

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY GANG TASK FORCE

STREET GANGS

A guide to community awareness

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INTRODUCTION

This information is to help parents determine if their child is either at risk in becoming associated with or is involved in gang activity. Indicators of gang association outlined in this brochure may generally fit a variety of youths. If parents observe more than one indicator, they should talk to their child about their concerns.

WHAT IS A GANG?

A gang is a group of three or more people who associate together, have a common identity and engage in criminal or delinquent activity. The gang may use a name, color, clothing style, tattoos, or other items to identify themselves. A gang may or may not claim control over a certain territory in the community.

WHY PEOPLE JOIN GANGS

There are many reasons people join gangs. Attention, excitement, peer pressure, protection, and financial gain are a few. In some families, gang membership is a tradition. Other people become gang members because they think gangs are trendy. Many youths do not realize the risks and hazards of gang involvement.

Parents may not be aware of their child's involvement. Parents should discuss gangs with their child and actively discourage gang association.

SIGNS OF GANG ASSOCIATION

Parents should be aware of behavior changes in their children. Such changes include; a decline in grades, truancy, graffiti in the youth's room, on school folders or on clothes, wearing of certain style or color of clothes, breaking of curfew, change in friends, drug and/or alcohol use, or possession of money or items that a parent cannot explain. Involvement of your child with a group of their friends in delinquent or criminal behavior may be another sign. Some gang members devise hand signals to communicate with other gang members. Use of such signals should alert parents to possible gang association.

GANG PARAPHERNALIA

CLOTHING:

Style shows the group that youths associate with. The particular color, type of clothing, shoes, hats, or the way the clothing is worn can be a warning sign. Look for the symbols, messages, graffiti or gang names written or embroidered on jacket, pants, shoes or baseball caps.

COLORS:

Various colors may be signs of gang association. Red may be used to show association with the Bloods or Northern California Hispanic Prison gangs. Blue may be used to show association with the Crips or Southern California Hispanic Prison gangs. Black clothing may be worn by a variety of gang associated youths. Some Hispanic gangs, White Supremacist gangs and some "Heavy Metal" gangs wear this color.

GRAFFITI:

Graffiti appears on books, posters, bedroom walls, interior of vehicles, doors and furniture. You should discuss any graffiti you find with your child first, then remove it. The graffiti may be a gang member's name or the name of their gang. It may include members' nicknames, or be a declaration of loyalty to a particular gang. Hispanic gang graffiti often uses block lettering that is exaggerated or has reversed letters.

JEWELRY:

Accessories may be worn to signify gang association. It may be expensive or inexpensive. Belt buckles, bracelets, necklaces, key chains, earrings, and rings are all commonly used. Some gang members wear dice earrings to show the "set" they are associated with. Others may wear a certain color earring to show their gang association.

PHOTOGRAPHS:

Pictures of your child with other gang members is a clear indicator. These photos may show members displaying hand signs, weapons, colors, clothing styles, or flashing money. Photographs may show your child singularly displaying these indicators.

WEAPONS:

Parents and the community should be aware that youths involved with gangs commonly carry weapons. The weapons may be baseball bats, tire irons, spiked wrist bands, a pipe, "martial arts" weapons, knives, "look alike" pellet guns, and guns. These types of weapons have been seized from youths involved in gangs in this county.

HOW GANGS FUNCTION

Gangs thrive on intimidation and publicity. Violence is common in gangs and is used to maintain its status. Gangs depend on both individual and group participation. An individual will be pressured by others in the gang to maintain their status.

Legitimate groups elect a leader. A gang's leadership generally depends on who is the toughest, natural leader or who has access to weapons or money. It also may be based on who has the best skills for what the gang wants to do at that time. A good fighter may lead on a night that they are going to fight, a good thief when they want to commit a theft.

Gangs will have a name or common identity. The name usually comes from their town, a street, an area, or their phone area code, housing project, rock bands, cults, or personal beliefs of the members. The gang name is an important identity for the gang. Members may have nicknames (monikers) as well. The moniker may be given to the member by the other members or chosen by the member himself. The name frequently fits the member's personality (real or perceived) or relate to some physical or mental traits.

EFFECTS OF INVOLVEMENT

Gangs are a terrible burden on society. Family members must worry about their safety as well as their child's. Friends who refuse to join the gang may be in jeopardy because of their refusal. These friends are often discarded for their fellow gang members.

Parents can be subjected to heavy financial bills for legal services, medical treatment, jail housing, and restitution to victims. The gang involved youth can expect to be arrested and prosecuted for their criminal activity. Most parents are not aware that if a crime is gang related, the violator will not only be prosecuted for this crime, they can also be charged with criminal gang enhancements. Upon conviction, the youth can expect jail time, out of home placement, fines, restitution to victims, community service work and/or very restrictive conditions of probation.

WHAT GANGS DO

Gangs differ from other groups in that they engage in criminal activity. Gang members commit a variety of crimes. These include robbery, burglary, thefts, vandalism, assaults, arson, witness intimidation, weapons and narcotic offenses.

Graffiti is probably the most visible and common crime. Gangs use graffiti to let the community know they exist, to mark their territory, to make statements about their gang, or to issue challenges to other gangs. Graffiti is not just an idle crime and is a great source of gang information.

Gang members actively seek violent conflicts. This includes murder, assaults with deadly weapons drive by shootings, and batteries. Gang violence often claims innocent victims. In 1993, almost nine out of every ten victims of gang related violence were nongang members. These crimes are committed for economic gain or to enhance the gang's reputation.

PREVENTION/EDUCATION

Awareness is the key to stopping gang activity, many parents are not aware of the child's gang involvement. Most youths are reluctant to discuss it with their parents. This is why the community should learn to recognize the signs of gang activity and to take appropriate action.

The first step is to recognize there is a gang problem. People who recognize the problem are better equipped to address the issue with their child, as well as not becoming victims of gang crimes.

Communities must recognize the problem and work together to solve the problem. Structured after school activities, employment, awards for good grades, community outreach and organized youth activities help lessen gang activity. Working with school and law enforcement officials aid in eliminating the anonymity that allows gangs to grow. Whenever graffiti occurs in your community, report it to law enforcement. Once it is documented, remove it quickly. If you allow you community to look like a ghetto, it will become ghetto.

Enforcing the laws and dealing with gang members is best left to those trained to deal with dangerous situations. Always report crimes as soon as they occur. Get involved in such groups as Neighborhood Watch. Cooperate with law enforcement, court officials and probation officers in holding gang members responsible for their actions.

A community that is dedicated to stopping this kind of activity will hamper a gang's ability to exist.

WHO TO CONTACT

Emergencies 24 hours 9-1-1

SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

Dispatch 805.934.6150 (No. Santa Barbara County)

SANTA MARIA POLICE DEPARTMENT

Dispatch 805.922.2631

Business office 805.928.3781 ext. 272

Narcotics 805.928.3781 ext. 361

DARE Program 805. 928.3781 ext.362