

Today many communities—maybe even yours—are facing serious problems with gangs.

As a member of the community, you may feel helpless against gangs, but there are things that you can do in conjunction with the authorities to prevent or reduce gang problems. And as a parent, there's a lot that you can do to keep your own children from joining gangs.

Learn about gangs

- Learn about gangs and signs of gang activity.
- Join with others to make or keep your neighborhood gang-free.
- Sharpen your skills as a parent and use them.

Young people (as young as nine or ten) are joining gangs in ever-growing numbers in all parts of the country. The reasons they give for joining are remarkably similar:

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

Gangs leave signs of their presence. As gang members, young people may adopt specific behavior, such as:

- wearing specific colors or emblems
- use of special hand signals
- wearing or drawing gang symbols—on walls as graffiti or on books, paper or clothing
- wearing certain kinds and colors of clothing in very specific ways
- possessing unexplained, relatively large sums of money

- grades becoming worse and interest in school declining
- staying out without good reason
- “hanging” with known or suspected gang members
- carrying weapons

As a parent

Many gang members say they joined because the gang offered them support, caring and a sense of order and purpose—all the things most parents try to give their kids. The odds are that the better you meet these needs, the less need your children will see 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 do his or her best in school. Do everything possible to prevent dropping out.
- Help your kids identify positive role models and heroes—especially people in your community.
- 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 with whom. Know about their friends and their friends' families.
- Address the issue.**
It is important to discuss with your child gangs and the problems they can create. The best time to talk about gangs is before there's a major problem. Tell your child that:
 - you disapprove of gangs

- you don't want to see your child hurt or arrested
- you see your child as special, and worth protecting
- you want to help your child with any problems he or she might face
- family members don't keep secrets from each other
- you and other parents are working together against gangs

It is important that you really listen to what your child has to say.

Talk with other parents.

For one thing, you'll find out what everyone else's parent really said. For another, you can support each other and share knowledge that will help spot problems sooner than you can on your own.

As a citizen

If you suspect gang activity in your area, contact the police immediately. Gangs often lead to crime problems, and the police should be made aware of any potential problem areas.

Develop positive alternatives.

Are there after-school and weekend activities kids can enjoy? Can the school offer its facilities? Can parents organize clubs or sports? Can older kids tutor or mentor younger ones? Can the kids themselves help with ideas?

Work with police and other agencies.

Report all suspicious activity; set up a Neighborhood Watch or a community patrol; let the police know about gang graffiti; get (and share) the facts on the gang problem in your community; find out what local services—non-profit as well as government—will work with communities to help avoid gang problems.

After contacting the police

□ **Get organized against the gang organization.** Use the system. Work with the local authorities and city or school organizations. Use your neighborhood association or get together with others to form a new group. Get help from a variety of sources right in your community. In addition to the police: religious leaders, family counselors, community associations, school counselors or principals, athletic coaches, Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCA/YWCA, Scouts, drug abuse prevention groups, youth-serving agencies and community centers—just to name a few.

United Against Crime

This crime prevention brochure is brought to you by RadioShack, working together with the National Crime Prevention Council (which manages the National Citizens' Crime Prevention Campaign) and the National Sheriffs' Association.

RadioShack has formed a special initiative with these leading organizations to provide you with answers for security that can help make your life safer.

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National Crime Prevention Council



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“What can I do to keep my kids from joining a gang?”



If security is the question, we've got answers.



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