

Many communities have serious problems with gangs. They cause fear, destroy property, threaten or hurt peaceable residents, and drive out businesses. There are many kinds of gangs, but whatever kind your community is dealing with, gangs spell trouble. Fortunately, while we do have gangs in Prince William County, our problem is not serious. Active community involvement, specific school procedures, and special police and judicial handling are all helping to control this issue for our county. But there is more to do to keep gang problems under control.

Parents can do a lot to prevent gang problems or to reduce gang problems already in place. Most important, there's a lot that parents like you can do to keep your own children from joining gangs:

Learn about gangs and signs of gang activity.

Sharpen your skills as a parent and use them.

Join with others to make or keep your neighborhood gang free.

WHY DO KIDS JOIN GANGS?

Young people (as young as nine or ten) join gangs for reasons that make sense to them, but not to adults. They give reasons like these:

- To belong to a group
- For excitement
- To get protection
- To earn money
- To be with friends



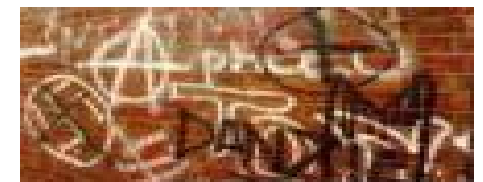
SIGNS OF GANG INVOLVEMENT

- Specific colors or emblems
- Special hand signals
- Gang symbols on walls as graffiti or on books or clothing
- Wearing certain kinds and colors of clothing in very specific ways
- Possessing unexplained and maybe large sums of money or may suddenly acquire property without explanation (TV's, stereos, expensive team jackets)
- A change in attitude to include violent reactions, disruptive behavior, dislike of and refusal to submit to authority (teachers, police, parents)
- Becomes secretive regarding where they are and their activities
- A change in friends and does not bring them home
- Skips school and grades dropping
- Receives phone calls from subjects who refuse to identify themselves, or may have an unusual nickname, or using a nickname to identify your child
- Frequent negative contact with school officials and law enforcement
- Hangs out with known or suspected gang members
- Interest in weapons or may possess or carry weapons (guns, knives, unusual objects)

SHARPEN YOUR SKILLS AS A PARENT

Many gang members say they joined because the gang offered them support, caring, belonging, and a sense of purpose – all the things that you should be providing as a parent. The odds are that the better you are at providing these needs, the less need your children will have for gangs. Here are some parenting skills that are especially important:

- Talk with and listen to your child. Spend some special time with each child.
- Put a high value on education and help your child to do his or her best in school. Do every thing possible to prevent dropping out. Take an interest in their education and grades.
- Help your kids identify positive role models and heroes, especially people right in your community. And don't forget, positive role models start at home. Don't be a "do as I say, not as I do!" kind of parent.
- Do everything possible to involve your children in supervised, positive group activities.
- Praise them for doing well and encourage them to do their very best to stretch their skills to the utmost.
- Know what your children are doing and whom they are with. Know their friends and their friends' families.



to promote tougher laws on criminals and juvenile offenders who are gang members.



HELP KEEP GANGS OUT Four Things You Can Do

First, develop positive alternatives. What activities currently exist for after-school involvement? What can you do to support them? What recreational facilities exist for youth activities?

Second, develop and support anti-crime programs. Does your child's school have any anti-crime programs such as a crime line to report gang involvement? What programs exist in your community to combat graffiti and vandalism? Does your community look like a crime area, or is it neat and well cared for?

Third, work with the Prince William County Police Department to start or join a Neighborhood Watch Program. Statistics show that a neighborhood watch area is 20 times safer from crime. Is suspicious activity reported to police in your neighborhood, or does it go unreported? Do you report suspicious groups and activity that you observe?

Fourth, voice your concerns. In Virginia, criminal activity associated with gangs and recruiting for gangs are felony violations of the criminal code; but being a member of a gang is not illegal. Are you tired of hearing about criminals who are committing crime while out on parole? Contact your state representatives

WHAT THE PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT IS DOING ABOUT GANGS

- D.A.R.E., or Drug Abuse Resistance Education is being conducted in many elementary schools by specially trained Police Officers.
- Community Resource Officers are assigned to every high school and also cover its feeder middle and elementary schools.
- Aggressive investigation and prosecution to the fullest extent of the law, of any gang suspected criminal incident.
- Public education on gang activity.
- Increased emphasis on Crime Prevention Programs such as Neighborhood Watch, Worship Watch and Business Watch.



GANG VIOLENCE



A Parent's Guide

**Police Non-Emergency
(703) 792-6500
PWCPD Gang Unit
(703) 792-7248
PWCPD Crime Prevention Unit
(703) 792-7270**



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