

STREET GANGS

A DEAD END

Youth gangs are not a new phenomenon in America. Cities have had to deal with gang-related problems since the late 18th century. Youth have banded together for a multitude of reasons ranging from protection to the execution of criminal activities. Such youths may just want to occupy time, fill an emptiness in their lives, or experience a sense of belonging. Whatever the reason, when a gang evolves, communities almost always suffer serious consequences. In recent years the popularity of gangs has brought community unrest in areas never before exposed to this type of problem.

Today, children as young as eight and ten are lured into gangs and commit acts of violence once associated with much older, street-wise troublemakers. With a little knowledge and understanding of the gang phenomenon, adults may help stem the tide of gang affiliation and end its natural results: disrespect, disruption in school, and a vicious cycle of community violence.

GANG AWARENESS

What is a gang?

A gang is defined as three or more individuals that hang together on a continuing basis, during both criminal and non-criminal activity. They distinguish themselves apart from the rest of society in some manner, which could be clothing, hairstyles, communication or any other means. A gang may or may not claim turf. However, one of the simplest and most functional definitions is that a gang is a group of people who form an allegiance for a common purpose and engage in violent, unlawful, or criminal activity.

Street gangs

Gangs are predominately territory oriented. Each gang has its own turf and graffiti mark sits boundaries. Anyone who does not belong in the area and 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 projects).

Nicknames

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 fulfilling specific roles in the gangs such as president or enforcer and wearing gang jackets similar to those worn by many car clubs having rigid structures. Rather, leadership roles in street gangs are usually not formally recognized positions. They 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 gangs, however, it is more likely that a single individual will become a recognized leader.

Cliques and sets

Many gangs are subdivided into sets or cliques. A clique or set will usually have its own name. Sets usually apply to black gangs and cliques to Hispanic gangs.

Why do young people join gangs?

There are variety of reasons, including the excitement of gang activity, peer pressure, attention, protection, financial benefit, family tradition, and lack of realization of the hazards involved. In many cases, young people are not actively discouraged from gang involvement by their parents. Often, parents don't realize that their children are engaged in gang activity.

Effects 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 families safety and that of their gang related child.

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, as well as extensive police records that will limit their employment opportunities.