

What is a gang?

A gang is an ongoing, organized association of three or more persons — some are formal and others, informal, but most have a common name or common signs, colors, or symbols. Typically, members or associates individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in criminal activity.

How did gangs begin?

Gangs started in this country about the time of the Industrial Revolution, when people left their rural homes for the city. There was inadequate housing and few jobs available, so the unemployed turned to crime to survive. After a short time, individuals found safety in larger numbers. They began to band together, thus forming gangs. Early gangs were made up of the poorest people—usually Irish, Italian, and Polish.

Gangs flourished and continued to grow well into the 1950s. Generally, gangs fought in large groups and covered large territories. They were well-disciplined. Their weapons consisted of bats, chains, and fists. Gangs diminished in size in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but reappeared in the late 1970s tougher and more violent than ever. Today, the majority of gangs are comprised of young people seeking attention and interaction not found within their immediate family.

Characteristics of gang members:

- Lack of education or educational opportunities;
- Lack of job opportunities or skills;
- Absence of sufficient, positive adult role models;
- Lack of family support;
- Low self-esteem and the absence of a feeling of empowerment;
- Drug and alcohol abuse;
- Lack of opportunities for pro-social interactions;

Why do young people join a gang?

The reasons for joining a gang may range from wanting to have a good time to pursuing entrepreneurial ventures that may require a considerable commitment to delinquent or criminal activity.

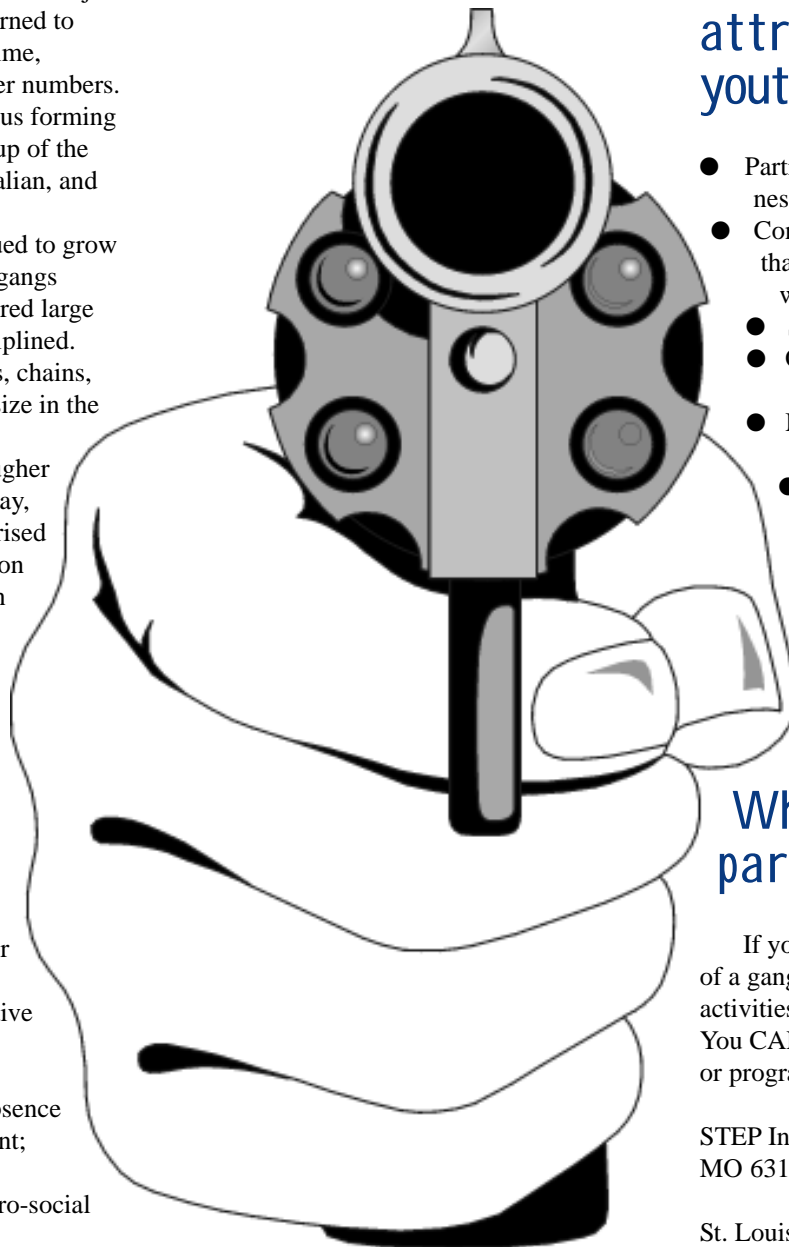
These reasons and correlates of gang participation, coupled with a society that is more violent and one that glamorizes gangs and criminals on television and in movies, make it no surprise that our youth are in gangs. Within the gang, they find identity, security, companionship, and a sense of belonging they never knew at home.

Still other youths join gangs merely for survival or protection from other gangs. The gang may also represent a way to succeed and obtain material possessions that the youth would not otherwise have.

What types of activities are gangs involved in?

Social — Some gang activity may be socially motivated or include parties, dances, and athletic events. Members share the same feelings and ideologies and are seldom delinquent.

Delinquent — These gang members engage extensively in property offenses and in serious crimes. They are sometimes termed “serious delinquents”. Drug use and sale are relatively unimportant.



Violent — Violence in gangs and in their activities is extremely common and is done for gratification or retribution.

Drug activities — The main motivator for the gang’s existence is drugs. Their greatest financial success has come from increased involvement in narcotics trafficking. When these gangs first became involved with trafficking, the predominant drugs were marijuana and PCP. This trend has progressed to include cocaine, in particular, rock or crack.

How can gang activity be curbed?

- Social Programs
- Establishing Community Centers
- Employment Assistance

- Dropout Services
- Mentor Programs
- Recreational Activities
- Family Intervention and Training
- Substance Abuse Counseling
- Group Homes
- Self-Help Programs
- Counseling Services for Gangs, Families, Communities, and Teachers
- Educational Programs
- Rehabilitation Programs

What are the various members of law enforcement doing to counteract the gang’s attractiveness to youth?

- Participating in a community awareness campaign.
- Contacting parents to alert them that their children are involved with a gang.
- Sponsoring gang hotlines.
- Organizing athletic events between police and gang members.
- Making presentations about gangs in schools.
- Suppression. This approach has worked, but the results are sometimes short lived.
- Gang task forces. These are used to identify members and their operations
- Neighborhood watch programs.
- New laws; Gang laws.

What can/should a parent do?

If you suspect your child is a member of a gang or involved in gang-related activities get informed and get involved. You CAN make a difference. For assistance or program information, contact:

STEP Inc., 7935 Page Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63133; (314) 863-0015.

St. Louis County Police Department gang hotline (for activity in that area): (314) 889-4264.

Anti-Drug and Gang Task Force Unit, St. Louis Caring Communities, Teen Drop-In Center, 5036 Thekla Avenue, St. Louis, MO, 63115. You may contact them at (314) 389-5029. (Serving Metropolitan St. Louis.)

Move Up (formerly AdHoc Group Against Crime), 3330 Troost, Kansas City, MO 64109. You may contact them at (816) 531-0000. (This group provides intervention programs in the Kansas City.)



Gang Glossary

BANGER – Gang member or a person shooting in a drive-by.

BANGING – Gang activities/fighting or violence

BG – Baby gangster

BUSTED, POPPED A CAP – Shot at someone

COLORS – Item of clothing which IDs a gang

CRUMBS – Tiny pieces of rock cocaine

DOWN FOR MINE – Ability to protect self

DOWN WITH THE SET – On the gang's own turf

DRESSED DOWN – Wearing gang-related colors

DUSTED – Under the influence of PCP/crack

EIGHT BALL – 1/8 ounce of cocaine/40 ounce bottle of Old English 800 malt liquor beer

5-0 – The police

FLYING YOUR COLORS – Representing gang colors

G – Gangster, homey

GANGBANGER – Gang Member

GANGBANGING – Gang activities

GANGSTER – Gang Member

GAT – Gun

GRAVEYARD – This is a drug house which has either sold all their drugs or has been shut down by the police.

HOME BOY – Fellow gang members

HOMES – Fellow gang members

HOMEY – Fellow gang members

HOOD – Neighborhood

HOODSTA – Gangster

ICE – Crystal

JACK – Rob

JIM JONES – Marijuana joint laced with cocaine

JUMP ON – Intimidation

KEY – Kilo of cocaine in powder form

KIBBLES AND BITS – Crumbs of cocaine

KILLA – Killer

LIQUID JUICE/SHERM/WACK – PCP

LOC's – Dark sunglasses

Ludes – Nickname for Quaaludes

MAN – The police/anyone in charge

MUSHROOM – An innocent bystander shot in drive by shooting

O/G – Original gangster/old gangster/organized gangster

187 – Penal code for murder in California

PACKING – Gang member has a gun in his possession

PIPE HEAD – Crack addict

POPPED A CAP/BUSTED – Shot at someone

PRIMO – Marijuana laced with cocaine

PUFFER – Cocaine smoker

Queen – Female member of a gang

Rig – Combination of hypodermic needle, bottle cap, and a string or nylon to tie off arm before injecting drugs

ROCK – Crystallized cocaine

ROLLIN GOOD – Selling drugs

SAGGIN – Jailhouse life/wearing pants real low/gangstering

SET – Specific gang/location of turf

SHOTCALLER – Person in charge/gang leader

SLANGIN KEYS – Selling dope

SLING OR SLANG – Deals or sells cocaine

SPACE BASE – PCP/rock cocaine

SPEED – Common name for LSD

SPEED BALL – Combination of heroin and cocaine

STRAPPED – Have a gun on you

TANGO & CASH – Fentanyl

TEENAGER – 1/16 of an ounce of cocaine

TG – Tiny gangster

TWENTY – \$20 piece of crack

20 CENTS – \$20 worth of cocaine

VAPORS – Fumes from freebased cocaine

WACK PATIENT – An individual who smokes PCP

WACKY TOBACCY – Marijuana

WAD-UP – Stoned/high on drugs or alcohol

WATER – PCP

WE'RE DOWN WITH THE SET – Mellow/fine/secure/OK

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