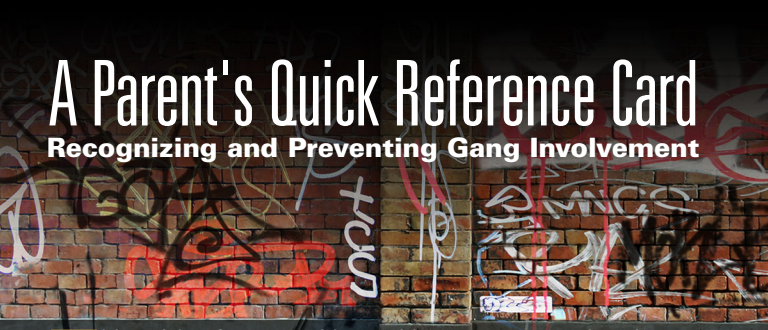
A Parent's Quick Reference Card

Recognizing and Preventing Gang Involvement



This quick reference guide provides common warning signs of gang involvement but may not be all-encompassing. Parents should look for multiple signs to indicate possible gang involvement because some of these indicators alone, such as clothes or musical preferences, are also common among youth not involved in gangs. Parents are encouraged to familiarize themselves with local gang symbols; seek help early; and consider contacting school personnel, local law enforcement, faith leaders, and community organizations for additional assistance.

Warning signs that your child may be involved with a gang

- Admits to hanging out with kids in gangs
- Shows an unusual interest in one or two particular colors of clothing or a particular logo
- Has an unusual interest in gangster-influenced music, videos, movies, or websites
- Uses unusual hand signals to communicate with friends
- Has specific drawings or gang symbols on school books, clothes, walls, or tattoos
- Comes home with unexplained physical injuries (fighting-related bruises or injuries to hands/knuckles)
- Has unexplained cash or goods, such as clothing or jewelry
- Carries a weapon
- Has been in trouble with the police
- Exhibits negative changes in behavior such as the following:
  - Withdrawing from family
  - Declining school attendance, performance, or behavior
  - Staying out late without reason
  - Displaying an unusual desire for secrecy
  - Exhibiting signs of drug use
  - Breaking rules consistently
  - Speaking in gang-style slang

First published 2004. Revised 2015. e09042535

What parents can do to prevent gang involvement

- Spend quality time with your child
- Get involved in your child's school activities
- Be a positive role model and set the right example
- Know your child's friends and their families
- Encourage good study habits
- Teach your child how to cope with peer pressure
- Help your child develop good conflict/resolution skills (See http://www.ncpc.org/programs/teens-crime-and-the-community/monthly-article/helping-teens-manage-conflict)
- Encourage your child to participate in positive afterschool activities with adult supervision (recreation centers, organized sports, and youth groups)
- Take action in your neighborhood (create a neighborhood alliance to report and remove graffiti)
- Talk with your child about the dangers and consequences of gang involvement. Let your child know that you don't want to see him or her hurt or arrested. Explain to your child that he or she should *not* do the folloiwng:
  - Associate with gang members
  - Attend parties or social events sponsored by gangs
  - Use hand signs, symbols, or language that is meaningful to gangs
  - Wear clothing, including specific colors, that may have meaning to gangs in your area

---

To obtain details on COPS Office programs, call the COPS Office Response Center at 800-421-6770.

COPS Community Oriented Policing Services U.S. Department of Justice

www.cops.usdoj.gov

www.fbi.gov

OJJDP Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Office of Justice Programs ♦ U.S. Department of Justice

www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org