



YOUTH STREET GANGS

Communities may wonder, “How would they know if there was gang activity in their community”. What would that mean and how could you tell if there was a risk of youth involvement in gang activities? The Ontario Provincial Police is committed to crime prevention, and there are resources available to support communities in preventing gang issues.

Signs that your child may be involved in a gang:

1. Dressing differently/same colour or certain clothing brands worn
2. Wearing bandanas, beads, shoelaces, etc. depicting one colour
3. Hanging out with different friends
4. Unexplained source of income/ jewellery
5. Drawing gang symbols on school books
6. Attitude change, especially towards authority
7. Skipping school or poor grades in school

8. Gang style tattoos
9. Unexplained scars or burns
10. Accessing gang information on the Internet
11. Using special hand signs
12. Adopting a nickname
13. Change in language, using special phrases or terms
14. Becoming more private
15. Staying out late

These signs together or alone do not mean your child is involved in a gang. However, parents should be concerned and talk to their children about their activities.

What are Youth/ Street Gangs?

Street gangs are self-formed groups of devoted persons who engage in anti-social and/or profit-driven criminal activity who operate within the community with an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

Street gangs pose a serious threat to community safety because of their tendency for violence and a complete lack of concern for innocent bystanders.

With the success of the Integrated Guns and Gang Task Force many of the Toronto based gangs have been moving into areas beyond the Greater Toronto Area, which includes area policed by the Ontario Provincial Police. The Internet is also a tool that provides universal access to the gang culture.

Why do youth join street gangs?

- For a sense of belonging or to be part of a group/accepted by your peers
- For the excitement and risks of the gang lifestyle
- To seek protection from potential violence
- To earn money
- To be with friends
- Have low self-esteem or motivation
- For the perceived power and status associated to gangs
- Friends or family members belong to a gang
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Poverty
- Abuse or neglect at home



The truth about gang life

- Have a high risk of getting hurt or killed
- Chances of getting a criminal record are increased
- Involvement in selling illegal drugs and stolen property to obtain money
- Solve problems with violence and intimidation
- Required to complete an initiation (generally with violence) to join a gang
- May have to commit a criminal act to prove themselves
- Gang life is a self-destructive lifestyle
- High frequency of drug and alcohol abuse

Recruitment

In certain instances individuals may grow up in a gang neighbourhood. The people they associate with, go to school with, or maybe their parents or siblings, could be members of a gang.

At times the parents of a gang member may relocate in an attempt to remove their child from the gang lifestyle. However, there is potential the gang member will simply start up their own gang in their new neighbourhood. This person will be identified as a hardcore gang member and quickly recruit people into the gang. Individuals can often be recruited while in custody.

How do you get out of a gang?

Getting out of a gang is not easy. The other members of the gang are often long time friends; they hang out in the same places, or even attend the same school. Leaving the gang requires avoiding all those places and leaving friends behind. In addition, once trying to start a new life, the people in the community may still see that person as a gang member and not forget their gang involvement.

What can parents do?

If gang activity begins to control your community parents may lose the most, the wellbeing or even the life of their child. Parents can do a lot to identify, prevent, and reduce gang issues.

- Spend quality time with each of your children. Keep them ACTIVE and INVOLVED in supervised positive community programs
- Talk to them and LISTEN with your full attention.
- Respect your child's feelings and attitudes and help them develop self-esteem
- Establish rules, set limits, and be consistent, firm and fair in discipline
- Help your children identify with positive role models.

- Know what your children are doing at all times and with whom. Meet their friends. Know what influence these friends have with your child
- Support your child in their schoolwork and special interests. Show your interest by attending parent/teacher nights and communicate with educators regularly.
- Monitor your child's room and its contents and clothing choices. If youth start dressing in gang-style, they will attract attention from those involved with gangs.
- Educate yourself and be aware of potential gang involvement and be aware of local resources in the community.

REMEMBER: *If you want your children to follow in your footsteps, be very careful where you place your feet.*

Help

Further information or assistance can be found at the web links below:

www.opp.ca/Community/CrimePrevention/opp_001498.html

Kids Help Phone website:
www.kidshelpphone.ca

No To Gangs web-site:
www.notogangs.org

Safe Canada-Youth Gangs
www.safecanada.ca/gangs_e.asp