

What To Do

Fighting crime and dealing directly with violent gang members is best left to experts trained to handle dangerous situations. However, everyone has the responsibility to overcome apathy and fear. Everyone must work toward a solution to the gang problem.

One solution is to offer alternatives to gang involvement. Youth, loitering after school or hanging out on corners, provide a breeding ground for gangs.

The alternatives include locations where organized and supervised programs are offered. The following suggestions may provide a starting point for concerned parents: The United Way, your child's school, Boy Scouts of America, Parks and Recreation Department, youth service programs, Law Enforcement Explorer Scout Posts, etc.

Becoming Aware

The first and most important step is to become aware of gangs, gang members, and their activities. Citizens armed with basic knowledge are better able to avoid becoming victims of gang attack.

Neighborhood Involvement

Gangs attempt to instill fear. They intimidate rivals and citizens alike. The gang's power grows through the use of fear and intimidation. This can be countered by citizen action groups such as the Neighborhood Watch. A neighborhood that is united and dedicated in a spirit of cooperation toward stopping crime and violence will greatly hamper a gang's efforts to intimidate and victimize.

Prevention

Prevention is the key to controlling gang activity. Many parents are unaware that their children are involved in gang activity. Many of the younger gang members are not aware of the realities of the violence associated with gang membership or the finality of death. Parents should look for changes in the behavior patterns of their children. Such changes include truancy, a decline in grades, changes of friends, late hours, graffiti in their bedrooms, and other indications of gang involvement. Gangs frequently gather in dark areas to avoid being seen. In these locations they will

often drink, use narcotics, and deface property with graffiti. Graffiti targets a neighborhood for deadly violence. Whenever possible, such areas should be kept well lighted. Outside floodlights mounted out of reach with wire covers to prevent intentional bulb breakage discourage gang loitering. In addition, graffiti should be quickly removed. The longer it remains, the more it attracts gang members.

Get Organized

You and your neighbors can work to get gangs and drugs out of your community. The key is being organized.

1) Get to know the neighbors on your block. Talk to them and see if they share your concern. Exchange names, phone numbers, and addresses. (If the people on your block are not interested, try to get involved in another nearby neighborhood, association, or a local church group that wants to act on the problem.)

2) Contact your local law enforcement agency. Many police departments have a Crime Prevention Officer or specialist who can speak to your group and assist you in getting organized. Also, get to know the police officer on your local "beat". He or she would have the best knowledge of the specific problems in your neighborhood. It might also be helpful to get advice from a community-based group which works with gang members.

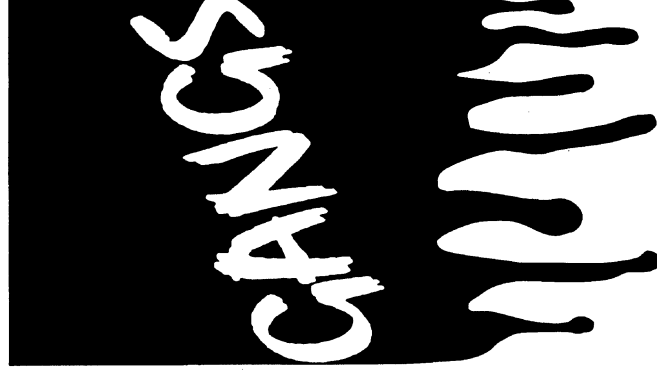
3) Organize a Neighborhood Watch meeting. At your first meeting select a block captain to serve as a liaison between law enforcement and your block group, talk about how often you'd like to meet and where, and develop a map of your area to assist people in reporting the exact location of suspicious activity. Include street names and the name, address, and phone number of each household on your map.

4) Document suspicious activity. Encourage your neighbors to document any suspicious activity. Write down addresses, names, descriptions of dealers and gang members, property owners, license numbers, and dates of incidents. This way you'll have all the facts at your fingertips when you call law enforcement.

For more information on starting a Neighborhood Watch group call (626) 308-2846.

San Gabriel
Police Department

STREET



What You Can Do To Stop Them!

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GANG AWARENESS

What is a gang?

Street gangs in Los Angeles County can be described as a group of individuals who may or may not claim control over a certain territory in the community and engage, either individually or collectively, in violent or other forms of illegal behavior. 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. Hispanic and Black street gang members account for most violent gang crimes; however, Asian and Pacific Island gangs are becoming more active.

Street Gangs

Gangs are predominately territory oriented. Each gang has its own turf and graffiti marks its boundaries. Anyone not belonging in the area and who 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 project).

Nick Names

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 in Los Angeles County 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 sub-divided 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 a variety of reasons including the excitement of gang activity, peer pressure, attention, financial benefit, family tradition, and a 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.

Effect Of Gang Involvement

Gang membership extracts a terrible toll from the lives of all that contact the members. Parents and relatives of gang members live in a double fear, one for their own safety and that of other non-gang family members and, a second fear for the survival of their gang member son or daughter.

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, and extensive police records that will limit their employment opportunities.

Gang Activity - What Do Gangs Do?

It is not practical to examine everything a gang does. In fact, many gang activities are frequently shared by a large portion of society. But when a gang is involved in a weekend party, or attends a public event such as visiting an amusement park, the potential for violence and criminal activity is far greater than for any other group of people. Gang members seek confrontations with rivals. The resulting violence often claims innocent victims.

While gang violence often makes headlines, it creates even more damage on a regular basis to local property and business. Vandandalism, in the form of graffiti and the wanton destruction of public and private property, is often done in furtherance of the gang's reputation. Abandoned houses are favorite targets for vandandalism but even occupied homes do not escape. Local businesses suffer not only from the property damage and graffiti, but also from loss of customers and employees. Businesses facing decreasing revenue and rising insurance costs close their doors leaving another abandoned building for the gang. However, the majority of residents in a gang area who are unable to move away, live in fear.

How Are Gang Members Identified?

Most gang members are proud of their gang and freely admit their membership. Many display tattoos openly and dress in a style identifying their particular gang. Their personal belongings are frequently covered with graffiti and bear the gang's logo and the member's gang names. Many gang members "shoot signs" with their fingers; that is to say they make gestures with their hands and fingers which identify their gang.

Many individuals on the fringe of gang involvement are reluctant to identify themselves as gang members. They often state that their friends are gang members but they are not. However, rival gang members, shooting from a speeding car, do not make a distinction between a gang member and his associates.

Dress

The uniform of Hispanic gangs is an easily recognized standard. Most gang members adopt a basic style that includes white T-shirts, thin belts, baggy pants with split cuffs, a black or blue knit cap (beanie or a bandana tied around the forehead similar to a sweatband). Black gang members are individualistic in their dress. Black gangs tend to identify themselves by adopting certain colors. The "Crips" identify themselves with the color blue. "Non-Crip" gangs, known generally as "Bloods" use red accessories, such as caps or bandanas, to identify themselves.

Grffiti

Grffiti, a form of vandandalism, is a problem that impacts our neighborhoods in a variety of ways. Without question, it decreases property values in residential neighborhoods and negatively affects industrial and commercial areas. Of greater concern is the inherent violence associated with gang graffiti. Gang members use graffiti to mark their gang's "turf" or territory. They also use it to advertise the gang's status or power and to declare their own allegiance to the gang. When a neighborhood is marked with graffiti indicating territorial dominance, the entire area and its inhabitants become targets for violence. Anyone on the street or in his home is fair game for drive-by attacks by rival gang members. A rival gang identifies everyone in the neighborhood as a potential threat. Consequently, innocent residents are often subjected to gang violence by the mere presence of graffiti in their neighborhood.