



West Bend Police Department Parent's Guide to Youth Gangs

Gangs are a nationwide problem and are not limited to large cities. In West Bend we have been able to control and confine gang activities to a minimal level. We are able to do this because the community through its schools, parents and citizens are aware of what to look for, and are willing to get involved. Please use the information below and stay involved in your children's lives and the community.



WHAT IS A GANG?

A youth gang is defined as adolescents and young adults who interact frequently and are deliberately involved in illegal activities, share a common identity (often expressed through a gang name), adopt certain symbols and/or claim control over certain "turf".

WHO JOINS THE GANG AND WHY?

No one is immune to becoming a gang member although gang members come from every type of background, there are certain factors that may increase the likelihood of gang involvement. These factors are:

- Peer pressure
- Intimidation from gang members
- Feeling of a lack of love and respect
- Lack of close family relationship
- Lack of discipline
- Low income family
- Low self-esteem
- Single parent family
- School dropout or truant (poor student)
- Victim of abuse/neglect, parental abuse
- Negative role models
- No outside interest

Young people need positive role models, recognition, love and respect from their families and their communities. If their needs are not met in a constructive way, some will turn to the gangs to meet these needs.

WHAT DO MEMBERS GET FROM BEING IN THE GANG?



Status
Excitement
Attention, affection, belonging, recognition and protection
Gang serves as member's family
Sexual relationships

DOES RACISM PLAY A PART?

In some communities, there are certain elements of the population that do not want or are unwilling to accept any type of cultural change. When this segment comes in contact with change, they tend to react in negative ways. The young people on both sides of the issue are caught in the middle.

AS A PARENT WHAT DO I LOOK FOR?

There are several early warning signs that a parent should be aware of and questions to ask:

What is going on in the neighborhood?

Who are the people involved?

Is my child one of them?

Are they dressing differently than they used to?

And if so, what are they now wearing?

Are their friends dressing the same way?

Are you finding drawings/logo's on notebooks, papers and t-shirts?

Are they getting in trouble at school or with the Police?



Do they suddenly have a nickname?

Do they have money that they cannot explain?

Watch for bruises, which may be signs of gang initiation.

Watch for tattoos/bodywriting, which may be a sign of gang membership.

Are there signs of any drug abuse?

A word of caution: one or even a few of these identifiers may not mean

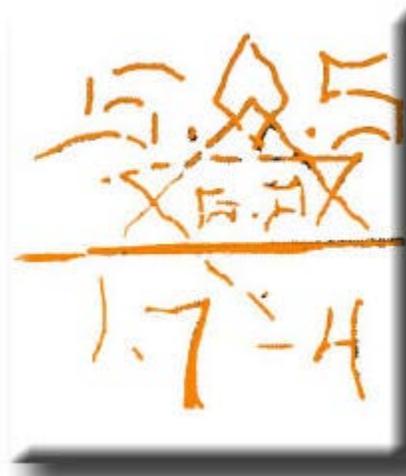
gang involvement or membership. A parent should look for multiple identifiers and for similarity among their child's friends (i.e., same type and color of clothing).

AS A PARENT, WHAT CAN I DO?

- DO NOT permit children to attend and/or host unsupervised parties.
- DO NOT overlook the potential for females to be involved with gangs. They may support male gang members as a related subgroup or form a gang of their own.
- DO KNOW that many youths associated with gangs deny their involvement, claiming that they just "hang with a group of guys". Although you may not see an obvious gang with colors and ,open leadership, be cautious for gangs having subtle colors and low-key leaders.
- DO KNOW about the exposure of your children to negative activities, friends, music, etc. Although we cannot shelter children from all the "evils" of society, we can monitor their activities and associates, and discuss negatives with them. LISTEN to your child and learn the names of his her friends.

Once you have found or identified your child as a member of a gang or associating with suspected gang members, there are specific things you as parent can do:

- Set and enforce clear behavioral limits. Explain to your child her/his rights and responsibilities.
- Report any gang activity to the police.
 - Cooperate fully with school and police authorities.



MEASURES TO TAKE TOWARD A SOLUTION

Spend time with your children discussing this issue, ask for their suggestions and feelings. Let them know they are not alone. Encourage your children to stay in school; talk to the school and get the tutoring or counseling they need.

We all come from different family circumstances and each situation will be different. If there has been open communication with your children as they grow - then they're probably discussing this with you. Point out positive alternatives to them. Offer to help them find something else that give them a sense of pride, a sense of belonging or a means to be recognized as someone of value as parents. By reaching out and joining together in parent support groups or neighborhood watch programs, we can reclaim the community for children.