

Helping Your Kids Steer Clear of Gangs

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

You've probably heard about the dangers of gang violence. Gangs scare people, destroy property, and drive out businesses. Never mind the thought of your children joining a gang! But the truth is that parents can do a lot to prevent their kid's involvement with gangs. Initiation into a gang doesn't happen overnight.

Adolescents may be tempted to join a gang when parents are too busy to give their children the attention, and positive reinforcement they need. This environment sends youngsters looking for support elsewhere.

Sometimes the pressures of work and making ends meet is too much for parents. Meeting with your daughter or son's teacher to discuss problems with skipping school, not doing homework, and goofing off in class may not be a top priority, but it needs to be. If they don't receive your attention, little by little, your children may start to get the message that nobody loves them and they don't matter. Children may meet a "cool" group of friends who offer them everything they seem to be missing at home. For many youngsters, joining a gang is like joining a family. A gang offers them support, belonging, order, caring, and a sense of purpose.

Here are some common factors that you should look for in your child:

- Performs poorly in school
- Doesn't attend school regularly
- Isn't interested in extra-curricular activities or family events
- Has negative contact with the police
- Writes the name of his or her gang in graffiti
- Has problems at home
- Has gang tattoos
- Has friends who are in gangs
- Dresses in gang clothes

Interest in
joining
a gang
starts early,
sometimes
as early as
elementary school

What You Can Do:

- Get to know your children's friends, how they influence your kids, and what they do when they're together. Discourage your kids from hanging out with gangs.
- Spend your free time with your kids. Give them chores to do around the house, enroll them in after-school activities, sports, and community center or church programs.
- Stress the value of an education and motivate your children to do well in school.



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- Develop good communication skills with your kids. Good communication means that it's open, frequent, and positive. This will allow your kids to express themselves and confide in you.
- Find positive role models for your children.
- Spend time with your kids. Plan activities for the entire family, such as trips to parks, libraries, museums, or the beach. Give them attention!



- Give your kids some one-on-one time, so that you can give them your undivided attention.
- Don't buy or let your children wear clothing that resembles gang wear. They might attract attention from the wrong people.
- Set limits and rules for your kids. From an early age, let them know what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. Enforce a curfew. Don't let them hang out until all hours of the night.
- Don't let your kids write, or draw graffiti like gang members.
- Get involved in your kid's education. Take an interest in your kids, go to their schools, get to know their teachers, and attend parent-teacher events.
- Learn about gangs and gang activity in your community. Get educated!

If you follow these steps, your children may be less likely to join a gang.

You can make the difference in your child's life.

Be active and show them how much you love and appreciate them.

It's never too late to start!

Information Provided by:

SAMHSA

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
www.soyunica.gov