



Are you concerned that your teen may become involved in a gang?

ABOUT GANGS

A gang is a group of individuals who band together for mutual protection and profit. Anti-social and illegal activity is often involved. A crew is a more loosely knit group that consists of individuals who grew up in or who have family roots in a particular neighbourhood. Crews have always been around and are not necessarily negative.

WHY DO YOUTH JOIN GANGS?

- **To feel accepted.** Gangs can provide a substitute family to a young person when they aren't happy with their home life.
- **For protection and safety.** Young people may believe that they are safer in a gang because they have the protection of other gang members.
- **Because they are pressured.** Young people are far more likely to face gang pressure if they live or spend time in areas where gangs are active. Gangs may even threaten to hurt them if they do not join. Teach your child to stand up to the pressure they may face.

- **For money and self-esteem.** Young people who feel that their economic futures are bleak may join gangs for money and self-esteem. Gangs are often seen as money makers – they often deal in the highly profitable drug trade, which can be accompanied by violence.
- **For excitement and the lifestyle.** Young people are impressionable and crave excitement. They may become involved in gangs because the media glamorizes the lifestyle through movies, music, and other entertainment. By the time the young person realizes that the gang is not what they want, it may be too late to drop out without facing violence or prosecution.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Offer children the warmth, hope, and support that they need and crave so they will understand that they have positive options and something precious that is worth protecting.
- Talk openly and honestly with the young people in your life about the risks of gang involvement. Let them know clearly that you do not approve of gangs. Explain what might happen if they were to join a gang (they could be physically hurt, pressured into committing criminal acts and imprisoned).
- Make sure your child is involved in healthy supervised activities afterschool and during vacation time (sports, gombey, community service, exercise, majorettes and arts).
- Set clear fair limits for your child and stick to them. Show your child that they are special and that you are concerned for their safety.
- Know where your child goes in their free time and get to know your child's friends and their parents.
- Get involved in your child's education, homework, PTA and school activities.

- Pay special attention to the kinds of media your children play with or watch. Encourage your children to think about what they are watching, listening to or playing. Let them know why violent games or movies can lead to normalizing destructive thoughts and violent actions.
- Make sure that your child knows you will help them with their problems and not judge them harshly.
- Encourage them to talk. If they won't talk with you, then encourage them to choose another safe and wise adult such as a school counsellor, pastor, relative or another adult that you can both trust.

By providing information and care, you can greatly reduce the risk that your child and other young people in your life will become involved with a gang.

If you think that your child is at-risk or is involved in gang activity, you can contact Family Centre and ask to speak with the intake worker on call at 232-1116.