

- ◆ you see your child as special, and worth protecting;
- ◆ you want to help your child with problems;
- ◆ family members don't keep secrets from each other; and
- ◆ you and other parents are working together against gangs.

Don't forget to listen to your child as well!

3. Help Keep (or Put) Gangs Out—Four Things You Can Do

Everyone (except gang members) wants a gang-free community. Parents stand to lose the most—the well-being or even the life of a child—if gangs take or keep hold. But gangs are often violent and intimidating. What can you do in the face of this?

First, 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?

Second, 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.

Third, work with police and other agencies. Report suspicious activity; set up a

Neighborhood Watch or a community patrol; let the police know about gang graffiti; get (and share with other parents) the facts on the gang problem in your community; find out what local services—nonprofit as well as government—will work with communities against gangs.

Fourth, get organized against the gang organization. Use your neighborhood association or a new group. Get help from a variety of sources right in your community. Try these kinds of people in addition to the police: priest or minister, family counselor, community association, school counselor or principal, athletic coach, Boys & Girls Club, YM/WCA, Scouts, drug abuse prevention groups, youth-serving agencies, and community centers—just to name a few.

Crime prevention tips from

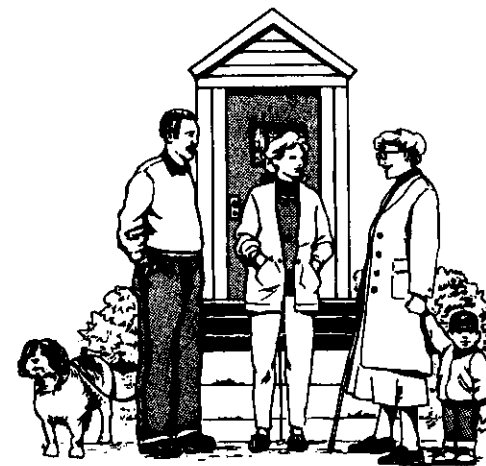
National Crime Prevention Council
1700 K Street, NW, Second Floor
Washington, DC 20006-3817

and

Cheektowaga Police Department
Crime Resistance Unit
275 Alexander Avenue
Cheektowaga, NY 14211
716-897-7293

For details on getting a neighborhood group organized, write to the National Crime Prevention Council for a free copy of *Getting Together to Fight Crime*.

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A Parent's Guide for Preventing Gangs

2

Sharpen Your Skills 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 that 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 to 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 right 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 whom they are with. Know about their friends and their friends' families.

Don't forget to talk about gangs. The best time 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;

- ◆ special hand signals;
- ◆ gang symbols on walls as graffiti or on books or clothing;
- ◆ major and negative behavior changes, such as:
 - ◇ worse grades,
 - ◇ staying out without good reason,
 - ◇ “hanging” with known or suspected gang members, or
 - ◇ carrying weapons.



- ◆ wearing certain kinds and colors of clothing in very specific ways; and
- ◆ possessing unexplained, relatively large sums of money.

Many communities—maybe the one you live in—have serious problems with gangs. There are many kinds of gangs, but whatever kind your community is dealing with, gangs spell trouble. They cause fear, destroy property, threaten or hurt peaceable residents, and drive out businesses.

Parents can do a lot to prevent gang problems or to reduce gang problems already in place. Most important, there's a lot that parents like you can do to keep your own children from joining gangs:

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

1. Learn About Gangs

Young people (as young as nine or ten) join gangs for reasons that makes sense to them, if not to adults. They give reasons like these:

- ◆ to belong to a group;
- ◆ for excitement;
- ◆ to get protection;
- ◆ to earn money; and
- ◆ to be with friends.

Gangs leave signs of their presence. Your child may adopt some of those signs as either a gang member or an imitator:

- ◆ specific colors or emblems;