Do females join gangs?

Female gang membership is sky rocketing. Current trends are that specific female gangs are emerging here in Florida and all over the Nation. Females are valued by the majority of gangs, but they are not true members and are often in support roles like carrying the weapons and drugs.

What is the general gang membership structure?

1. **Potentials or "Could-be's."** These are youngsters who are getting close to an age where they might decide to join a gang, live in or close to an area where there are gangs, or have a family member who is involved with gangs. Potentials do not have to join gangs, they can choose alternatives and avoid gangs completely.

2. **Claimers, Associates or "Wanna-be's."** Average age 11-13 years old, but may vary. These young people are not officially members of the gang but they act, walk, talk, and claim to be from the gang. They may begin to dress in gang attire, hang around with the gang and become involved in some of its activities.

3. **Regular Members.** Average age 14-17 years old; however could be much older or younger. They are already initiated in to the gang. Tend to back up the hard-core gang members. If they survive long enough, they could become hard-core.

4. **Hard-core.** Comprise about 5 to 10% of the gang. They are in the gang the longest and frequently are in and out of jail, unemployed, and involved with drug distribution and use. Average age is early to mid-twenties; however some are older or younger. They are very influential in the gang.

Why do gangs use graffiti and what does it mean?

As gang activity increases so does their graffiti. Graffiti has been called the "newspaper of the streets." Each gang has its unique symbols and cryptic types of writing. Graffiti is *not art work;* it is sophisticated communication that publicizes the gang's power, status, delineates territory, sends messages, and warns intruders. Graffiti upside down or crossed out is generally a 'put down' or threat to a rival gang or person. 'Death warrants' for police officers are known to have been posted with graffiti.

What do you do about gang graffiti?

Read It! Record It! Report It! And Remove It!! Gang graffiti left unchecked can be dangerous. Remember it can communicate an outright threat against an opposing gang or person. First the graffiti must be read and interpreted for danger signals. Second, it should be photographed. Then, a police report should be made for tracking purposes. Finally, the graffiti should be removed to reduce the likelihood of continued violence.

What are gang colors and gang signs? Colors refers to a gang member representing his/her membership by wearing a specific gang logo, particular colors of clothing, a specific brand name of clothing or clothing worn in a predefined manner. This may also include hair styles, jewelry, or even the way a person stands, walks or folds arms and hands. Colors identify the gang member and show member pride and affiliation.

Hand signals and gang slang are a means of communication. Symbols formed and flashed with the fingers, hands, and body have very specific meaning to the gang. The same goes for buzz words or phrases. Remember all of these may be area or geographic region specific and meanings may vary.

How do you deal with gangs?

Be decisive, firm, and fair. Lenient treatment is viewed as weakness and they will take advantage of you.

Intimidation will not work; it will most likely lead to confrontation. Lectures do not work either. Gang members are looking for respect.

Giving any public or media attention to a gang only feeds their egos and escalates gang activity.

It is bad news to negotiate with terrorist or criminals, so don't do it with gangs or their members–all it does is give them more recognition and power.

Remember the four "Rs" about graffiti–Read, Record, Report, Remove.

Prevent conflict whenever possible–look for common ground.

What are some typical pre-gang behaviors? Gang involvement does not happen overnight. It is a gradual process and if you are alert you will see the signs.

Poor progress or achievement in school

Truancy from school

Lack of hobbies or too much leisure time

Frequent contact with authority figures or police

Draws gang insignias/symbols

Problems at home

Lives in neighborhood where gangs exist

Friends are gang members or "dressing down" or "sagging and bagging" in gang attire

Begins dressing in traditional gang clothes

These items are characteristic of gang involvement. However, some people who join or associate with gangs do not dress in the traditional attire and do not exhibit conspicuous behavior to show gang involvement. *Parents must be aware of the behavior and activities of their children.* Continual monitoring of behavior and positive verbal communication between parents and young people is a must for gang membership prevention.

What can parents do?

Know your children's friends.

Know about who and what influences your kids.

Know what your children are doing at all times.

Become involved with them and occupy their time.

Strive for good communication between you and your youngsters.

Again, spend time with them.

Do not allow gang dress.

Do not allow hanging in the streets or mall.

Be very suspicious of gang writing, graffiti, or tattoos.

Encourage anti-gang attitudes at home.

Learn about gangs and drugs.

Participate in your child's education–find out what's happening at school.

Get involved in community affairs.

Set the example for your kids–they will do what you do.

Believe in your young person.

What are some parental strategies to combat gangs?

More recreational and leisure-time activities for youngsters

A crack-down and tougher law enforcement against gang activities in the community

Stepped-up efforts to dry up the chief source of gang money–DRUGS

Increased parental supervision of children, their activities, and their friends

Collaborative efforts between police, community residents, and young people

What are some community anti-gang strategies?

Establish a gang intelligence unit in the community police agency–a clearing house for tracking and monitoring gangs.

Build methods of disseminating advice/information on dealing with gangs to youths and parents.

Enact ordinances, both school board, city, and state, that make it a felony for gangs to recruit in school or intimidate youngsters to join a gang.

Support initiatives that provide for a rich assortment of extracurricular programs for kids and the incentives for them to participate in them.

Organize/support workshops on street gangs to be taught to parents, grandparents, and guardians of school-age children.

Provide public seminars on "street gangs" throughout the year.

Run media series on street gangs, stripping them of their mystique and exposing them for what they are.

Encourage service clubs and church groups to sponsor a battery of community speak-outs during the year on street gangs, with the help of the police departments, courts, youth services agencies, correctional institutions, and schools.

Organize an army of citizens to patrol through their community and erase gang graffiti whenever it appears.

Gang Assessment Tool

Is there graffiti on or near your neighborhood or community? **(5)**

1. Is the graffiti crossed out? **(10)**
2. Do the young people in your community wear colors, jewelry, clothing, flash hand signs, or display other behaviors that may be gang related? **(10)**
3. Are drugs available in or near your community? **(10)**
4. Was there a significant increase in the number of physical confrontations within the past 12 months in or near your community? **(5)**
5. Is there an increasing presence of weapons in your community?**(5)**
6. Are beepers, pagers, or cellular phones used by the young people in your community? **(10)**
7. Has there been a 'drive-by' shooting in or around your community? **(15)**
8. Have you had a "show-by" display of weapons in or around your community? **(10)**
9. Is the truancy rate and/or daytime burglaries in your community increasing? **(5)**
10. Have racial incidents increased in your community? **(5)**
11. Is there a history of gangs in your community? **(10)**
12. Is there an increasing presence of "informal social groups" with the unusual names that have words like: kings, disciples, queens, posse, crew? **(15)**

Add up your score:

0 - 20 points = No Problem

25 - 45 points = Emerging Problems

50 - 65 points = You Have Problems

70 + points = There Are Serious Problems

At 50+ points a need exists to develop a gang prevention and intervention program.