

- Do not allow your children to wear gang clothing.
- If you suspect gang activity, look for gang symbols, drugs and weapons in areas that your child occupies, including their room.
- Seek help and advice from family, church, school administrators and police.
- Always remain an active part of your children's lives and a positive role model.
- Immediately contact your local police department to report gang graffiti or any other evidence of gang activity in your neighborhood or community.

Dear Parent:

Most people in Somerset County for years have believed that gangs exist only in the more urban areas of our small State and would never travel just a few miles to affect the quality of our lives or the lives of our children. Although we would like to think we are immune forever from gang influences and criminal activities, we simply are not. Most parents' interest in gangs has now become heightened by the rapid growth in gang membership, drug trafficking, violence and their migration into suburbia. Regrettably, through some of our successful narcotics operations and with the unintended murders of some of our youth, we have had some real life and death eye-openers. We can no longer stand idly by and rationalize that "it was just a group of kids who grew up together, hang out together and made a mistake," claiming that they do not meet the "definition" of a gang. Now is the time for all of us to accept responsibility and work together to protect our children from potential gang influences.

Sincerely,

Wayne J. Forrest

Prosecutor

Gang Awareness



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WHAT IS A GANG?

A group or association of three or more persons who may have a common identifying sign, symbol or name and who individually or collectively engage in, or have engaged in, criminal activity which creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. (National Alliance of Gang Investigators Association).

WHAT ARE GANG COLORS AND SIGNS?

Colors are used by gangs as a means to show an individual's affiliation with a gang. Colors are usually displayed on articles of clothing, graffiti, bandanas and other accessories. Many gang members will wear a dominant color or combination of colors to signify their affiliation to a particular gang.

Hand signs are common among street gangs. They are used as a form of communication between gang members. Hand signs vary from gang to gang. Symbols are formed with the fingers, hands and body to relay information, words and phrases from one member to another.

WHAT DOES GANG GRAFFITI MEAN?

Gang graffiti is often used to define a gang's territory, send messages between gang members and to disrespect rival gangs. Gangs will cross out a rival gang member's graffiti or write the graffiti upside down to show disrespect. This is also a sign of possible hostilities between the gangs.

WHAT ARE GANG TATTOOS OR MARKS?

Gang members will generally display the gang's colors, symbol or name in the form of tattoos or marks on their body. It is rare to see a gang member without a tattoo or gang marking. Some gang members may also be branded or burn marks into their skin to show allegiance to the gang.

HOW DO GANGS RECRUIT MEMBERS?

Individuals are confronted by gang members in neighborhoods, schools and social hangouts. Gangs recruit from all social, racial and ethnic groups. Gang members will promise the recruit(s) personal security, financial opportunity, love and respect by joining the gang. Gang members may also use forms of intimidation, to include threats of bodily harm, to coerce individuals into joining. Once a member of a gang, it is very difficult to leave for fear of being assaulted or in extreme cases killed.

WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE JOIN GANGS?

- Status, identity or recognition
- Excitement of gang activity
- Breakdown of family
- Low self-esteem
- Poor communication at home
- Lack of success in school
- Need for acceptance or belonging
- Lack of involvement in activities or sports
- Perceived or real need for protection
- Peer pressure from gang members
- Financial benefits from drug sales, burglaries, robberies and other criminal activities
- For some, their older siblings or other family members are involved with gangs

WARNING SIGNS OF GANG INVOLVEMENT

- Graffiti (drawing gang names and symbols)
- Gang names, logos and nicknames written on school books, papers, notebooks and other personal belongings
- Withdrawal from family and normal activities
- New friends that you do not approve of
- Staying out late at night
- Secretive activities
- Sudden changes in behavior and personality
- Unexplained injuries, body markings and tattoos
- Unexplained gifts of money, expensive items or jewelry
- Possession of weapons
- Use of hand signs and/or body gestures when communicating with friends

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

- Talk and listen to your children.
- Show an interest in them and know their friends and their friends' parents.
- Know their activities and whereabouts after school and in the evenings.
- Encourage your children to become involved in extracurricular activities in school and the community.
- Help plan constructive activities for your children and other children in your community.
- Learn about gangs and drugs.
- Sit down with your children and explain to them about the dangers of being involved with gangs.
- Confront your child if you suspect gang involvement and seek help. A strong parental stand against gangs will help deter children from gang activity.