more severe.



*"I WAS 13...  
WHEN I FIRST GOT RECRUITED"*

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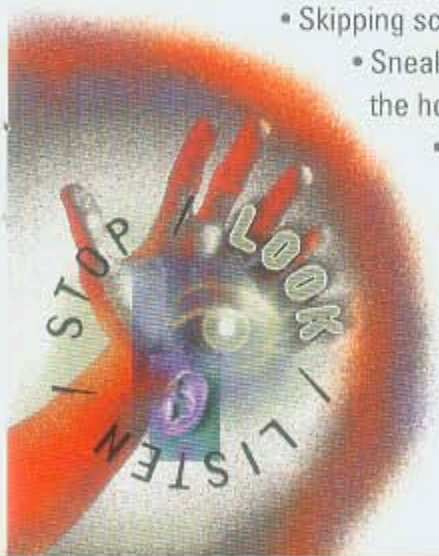
Children don't turn into delinquents overnight. It's usually gradual, but the signs are there if you know where to look. Review the following list of warning signs that signal gang affiliation. Then, ask yourself, "Are any of the children I know behaving like that?"

**Behavior warning signs:**

- Being secretive about who their friends are and where they live
- Changing attitude from nice to angry, hostile, intimidating, moody
- Failing grades
- Having large sums of unexplained money
- Listening to different music
- Refusing to participate in family outings
  - Skipping school
  - Sneaking out of the house
  - Staying out late

## LOOK FOR THE WARNING SIGNS

REVIEW  
THE FOLLOWING LIST  
OF WARNING SIGNS  
THAT SIGNAL  
GANG  
AFFILIATION.



# LOOK FOR THE WARNING SIGNS

- Stealing from family and friends
- Switching friends
- Threatening or hitting family members
- Using alcohol and/or drugs
- Wearing expensive jewelry, clothes, shoes

## Physical warning signs:

- Aligning clothing right or left
- Collecting and/or carrying weapons (baseball bats, guns, knives, pipes, razor blades)
- Coming home with black eyes, bruises, cuts
- Drawing graffiti in bedroom; on schoolbooks, bookbags and personal items
- Getting tattooed
- Talking slang
- Using hand signs and signals to communicate
- Wearing clothes, caps, beads always in the same colors

As adults, we must stop thinking, "it can't happen in our community to our children." We need to pay attention to changes in our children's behavior, attitude, physical appearance and friends.



# GRAFFITI

## As communication...

One of the first signs that gangs are organizing in a community is graffiti. Writing or drawings—usually spray painted—start appearing on public walls, overpasses, streets, buses, mail boxes. To understand the significance of graffiti, think of it as an enormous bulletin board or newspaper that gang members use to:

- Communicate with rival gangs
- Issue challenges and warnings
- Stake out their territory or “turf”
- Boast about crimes they’ve committed
- Brag about what they’re going to do next
- Show disrespect for other gangs
- Honor a fallen gang member

Graffiti is usually written in code, has local overtones and is understood by all the gangs in the area.

## THE GANG'S PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM

*“They might put up  
‘Rest in Peace’ with  
someone’s name. That  
means that person died  
— or is about to.”*



# GRAFFITI:

## THE GANG'S PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM

*"Graffiti gangs are really about just putting up their artwork."*



Numbers in gang graffiti sometimes represent crimes a gang has committed or is about to commit. For example, if the number 211 is the local police code for armed robbery and that number appears in graffiti, it could be a gang's way of boasting or threatening.

Graffiti serves as a giant gang fingerprint—it reveals all sorts of information (gang size, members' street names, turf) and should be photographed or documented by the police before it is removed.

As a community, we need to recognize and question strange symbols and drawings when they start showing up on clothes, books, walls – and bodies as tattoos.

### **As artwork...**

Graffiti gangs – or "taggers" – are looking for a public forum in which to display their art. Tagging is a way for them to gain respect for their talent – and their daring. They quite often wear baggy clothes to hide the tools of their trade – spray cans. While taggers inflict property damage on the community, they typically aren't involved in other gang-related crimes; although they will defend their turf, when necessary, to preserve their art.

## OPEN THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION

Learning and listening are two of the best defenses we have to keep our children out of gangs. Learn about the gang activity in your community; and if someone suggests your child may be in a gang, don't say "not my kid" and hang up or slam the door. Listen to them!

The very best way to keep our children out of gangs is to talk with them before there's ever a problem. We talk to our kids about drugging, drinking and unprotected sex. Why not gangs?

Find out what they know about gangs, then explain to them that you don't approve of gangs and that gang members often get hurt, even killed, arrested and sent to prison. Once you spell out the dangers of gang involvement, let them know you don't want anything bad like that to happen to

them. Tell them that you are there to help and protect them.

*"If you talk about it, that would definitely help out your kids."*

*"You've got to communicate with them to find out what's really going on."*

*"Teach them how bad a gang can be."*



## TWELVE TAG TIPS

*"Give a kid  
more things  
to do –  
more places  
to go."*

**TAG** has gathered tips from parents whose children have had gang experiences and from the law enforcement community. Follow them, and help keep your children safe from gangs and the violence associated with them.

•**Tip #1:** Check with your local police station to find out about the level of gang activity in your community. Learn about names, territories, colors and symbols associated with the different gangs in the area.

•**Tip #2:** Emphasize the value of education to your children. Encourage, help with homework, do everything possible to discourage dropping out. Talk with school personnel and discuss attitude and behavior changes.

•**Tip #3:** Spend time with your children, Find out who their friends are. Chances are, children who hang around with delinquents, drop outs and troublemakers, will find themselves traveling down the same destructive path.

**REALLY WATCH THE GROUPS THEY HANG OUT WITH**

## TWELVE TAG TIPS

•**Tip #4:** Get to know your children's friends' parents. Agree to communicate with them about your children on a regular basis. Always know where your children are and with whom.

•**Tip #5:** Go into your child's room regularly. Look for graffiti, strange symbols, notes. Check out the clothes closet. Is it full of clothes that are predominantly one color? Examine schoolbooks and bookbags—gang members almost always put some sort of graffiti on them.

If you suspect your child is involved with a gang, search and clean out his or her room. Even though you may feel uneasy about invading your child's privacy, remember, it's YOUR house. This is one instance where the end justifies the means.

*"Pay more attention  
to your kids."*



YOU CAN TELL A LOT FROM SOMEONE'S FRIENDS.



## TWELVE TAG TIPS

•**Tip #6:** Find supervised, positive activities to fill free time, combat boredom and offer challenges that build self-esteem. Support and praise their efforts.

•**Tip #7:** Identify role models and look for mentors in the community.

•**Tip #8:** Volunteer to join or set up a neighborhood watch program.

•**Tip #9:** Tell children if they are approached about joining a gang they should resist politely – never disrespectfully – each and every time they're asked.

•**Tip #10:** Children who join a gang and want out should talk to the police. Juvenile officers will work with them to break the vicious cycle they're caught up in.

•**Tip #11:** Help your children find new friends and different places to spend their time.

•**Tip #12:** Share this handbook with everyone you know.

**Stop! Look! Listen!** These should be the watchwords of every adult in our community. Remember, learn all you can about gangs, look for the signs and listen to what your child and others are saying. By banding Together Against Gangs, we can keep our neighborhoods and our children safe.



- **ASPIRA Palm Beach**  
561-366-9713
- **Boys and Girls Club**  
561-683-3287
- **Growing Together**  
561-585-0892
- **Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, Eagle Academy**  
561-992-1071
- **Urban League of Palm Beach County** 561-833-1461
- **Youth Activity Center, Veteran's Park** 561-883-9325
- **Your local Police Department**

WHERE TO  
GO FOR  
HELP...

*"The cure starts first with the recognition that there is a problem."*

To report incidents of gang activity or graffiti, call the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office hotline: 800-429-0006.

This handbook was produced through the generosity of Tyco International Ltd., the City of Boca Raton Police Department and Palm Beach County Department of Parks and Recreation.



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OUR  
THANKS



# 1999 TOGETHER AGAINST GANGS

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