Gangs

Is Your Community Prepared?

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GANGS: Is Your Community Prepared?

Although gangs are not new to California, they have spread from major urban areas to the suburbs and rural communities. For decades they have been associated with fighting, vandalism, and robbery.

In the past two decades, however, gang activities have become more alarming and dangerous. Drive-by shootings, carjackings, home invasions, and other acts of senseless violence have become too frequent in communities throughout California, destroying the lives of all who are touched by this violence.

With the spread of gangs and their increasingly random violence, we cannot afford to ignore their presence. We must respond as a community. We must all work together – parents, community members, clergy, businesses, educators, law enforcement, and local government. We must find ways to steer our youth away from gangs. We have the power to give them options, opportunities, and alternatives to joining gangs.

This booklet provides general information about gangs, how to recognize signs of gang involvement, and what you and your community can do to prevent gang activity.

Early Signs of Gang Involvement

Gang involvement can begin as early as elementary school. Children as young as 7 or 8 years old have been recruited to work for gangs.

Parents and educators should watch for the signs that their children or students may be involved

with gangs. Changes in a child's behavior or activities which may be early warning signs of gang involvement include:

- Decline in grades
- Change of friends
- Truancy
- Keeping late hours
- Alcohol and other drug use
- Having large sums of money or expensive items which cannot be explained

- Developing major attitude problems with parents, teachers, or others in authority
- Glamorizing gangs

Signs of Serious Gang Involvement

There are different levels of gang activity, ranging from "criminal street gang" activity to the delinquent behaviors of juveniles. Juvenile delinquent behaviors, which include extorting lunch money, writing graffiti, vandalism, bullying, intimidation, stealing bicycles, shoplifting, drug use, and truancy, can lead to serious criminal street gang activity. Signs of gang involvement include:

- Gang graffiti on bedroom walls, books, clothing, athletic shoes, and posters
- Gang uniforms or gang colors
- Hand signals to communicate with other gang members
- Photos showing gang names, slogans, insignia, hand signals, or individuals involved in gang activities
- Gang style language
- Gang tattoos or gang insignias
- Disclosure of gang membership

- Fingernails painted a certain color
- Gang-color shoelaces in athletic shoes
- Specific hairstyles (such as the Skinheads shaving their heads bald, or a group of females all wearing their hair in a ponytail).

- Possession of weapons such as shaved-down baseball bats, sections of pipe taped at the ends, spiked wrist bands, chemical mace, knives, handguns, sawed-off shotguns, and semi-automatic firearms

Clothing color and style sometime serve to identify each gang. For example, with African American gangs, the color red stands for "Bloods," blue for "Crips." Black and dark or dull colors tend to be favored by some Hispanic gangs and white Heavy Metal groups. Other favored gang colors may be brown or purple. Whether they use color or not, traditional gangs will generally adopt some article of clothing or style of dress in order to distinguish themselves as a group.

Signs of Gangs in Your Neighborhood

Graffiti

One of the first signs of the presence of a gang in your neighborhood is graffiti. Graffiti is a clear marking of territorial boundaries which serves as a warning and challenge to rival gangs. It is also used to communicate messages between gangs.

The graffiti may indicate the gang's name, the member's nickname, a declaration of loyalty, a memorial to a slain gang member, threats, challenges, and warnings to rival gangs, or a description of criminal acts which the gang has been involved. Gang graffiti is most commonly found on neighborhood walls, fences, and mailboxes.

Tagging

Another type of gang is known as a tagging crew. Tagging crews are individuals (known as "taggers") who initially group together for the sole purpose of placing their names or slogans in visible locations or having tagging competitions known as "battles" with other tagging crews when they are challenged. While tagging can be done by individuals or crews who have no gang affiliation, trends are showing that more and more tagging crews are being identified (by law enforcement) as another type of street gang.

Youths Hanging Out

Another sign that gangs may be in your neighborhood is the presence of large numbers of youths hanging around public parks, high schools, fast food stands, convenience stores, and other hang-outs for teenagers. You may also notice the frequent use of public phone booths by people who actually receive phone calls there.

Drug Houses

Drug gangs set up shop in homes, apartments, or hotels. These sites, known as "rock" or drug houses, are used for the manufacturing, distribution, and sale of illegal drugs. Drug houses are usually in disrepair and are the site of many parties. The most identifiable characteristic of a drug house, however, is the heavy traffic of people coming into the house for short periods and then leaving.

Increase in Crime

Your community may experience an increase in gang-related crimes such as vandalism, assaults, burglaries, robberies, and even random drive-by shootings.

Why Should You Get Involved?

Gang membership can severely damage a child's future. Gang members usually socialize only with other gang members, reinforcing their limited view of life. They often drop out of school, limiting their chances of higher education, employment, and upward mobility. They frequently establish a lifelong pattern of involvement with the criminal justice system. They may commit serious and violent crimes that lead to lengthy incarcerations. They may be killed or injured. They may place an entire household of family members at risk. The gang members that do make it to adulthood often become dependent on alcohol and drugs. For some, the gang lifestyle is passed down as a family tradition leading to generational gangs.

What Parents Can Do

Parents who suspect gang activity should take steps to intervene. The following are some suggested steps:

- Increase your awareness of your child's belongings, clothes, and room. Know who their friends are and where they "hang out."
- Be willing to identify and address the dynamics within your family, as well as factors within the neighborhood and school that could be contributing to your child's gang involvement.

- Talk to your child or teenager. Get answers to your questions about their behavior and discuss the consequences of being in a gang.
- Talk to school officials and counselors. Ask if they are aware of campus problems and if there are school programs that will help.
- Contact your local law enforcement agency or juvenile probation department. They may have a crime prevention or gang specialist who can give you up-to-date information.

- Call community-based organizations. Many have experience with gang problems and can give you valuable guidance.
- Go to your religious leaders for advice. They may know of programs that help neighborhood children stay out of gangs.
- Report and immediately remove any graffiti in your neighborhood or local school grounds.
- Take action – this is the most important thing you can do as an individual, a group, or a organization.

What Your Neighborhood Can Do

You and your neighbors can work to get gangs and drugs out of your community. The key is being organized. Remember, prevention is the key to controlling gang activity. Everyone and every community can work on solutions to the gang problem. Effective anti-gang efforts begin with partnerships among parents, schools, law enforcement, religious institutions, community organizations, businesses, and youth.

Anti-Gang Laws

To reduce gang violence, graffiti and illegal drug use in California, laws have been enacted specially aimed at gangs. These laws assist law enforcement agencies, district attorneys, judges, schools, and communities in mounting a comprehensive attack on the problem. Some of the anti-gang laws target such criminal activity as:

Street Crime: Penalties for active participation in a criminal street gang with knowledge that its members engage in criminal activity; adults who use violent coercion to induce a minor to participate in criminal street gangs; providing firearms to gang members.

Graffiti: Penalties for active possession, sale, or purchase by a minor of an aerosol container of paint for graffiti purposes; parental liability for fines relating to graffiti convictions.

Drive-by Shootings: For murder committed in a drive-by shooting, and murder committed in the perpetration of carjacking, or for shooting at an occupied vehicle.

Penalty Enhancements: For conviction of a felony committed to promote or assist in any criminal conduct by gang members; felonies committed on or near a school.

Proposition 21, adopted in California in 2000, increases punishment for gang-related felonies including providing for the death penalty for gang-related murder, indeterminate life sentences for home-invasion robbery, carjacking, witness intimidation and drive-by shootings; and creates the crime of recruiting for gang activities. Among other provisions, it also authorizes wiretapping for gang activities.

Effective January 1, 2003, a new law expands the list of gang crimes subject to asset forfeiture under the criminal profiteering law.

Statewide Resources

Office of the Attorney General
Crime and Violence Prevention Center
P.O. Box 944255
Sacramento, CA 94244-2550
(916) 324-7863
Web site: www.safestate.org
Develops educational materials, conducts research, and provides gang and other crime and violence prevention information and resources to government agencies, law enforcement, and the general public.

Office of Criminal Justice Planning
Gang Violence Suppression Branch
1130 K Street, Suite 300
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 327-3682
Provides funding for local anti-gang programs, including suppression, intervention, education, enforcement, prosecution, and probation efforts. Maintains an information clearinghouse on anti-gang efforts.

California Department of Education
School Safety and Violence Prevention Office
P.O. Box 944272
Sacramento, CA 94244-2720
(916) 657-2989
Provides free personal technical assistance and resource materials to schools, law enforcement organizations, and other youth-serving agencies to promote safe schools, improve school attendance, and encourage good citizenship.

California Youth Authority
Gang Violence Reduction Project
2445 Mariondale Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90032
(213) 227-4114
Provides information and resources pertaining to its Gang Violence Reduction Project. The purpose of the project is to mediate gang feuds and provide positive activities for at-risk youth in their respective neighborhoods.

Local Law Enforcement

Your **local police or sheriff's office** are often the best places to make your first call. Most law enforcement agencies have a crime prevention office that can assist you in your efforts. They can also refer you to community organizations in your area which you may wish to contact.

Community-Based Organizations

Neighborhood and local, county or regional groups have helped thousands break the cycle of gang violence. If your community is not included in this list, contact your local law enforcement or one of the Statewide Resources for programs in your area.

Alameda County contact:
Youth ALIVE!
3300 Elm Street
Oakland ca 94609
(510) 594-2588 ext 300
www.youthalive.org
(Languages: English, Spanish)

Fresno County contact:
Comprehensive Youth Services
3795 E. Shields Ave.
Fresno CA 93726
(559) 229-3561
(Languages: English, Spanish, Hmong)

Los Angeles County contact:
Association of Community Based Gang Intervention Workers
C/O Gang Violence Bridging Project
Pat Brown Institute, Cal State University Los Angeles
5151 State University Drive
Los Angeles CA 90032-8261
(323) 343-3773
www.gangalternatives.org
(Languages: English, Spanish, Filipino dialects)

Orange County contact:
Community Service Programs, Inc.
CSP Gang Prevention Program
1821 E. Dyer Road, Suite 200
Santa Ana CA 92705
(949) 250-0488
www.cspinc.org
(Languages: English, Spanish)

Riverside County contact:
People Reaching Out, Project YES
2060 University Avenue
Riverside CA 92507
(909) 686-8946
www.inlandagency.org
(Languages: English, Spanish)

Sacramento County contact:
La Familia Counseling Center
5523 34th Street
Sacramento CA 95820
(916) 452-3601
(Languages: English, Spanish, Hmong)

San Bernardino County contact:
Alternative Choices/Family Service Agency
216 West 6th Street
San Bernardino CA 92401
(909) 888-4440
familysv@msn.com
(Languages: English, Spanish)

San Diego County contact:
San Diego Youth and Community Services
3255 Wing Street
San Diego CA 92110-4638
(619) 221-8600
www.sdycs.org
(Languages: English, Spanish)

San Francisco contact:
Mayor's Criminal Justice Council
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, Suite 496
San Francisco CA 94102
(415) 554-6688
www.ci.sf.ca.us/ncjc
(Languages: English, Spanish, Chinese, others as needed)

San Joaquin County contact:
Center for Positive Prevention Alternatives
729 North California Street
Stockton CA 95202
(209) 929-6713
www.cppainc.org
(Languages: English, Spanish, Cambodian)

Santa Clara County contact:
STAND (Striving Toward Achievement & New Direction) Program
City of San Jose Youth Services
2695 Moorpark Avenue
San Jose CA 95128
(408) 794-1218
www.ci.san-jose.ca.us/prns/youthsvc.htm
(Languages: English, Spanish)

Notes

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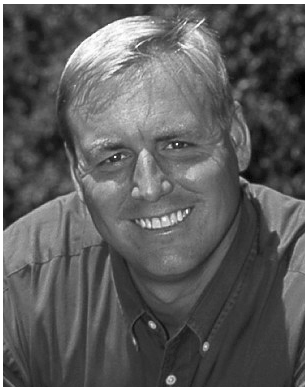

SENATOR JEFF DENHAM

Capitol Office
State Capitol, Room 3076
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 651-4012

District Offices
369 Main Street, Suite 208
Salinas, CA 93901
(831) 769-8040

1231 8th Street, Suite 175
Modesto, CA 95354
(209) 577-6592

1640 N Street, Suite 210
Merced, CA 95340
(209) 726-5495

senator.denham@sen.ca.gov

www.sen.ca.gov/denham

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