

## TIPS FOR PARENTS:

- Get to know your children's friends and the friend's parents.
- Impress upon your child the importance of school and good grades.
- Listen to and spend quality time with your children. Communicate with them about their concerns and fears.
- Get involved in your child's school activities.
- Establish rules, set limits and be consistent, firm and fair in punishment.
- Respect your child's feelings and attitudes and help them develop self-esteem.
- Watch closely for negative influences.
- Help children develop self-control and deal appropriately with problems.

## GRAFFITI



Gangs use graffiti to identify themselves and their territory. With graffiti, they mark their territory or turf, declare their allegiance to the gang, advertise the gang's status or power,

announce their presence, challenge rivals and announce working relationships between gangs. Graffiti is also used to intimidate the residents who live in a gang-controlled area.

Graffiti can also be used to communicate messages and to show alliances or conflict between gangs. The graffiti may indicate the gang's name, the member's nickname, a declaration of loyalty, a memorial to a slain gang member, or a description of criminal acts in which the gang has been involved.

Gang graffiti can be found on neighborhood walls, fences, streets and mailboxes. It may also be found on clothing, athletic shoes, notebooks, photographs and bedroom walls. Graffiti is sort of the newspaper of the gang culture.

Gangs purposely vandalize and destroy public and private property in order to enhance their reputation. Of equal concern with property damage is the violence associated with gang graffiti.

The presence of any type of graffiti can be an indicator that a gang is present and can be an important source of information for both law enforcement and community members.

## WHY YOUTH JOIN GANGS

Young people join gangs for a variety of reasons which can be influenced by conditions in their family, school and neighborhood. A vulnerable child seeks love, protection and the acceptance of his or her peers. Youth who lack parental guidance and support, or opportunities for positive involvement with their peers, often turn to a gang to meet those needs.

Other reasons for joining a gang include: excitement, physical protection, peer pressure, family tradition, perceived financial gain, "respect", being wanted and valued by a group, being feared by others, getting girlfriends, gaining notoriety or out of boredom.

## PREVENTION; TAKE ACTION!

The key to prevention is taking action! Prevention is part of a formula to building healthy communication and reducing gang activity. Everyone and every community can work on solutions to minimize problems. Effective anti-gang efforts begin with partnerships among parents, schools, law enforcement, religious institutions, community organizations, businesses and youth. The key is that individuals and the community take action. Call the Suffolk Police Department NET unit at 514-7950 to report graffiti or gang activity. *The most important thing an individual, a group or an organization can do is get involved.*

## A MESSAGE FROM YOUR COMMONWEALTH'S ATTORNEY – C. PHILLIPS "PHIL" FERGUSON

"If gang incidents occur in your neighborhood, cooperate with the police. Your help may prevent others from becoming victims of gang violence. Any information about gang crimes, wanted suspects or gang activity should be reported to the police rather than trying to handle what might be a violent situation on your own. Making a difference in your community begins at home."



# Gangs and Youth Violence



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***Gang Violence is a serious problem, and no one is immune***

***from the impact that gangs and youth violence can have on a community.*** Today, the gangs and the aspects of the violence they attract draw young people from all walks of life, socio-economic backgrounds, races and ethnic groups. Youth violence is a problem not only for law enforcement, but also for the entire community. Research shows that parents play a major role in keeping young people out of gangs. Negative influences within the family can increase the risk of a youth joining a gang.

As a parent, educator, member of law enforcement, youth or concerned community member, you can help prevent further gang violence by learning what a gang is, what signs of gang involvement and gang activity are and what you can do to stem future violence.

**WHAT IS A GANG?**

For the purposes of this brochure let us use the following basic definition: A “gang” is a *group of three or more individuals (adult/juvenile/male/female) in association with each other (on regular or part-time basis) using some type of identifier (like a name, sign, symbol or color) committing crime (any crimes – misdemeanor, felony or against any city ordinance).*

**WARNING SIGNS:**

The warning signs of gang involvement can be similar to normal behavior during adolescence. The key is to question the behavior if it appears to go beyond the norm. ***You should be concerned if your child:***

1. admits to gang involvement;

2. drastic change in hair or dress style and obsession with one particular color of clothing (worn on shirts, bandannas, multicolored or single-colored beads, belts, hats, shoelaces, headbands, jewelry, and other items) or shows a desire for a particular logo over and over;

3. wears sagging pants (this in and of itself is not indicative of gang activity);

4. wears excessive jewelry with distinctive designs and may wear it only on either the right or left side of the body;

5. is obsessed with gangster-influenced music, videos and movies to the point of imitation;

6. withdraws from family or longtime friends with an accompanying change in demeanor;

7. associates with undesirables and breaks parental rules consistently;

8. develops an unusual desire for privacy and secrecy and may completely rearrange living quarters to create more privacy; or

9. uses hand signs while with friends and practices them at home. (These signs communicate their affiliation with the gang and issue possible threats or challenges to rival gangs.)

***You should also be concerned if there is evidence or the appearance of:***

10. physical injury (such as being beaten, or injuries to hands and knuckles from fighting) and then child lies about the events surrounding the injury;

11. peculiar drawings or language on school books, clothing or other personal items (may appear later as tattoos or brands – usually graffiti-like, hard to decipher, and characterized by crossed out, and upside-down letters, and gang symbols. Some common symbols are five or six pointed

stars, crowns, pitchforks – pointing up or down, three dots in a triangle, and numbers);

12. unexplained cash or goods, i.e., clothing and jewelry; or

13. possible use of alcohol and drugs with attitude change;

14. sudden negative opinions about law enforcement or adults in position of authority; and

15. confrontational behavior, such as talking back, verbal abuse, name calling, and disrespect for parental authority.

If a kid shows some of these signs, it does not necessarily mean he or she is involved in a gang. Because of the popularity of “gang style” in popular culture, many kids who are not involved in gangs wear the style. This trend makes distinguishing who is actually involved in gangs even harder, but usually someone who exhibits all or most of these signs is probably involved in gang activity.

**ADVISE YOUR CHILDREN THEY SHOULD NOT:**

1. associate with gang members or “wanna be/gonna be” gang members;
2. identify or communicate with gangs or hang out near or where gangs congregate;
3. approach strangers in cars who appear to want information or directions;
4. wear gang-related clothing where gangs are known to gather;
5. wear initialed clothing such as BK – British Knights – a/k/a “Blood Killer” in high crime areas;
6. attend any party or social event sponsored by gangs or their associates;
7. take part in any graffiti activity or hang around where graffiti is present; or
8. use any kind of finger or sign language in a public place.