

SUPPORT YOUR



Gang Awareness and Support

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Why do young people join gangs?

The majority of young people are not involved in gangs and want nothing to do with them. However, the behaviour of the small number of young people who are involved has a significant impact on communities, families, friends, as well as themselves. The use of the internet at school is carefully monitored and there are controls in place that do not allow students to access harmful and inappropriate material.

Young people join gangs for reasons which make sense to them.

- Respect and status
- To gain friends
- A sense of belonging
- Excitement
- To find a substitute family
- Power
- Protection
- Money
- Peer Pressure

Signs to look out for:

Gangs often leave signs of their presence and your child might adopt some of these signs; either as a member or as an associate of a gang. Any sudden changes in your child's lifestyle should be discussed.

Signs may include:

- Unexplainable new clothing
- Anti social behaviour
- Talking differently – new slang or language with an aggressive tone
- Lack of interest or truanting school
- Carrying weapons
- Unexplained injuries or sums of money and possessions
- Staying out unusually late
- Graffiti style tags on possessions
- Interest in music which glorifies weapons and gang culture
- Stuffers with mental health issues
- Drug and Alcohol misuse
- Absconding from care
- Additional mobile phones
- Exposure to domestic violence
- History of victimisation / being bullied
- Special Educational Needs
- Secretive about friends / peers

Girls and Gangs

Girls can be affected by gangs, but their involvement may be harder to spot. They may be asked to hide weapons or drugs, or be targeted by male gang members in acts of revenge or gang initiations. All of this tends to go on 'behind closed doors'. Girls who are linked to gang members (sisters, girlfriends, friends, cousins, daughters) as well as female gang members themselves, are at risk of emotional, physical and sexual violence.

Signs that a girl you know might be involved with a gang include:

- Changes in physical appearance (for example wearing more 'adult' clothes, or wearing baggy clothes and no make up)
- Unexplained money or possessions
- Getting involved in fights
- Committing crimes such as shoplifting
- Regularly staying out late or going missing from home
- Abusing drugs and/or alcohol
- Physical injuries (which may indicate violence from others and/or self-harming)
- Refusing to seek medical help for such injuries and becoming fearful and/or withdrawn and/or prone to unexplained outbursts of anger

If your child is already involved

If your child is already involved in a gang, they may not want to talk about it or be scared. It is important that they know you want to listen and support them. Make sure they know they have a choice. Stay calm. Ask questions, but listen too. Don't be afraid of confrontation, but try not to approach them with anger and accusations. Try to understand the situation from their point of view and why they have joined the gang. Ask them what you can do to help. Try to agree about what they should do next. Work with them to find solutions and choices. Seek help.

How can parents help:

There are things you can do to help stop your child from being involved in gangs.

- Talk to your child and listen
- Encourage them to get involved in positive activities
- Know your child's friends and their families
- Always know where your child is, who they are with and what time they will be home
- Help them to cope with pressure and how to deal with conflict without violence
- Speak to them about the serious consequences that occur from violent or illegal behaviour.
- Help them to understand the dangers of being in a gang and find constructive ways to use their time
- Keep lines of communication open
- Be aware of what your child is doing on the internet
- Look for ways of disciplining children that do not involve anger or violence
- Work with other parents to watch their behaviour
- Talk about your child's behaviour with school and if you have any concerns involving gangs let school know