Why Do People Join Gangs?

Often young people are not discouraged from gang involvement by their parents. Parents don't realize that their children are engaged in gang activity. Other reasons include:

- the excitement of gang activity
- peer pressure
- attention
- financial benefit
- family tradition
- a lack of realization of the hazards involved

What You Can Do:

Get Involved & Join Your Neighborhood

A neighborhood that is united and cooperates in stopping crime and violence will greatly control a gang's power of fear and intimidation. Citizen action groups like Neighborhood Watch are available.

Become Aware & Take A Stand

The first and most important step is to become aware of gangs, gang members, and their activities. Citizens armed with basic knowledge are better able to avoid becoming victims of gang attack.. When incidents occur, cooperate with authorities. Ask about our Neighborhood Watch program which can safeguard your identity when reporting crime.

Light It Up!

Gangs frequently gather in dark areas to avoid being seen while drinking, using narcotics, and defacing property with graffiti. Whenever possible such areas should be kept well lighted. Outside floodlights mounted out of reach with wire covers to prevent intentional bulb break-age discourage gang loitering.

Remove It!

In addition, graffiti should be quickly removed. The longer it remains, the more it attracts gang members.

Prevention is the Key!

Prevention is the key to controlling gang activity. Many parents are unaware that their children are involved in gang activity. Parents should look for behavorial changes such as:

- ✔ truancy
- ✔ a decline in grades
- ✔ change of friends
- ✔ late hours
- ✔ graffiti in their bedrooms

Keep Your Kids Busy:

Youth, loitering after school or hanging out on corners, provide breeding ground for gangs. One solution is finding locations where organized and supervised programs are offered. The following suggestions provide a good starting point (and partial list) for concerned parents:

- **The United Way**
- **Your child's school**
- **Boy Scouts of America**
- **Girl Scouts of America**
- **Parks and Recreation Department**
- **Youth service programs**
- **Law Enforcement Explorer Scout Posts**

Fighting crime and dealing with violent gang members is best left to experts trained to handle dangerous situations. However, everyone has the responsibility to overcome apathy and fear. Everyone must work toward a solution to the gang problem.

For additional information-

Contact your local Sheriff's Station

Los Angeles County
Sheriff's Department

street GANGS

What you can do to stop them!

Operation Safe Streets

Gang Facts

There are more than 300 active gangs in the areas served by the Sheriff's Department. Each year there are several thousand gang crimes in the Sheriff's Department jurisdictions. These crimes include:

- homicides
- felony assaults
- robberies
- other assorted crimes.

Street Gangs:

Gangs are predominately territory oriented and graffiti marks the boundaries. Anyone not belonging in the area and who resembles a rival gang member may become the subject of attack.

Gang Names:

Many gangs adopt names that have significance when related to their neighborhood (streets, parks, hills, valleys or housing project). Many gang members adopt nicknames when recruited into the group if they do not already have one. The gang tends to select a name that fits the individual's physical or psychological characteristics.

Leadership:

Gang members do not fit the "movie image" in which they are portrayed having roles such as president or enforcer or wearing gang jackets like those worn by many car clubs. Rather, leadership roles in street gangs are assumed by a member who demonstrates or asserts dominant control at a particular time. His leadership may continue for the particular incident or a limited time thereafter. With smaller groups, however, it is more likely that a single individual will become a recognized leader.

How Are Gang Members Identified?

Gang members will display tattoos, dress in a style identifying their particular gang and openly admit membership. Their personal belongings are frequently covered with graffiti and bear the gang's logo and the member's gang name. Gang members make gestures with their hands and fingers which identify their gang.

Many individuals on the fringe of gang involvement are reluctant to identify themselves as gang members. They often state that their friends are gang members but they are not. However, rival gang members, shooting from a speeding car, do not make a distinction between a gang member and his associates.

Dress:

A style of dress does not necessarily mean a person is involved in gang activity. However, a sudden drastic change in clothing style may mean involvement in gangs. Parents should take the time to talk to their child about his/her activities outside the home. Some things to look for are baggy clothing, shaved head, web belts with buckles with gang initials, or wearing clothing of one particular color, especially blue or red. Many times teenagers may adopt a style of clothing to be "cool". If, however, this happens to resemble what is seen as gang-style clothing your child may become a target of gang violence.

What Do Gangs Do?

Violence is inherent in gang activity. Anybody in the area is fair game, including men, women, and children. Gang members use shotguns, automatic rifles, handguns, and explosives. Certain gang areas are frighteningly similar to a war zone with many people who sleep on their floor for fear of getting shot. Gangs seek confrontations with rivals and the resulting violence often claims innocent victims. When gang members are involved in a weekend party, or attend a public event (like an amusement park), the potential for violence and criminal activity is far greater than for any other group of people.

The Price Of Gang Involvement:

Gang membership extracts a terrible toll from the lives of all who contact the members. Parents and relatives of gang members live in a double fear; one for their own safety and that of other non-gang family members and, a second fear for the survival of their gang member son or daughter. Non-gang member friends are cast aside and soon the youth's only friends are gang members.

Gang membership, although a temporary phase for some youth, will shape the individual's future. All levels of formal education are discarded because they differ from the gangs objectives. Gang members not killed or seriously injured often develop patterns of alcohol and narcotics abuse, and extensive police records that will limit their employment opportunities.

How Gang Violence Affects The Community:

Gang violence creates even more damage on a regular basis to local property and business. Vandalism, in the form of graffiti and the wanton destruction of public and private property, is often done in furtherance of the gang's reputation. Abandoned houses are favorite target for vandalism but even occupied homes do not escape. Local businesses suffer not only from the property damage and graffiti, but also from loss of customers and employees. Businesses facing decreasing revenue and rising insurance costs close their doors leaving another abandoned building for the gang. However, the majority of residents in a gang area live in fear.

Graffiti:

Graffiti, a form of vandalism, is a problem that impacts our neighborhoods in a variety of ways. Without question, it decreases property values in residential neighborhoods and negatively affects industrial and commercial areas. Of greater concern is the inherent violence associated with gang graffiti. When a neighborhood is marked with graffiti indicating territorial dominance, the entire area and its inhabitants become targets for violence. Anyone on the street or in his home is fair game for driveby attacks by rival gang members. A rival gang identifies everyone in the neighborhood as a potential threat. Consequently, innocent residents are often subjected to gang violence by the mere presence of graffiti in their neighborhood.