

Protecting Your Child from Gang Involvement

Supervise your children's activities and know their friends. Insist on meeting your children's friends and make every effort to get to know their parents. Discourage your children from hanging around with gang members. Make sure you know how your children are spending their free time. Check up on your children occasionally to make sure they are doing what they say they are doing. Do not allow your children to stay out late or spend a lot of unsupervised time out in the streets.

Get your children involved in supervised, positive group activities. These might include after-school programs or clubs, athletics, the arts, or volunteering with community groups. Find activities that interest your child and that help your child to develop a sense of belonging.

Develop good communication with your children. It is important to develop good communication with your children so that if they have a problem, they will know they can come to you. Good communication is open and frequent, and it takes on a positive tone. Talk to your child, and take the time to listen to what your child is telling you. Make no topic off limits.

Spend positive time with your children. Plan activities that the whole family can enjoy, but also find a way to spend time alone with your children. Make sure that you regularly praise your child and encourage and support your child emotionally.

Become involved in your children's education. Put a high value on education and help your child to do his or her best in school. Keep in close contact with your child's teachers and let your local schools know about any concerns you might have.

Clearly and continually begin to express to your children at an early age your disapproval of gangs and gang-related activity. Let them know that you think gangs are dangerous and that their well-being is very important to you.

Keep your children from attracting the attention of gangs. Do not buy or allow your children to dress in gang-style clothing. Teach your children to walk away if gang members approach them and to avoid using gang gestures. Do not allow your children to write or practice writing gang names, symbols, or any other gang graffiti on their books, papers, clothes, bodies, walls or any other place.

Learn about gang and drug activity in your community. Gangs take different forms in different communities, and the gangs in your community may look and act very differently than those you see on television or at the movies. Learn how gang members in your community dress and speak, and find out about the kind of activities they are involved in. Attend information meetings and read articles related to gang activity. Contact your child's school to find out if gangs are active there.