

STREET REALITY OF GANGS

The Reality of Gangs

Youth gang involvement is not new. Gangs have been known to exist in our country since the 18th century. The gang problem is not likely to go away soon or easily. But there are ways you can prevent your child from being in a gang.

The family and the community are essential to the development of a child. If the family is the source of love, guidance and protection that youths seek, they are not forced to search for these basic needs from a gang. However, if a child feels lost and alone, he or she may choose companionship elsewhere.

Some of the reasons for joining a gang may include:

- ▶ A search for love, structure and discipline;
- ▶ A sense of belonging and commitment;
- ▶ The need for recognition and power;
- ▶ Companionship, training, excitement and activities;
- ▶ A sense of self-worth and status;
- ▶ A place of acceptance;
- ▶ The need for physical safety and protection; and
- ▶ A family tradition

If you feel your child may be leaning toward a gang, he or she may already be in one. Here are signs to look for:

- ▶ Does he or she have tattoos of something that looks like a gang name or insignia?
- ▶ Does he or she have extra money sometimes and try to explain it with stories you have trouble believing?
- ▶ Do you notice changes in wardrobe, attitude and tastes in music and cars?
- ▶ Does he or she collect bandanas of a particular color and favor that color in clothes?
- ▶ Does he or she go out late at night sometimes or not come home for several days?
- ▶ Is he or she getting in fights?
- ▶ Are his or her grades slipping at school, and is he or she "ditching" school from time to time?

You can protect your child from gangs by:

- ▶ Helping the child develop social and interpersonal skills;
- ▶ Imparting a high sense of self-esteem and personal responsibility;
- ▶ Teaching to reflect rather than have impulsive behavior;
- ▶ Being able to influence environment in a positive manner; and
- ▶ Teaching flexible coping strategies, well-developed problem-solving skills and intellectual abilities.

Once a child is in a gang, it's not easy getting out. He or she may risk his or her life upon leaving a gang. The alternatives are not pleasant either: Many put themselves in danger of disease, prison and death by staying in. Many become dependent on alcohol and drugs. Gang members usually drop out of school, limiting their chances for higher education or good employment. They are likely to be involved in crime throughout the rest of their lives.

Gangs are a no win situation. It's best not to start playing that game.

If you suspect your child is in a gang or there is gang activity in your neighborhood, call the Sandy Springs Police
Tip Line at **770-551-3300**. Your call can be anonymous.

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