



KNOW

More™

Know More About
TEENS & GANGS



KNOW More™

WHO ARE YOU?

The search for identity is a significant part of every teenager's journey. Identifying with a particular group can provide you with friends, purpose, self-confidence, support and a sense of belonging. Many kids join school clubs, church groups, sports teams or volunteer in search of identity.

Teens who join gangs are looking for some of the same things. Unfortunately, nothing positive comes from belonging to a gang; in fact, there are many negative consequences to gang life.

At some point, a known gang member may approach you to join a gang. Learn the facts about gangs so you can make wise decisions **based on what you KNOW.**

WHAT IS A GANG?

A gang is a group of people who share a common purpose and engage in **criminal activity** like drug dealing, graffiti, and violence. Gang members frequently hang out together, claiming a specific neighborhood or geographic area as their “turf.” Much of their time is spent fighting rival gangs to keep them out of their territory.



Young people of all races and ethnic backgrounds participate in gangs. Most gang members are between the ages of 15-22 but some gangs recruit kids as young as 12-13. Most gangs are male-dominated, but girls are joining gangs in rapidly growing numbers.



WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE JOIN GANGS?

Young people join gangs for a variety of reasons: **money, sense of support and belonging, peer status, protection, excitement.** Gang leaders use a variety of tactics to recruit new members often targeting teens with few friends and low self-esteem, who perform poorly in school, skip class, need money or have already gotten in trouble with the law. Other factors that encourage gang involvement include:

- **PEER** pressure
- **NEED** for protection
- **ECONOMIC** need
- **DRUG OR ALCOHOL ABUSE,** sexual promiscuity or history of violence
- **LACK** of stable family structure or home environment
- **FAMILY** members who are involved in gangs
- **NEIGHBORHOODS** and communities characterized by poverty, drug abuse and heavy gang activity



HOW DO I...

RECOGNIZE A GANG OR GANG MEMBERS



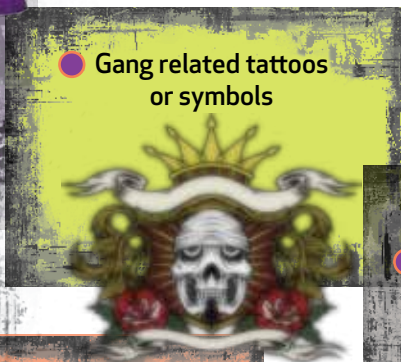
Gangs tend to mark their members and their territory.

GANG MEMBERS MAY BE IDENTIFIED BY:

○ Particular items of clothing or colors



● Gang related tattoos or symbols



● Graffiti marking neighborhoods or areas as gang "turf"



● Special hand signs or handshakes that tell others which gangs they belong to





I THINK...

MY FRIEND HAS JOINED A **GANG**

If one of your friends suddenly begins acting differently, he or she may be involved with a gang. Signs that your friend may have joined a gang may include:

- Hangs out with new friends, leaving old ones behind
- Displays gang symbols on books, lockers or clothing
- Has lost interest in school and family
- Often skips school
- Begins using drugs and alcohol more frequently
- Begins carrying weapons or large amounts of cash
- Gets arrested



GANG LIFE =

GANGS PROMISE money, prestige, excitement, drugs and alcohol, sex, and a sense of support and belonging. This may sound tempting, but there is a stiff price to pay by belonging to a gang. New gang members usually must commit crimes and acts of violence.

Gang initiation ceremonies are different for guys and girls. It usually involves a violent crime that could include theft, murder, gang rape or drive-by shootings.

When young men join gangs, they may have to fight several other gang members simultaneously.

When young women join, they may be raped by other gang members or forced to fight other female gang members. All new gang members may be forced to hurt an innocent person by committing crimes, such as robbery or assault.



knowing gang life was so surrounded by death, I don't know how anyone could WANT to get into a gang."

FORMER GANG MEMBER

SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES



Gang members often risk personal injury and possible death from rival gangs. Joining a gang will increase your risk of being targeted as a victim of violent crime.



Gang members are likely to be arrested or involved with drugs and alcohol.



Gang members may be injured, imprisoned or killed. Your family members may be injured or killed, too.



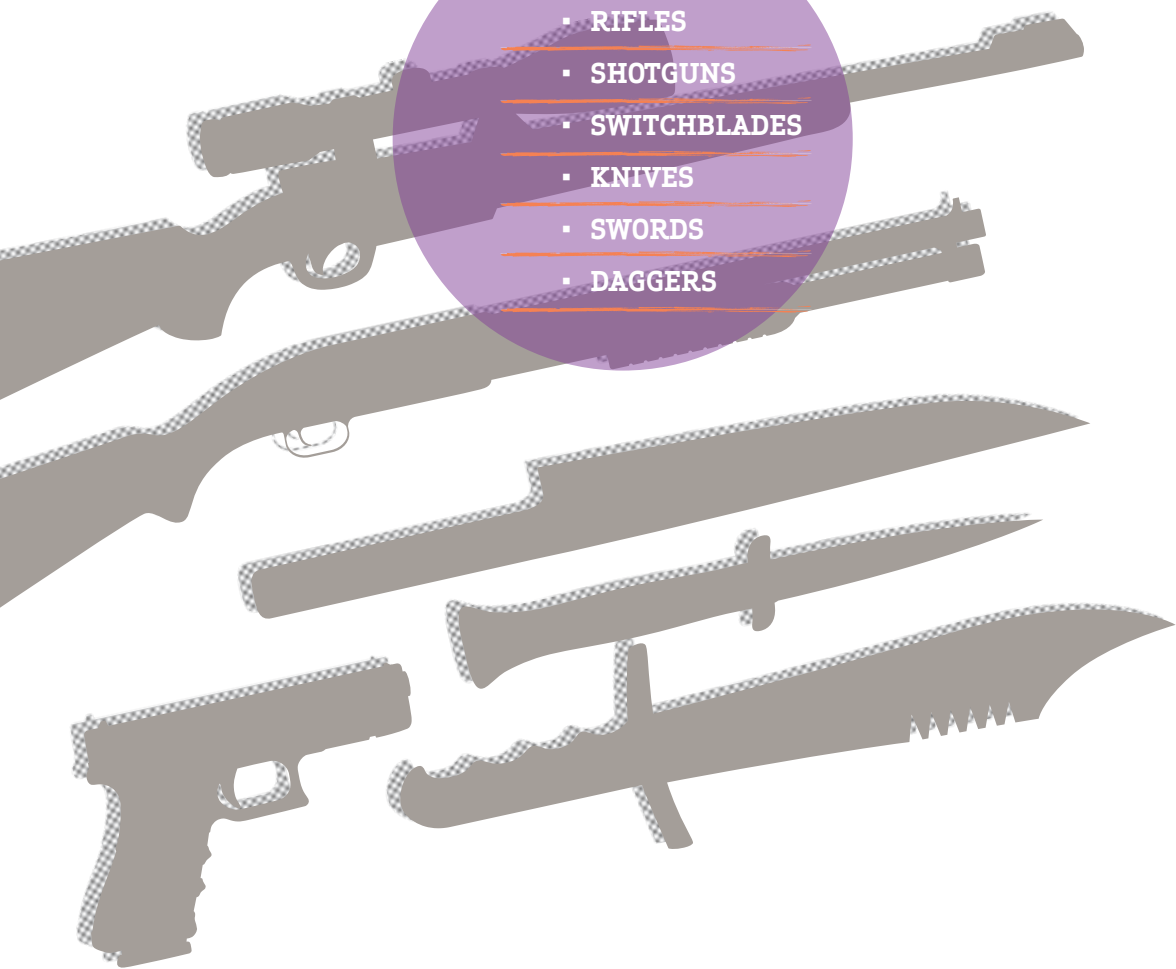
To combat the growing number of gang-related offenses, new laws now support some of the stiffest penalties for gang-related crimes. These include larger fines and longer sentences—15 years or more for gun violations, drug trafficking, and violence.



GANGS & GUNS

Guns and other weapons play a dangerous role in gang life. The law defines a dangerous weapon as a firearm or anything designed for the purpose of inflicting death or serious injury, which includes:

- PISTOLS
- RIFLES
- SHOTGUNS
- SWITCHBLADES
- KNIVES
- SWORDS
- DAGGERS





gang life is an endless battle with no victories on either side."

FORMER GANG MEMBER

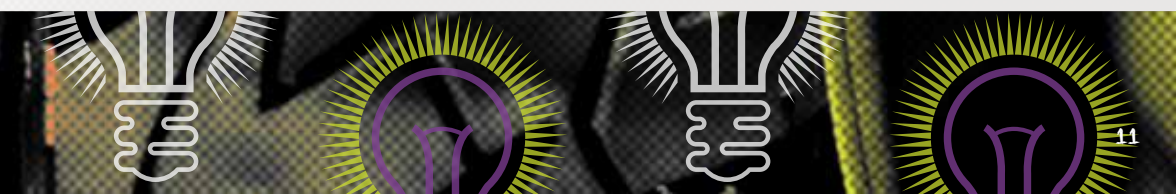
WHAT THE LAW SAYS ABOUT GUNS

It is against the law for anyone under 17 to own a handgun, rifle, shotgun or any dangerous or concealed weapon. Individuals under the age of 17 may not use or possess a firearm except under certain circumstances.

If a person under 17 commits a crime using a deadly weapon, the juvenile will be considered a serious juvenile offender.

YOU COULD GO TO JAIL:

- **IF** you bring a firearm to school, on the bus or to any school activity, it is a felony. The school can suspend you immediately, recommend your expulsion.
- **IF** you carry a firearm just to threaten or scare another person, you can be charged with aggravated assault.
- **IF** you shoot a gun from a moving vehicle. This is a serious offense.
- **IF** you shoot a gun at any house, vehicle, building or aircraft. This is a felony.
- **IF** you change any identification mark on a weapon or possess such an altered weapon. This is a felony.



GANGS & GRAFFITI

Graffiti is an illegal form of communication painted on walls and streets. It can be divided into two types:

TAGGER GRAFFITI AND GANG GRAFFITI.

Taggers see graffiti as an art form, a game or friendly contest. It is generally more intricate, artistic and colorful. Gang members post graffiti to increase their visibility, threaten and intimidate neighborhood residents. It is more primitive and more easily read than tagger graffiti. Gang graffiti may show alliances between gangs, mark the scene of a crime, or commemorate the death of a beloved "homie." It may also include offensive references to rival gangs.



Graffiti by street gangs often uses Old English style letters, balloon or block letters or simple single stroke letters. The number "13" is used often in gang graffiti; it also may include crude pictures of crescent moons, stars, rabbit ears, pitchforks, crowns or dice.

Never confront or challenge someone who is "tagging a wall." Street gang members are very often armed and may assault a challenger. Instead, contact a local law enforcement agency and give accurate description of individuals, graffiti, location, vehicle and license plate number.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF FROM GANG ACTIVITY



Few teens are actually forced to join a gang. If you are approached by a known gang member:

- **Be confident**, refuse the person and talk to a trusted adult—teacher, school counselor, parent or other family member—about what happened.
- **If gang members threaten you**, don't overreact. Stay cool and tell a trusted adult.
- **If gang threats continue**, tell your parents, law enforcement or school officials.



I DON'T WANT TO JOIN A GANG, WHAT CAN I DO



There are many alternatives to gangs. If you need help figuring out what to do, talk to an adult you trust. Some possible options include:

- Hang out with kids who are not involved and don't want to be involved in a gang
- Stay in school
- Participate in sports
- Volunteer
- Join an after school club or supervised activity
- Hang out at your local community center
- Get a part-time job

You can also help prevent gang recruitment in your community. Encourage your friends to take part in positive activities, and be careful not to copy gang clothing and symbols. You don't want gangs to mistake you and your friends for gang members, which could make you a target for violence.



I'M IN A GANG AND

I WANT TO GET OUT



Many teens have left gangs safely and you can too. If you or a friend is involved in a gang, getting out might seem impossible, but there are things you can do and organizations that are ready to help you. One of the first things you can do is talk to an adult you trust—a teacher, school counselor, parent or other family member, local police officer, gang squad officer, or community religious leader. Many former gang members have found the courage to get out of gangs and start a new life.

It takes courage to say no to a gang and courage to leave a gang. Knowing more will help you make the right decisions for the rest of your life.



RESOURCES

Parts of this booklet were derived from these sources:

- Youth Gangs: Know the Facts, National Crime Prevention Council | www.ncpc.org
- 11 Facts About Gangs | www.dosomething.org
- Graffiti: That Writing on the Wall, Salt Lake Area Gang Project | www.updsl.org
- Girls and Gangs, National Crime Prevention Council | www.ncpc.org
- Know More About the Law: Louisiana Laws for Youth, LA Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General | www.ag.state.la.us





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