



RISK FACTORS:

WHY YOUTH JOIN GANGS

Risk factors may show which young people may be more vulnerable to gang involvement unless effective intervention or action to avoid this lifestyle is taken. Recognizing the risk factors in each system affecting the individual is essential to developing a strategy to eliminate the effects of gang activity in the community and on the individual.

Individuals seeking:

- A sense of belonging
- Friendship
- Family
- Power
- Security/ Protection
- Prestige or high status
- Self-affirmation
- Need for money or sense of wealth
- Identity and meaning
- Assimilation
- Access to adult status

...are at high risk for gang membership as gangs offer a distorted answer to many of these needs.

Adolescents affected by:

- Social, economic, and cultural forces
- Lack of family, community, or youth support system (too much unsupervised time)
- Life in a gang-infested community
- Family members in a gang
- Low self-esteem
- Negative peer pressure
- Media and its glorification of violence

...may also be at risk for gang membership because of lack of skills and support needed to overcome gang pressure to join.

WARNING SIGNS

A combination of these signs coupled with criminal behavior can be a clue to gang involvement. Gang members use several forms of identifiers to signify and show off their membership. Graffiti, tattoos, clothing, colors, language (verbal and non-verbal), hand signs, codes, literature, are all forms used by gangs to demonstrate their affiliation. Gang identifiers are constantly evolving just as their other behavior and trends.

HAS YOUR CHILD BEEN DISPLAYING ANY OF THESE BEHAVIORS?

- Staying away from home or school
- Drop in academic achievement
- Isolation from others
- Lying/Stealing
- Increased problems with the law
- Use of hand signs
- Changing appearance with special haircuts, eyebrow markings, or tattoos
- Change of friends and social groups
- Personality changes
- Bad attitude toward family, school, and authorities
- Alcohol/drug use
- Unexplained wealth
- Graffiti on desk, walls, folders/notebooks
- Dressing in a particular color/style/brand
- Use of beads/bandannas
- Change in vocabulary (use of slang)

