

# GANG AWARENESS AND PREVENTION



## Bergen County Prosecutor's Office Gurbir S. Grewal



### WHAT IS A GANG?

The New Jersey Criminal Code (N.J.S.A. 2C:44-3h) defines a Street Gang as:

Three or more persons associated by common group name or identifying sign, symbol, tattoo or other physical markings, style of dress, hand signs or other indicia and while engaged in gang related activity have committed a criminal offense.

- There are approximately 2,300 gang members under the age of 15 in the State of New Jersey. Children as young as second and third grade have known gang affiliations. In fact, 46 percent of gang-related incidents occur on school property.
- Many communities in Bergen County have a gang presence or gang activity. There are many different types of gangs. As a parent, there are things you can do to prevent your child from joining a gang.

### COMMON GANG IDENTIFIERS

Gang members use graffiti, tattoos and colors to show their membership in a gang and to communicate their gang affiliation to others. Each gang has its own unique colors, graffiti and signs.

- **COLORS:** Wearing specific colors of clothing or particular emblems or logos. Some gangs use a particular sport's team clothing to represent their gang. They do so by picking a team that uses their gang's color and wearing it in a specific manner.
- Wearing specific colored bandannas or beads
- **HAND SIGNS:** Gangs use hand signs to communicate within the gang
- **GRAFFITI:** Gang drawings or symbols on clothing, school books, backpacks, walls or tattoos

**Note:** The wearing of specific colors or sports team insignia alone should not be used as an indication of gang involvement.

### WHY DO CHILDREN JOIN GANGS?

- For security and protection
- To belong to a group, to be with friends
- Peer pressure
- To gain respect and status
- Low self esteem
- Lack of family and/or community
- Financial gain
- Excitement
- Media glorification
- To gain attention
- Other family members are gang affiliated
- Lack of knowledge or opportunity

### SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES:

Sites such as myspace.com are spots where individuals can have a personal and interactive webpage which demonstrates gang affiliation. These sites include gang symbols, drawings, weapons and drug references. Once an individual puts any information on any of these sites, even if they try to delete it, it is still always retrievable.



### WHAT ARE SIGNS OF POSSIBLE GANG INVOLVEMENT?

- Admit to having gang involvement
- Interest in specific colors of clothing or particular emblems or logos. Wearing clothing in a specific way
- Uses hand signs
- Wears excessive jewelry with distinct designs and may wear it only on the right or left side of the body
- Gang drawings or symbols on clothing, school books, backpacks, walls or tattoos
- Behavior changes such as a decline in academics, school attendance, defiant, and staying out late with no reason
- New friends or calls from unknown people, withdrawal from usual friends
- Unexplained money or goods
- Unexplained physical injuries such as being "beat in" or injuries to the hands from fighting
- Evidence of alcohol, drug use or weapons
- Possessing photographs of themselves or their friends displaying hand signs, money, drugs, weapons or gang-like clothing
- Obsessed with gangster influenced music, video, and movie
- Withdraws from family with a change in demeanor and breaks parent's rules
- An unusual secrecy or desire for privacy

**WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PREVENT YOUR CHILD FROM JOINING A GANG OR IF YOU SUSPECT YOUR CHILD IS ALREADY INVOLVED IN A GANG?**

- Have open and frequent conversation with your child. Talk about gangs and express your disapproval of them. Explain that you don't want them to get hurt, arrested or killed.
- Take the time to get to know your child's friends, interests and what they are doing. **Peer pressure to get involved in gangs usually comes from friends.** Listen to conversations your child has with their friends or new acquaintances.
- Put high values on education.
- Get your child involved and encourage them to stay involved in supervised positive activities.
- Use local police, schools, religious organizations and/or community programs for help.

**WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I KNOW SOMEONE WHO IS IN A GANG OR IF I BECOME AWARE OF GANG ACTIVITY?**

**Notify your local law enforcement agency or the Bergen County Gang Unit at 201-226-5684. Ask to have someone speak with you and/or your child about gangs. There also may be community agencies or programs that can help.**

On December 1, 2006, in response to the increase in gang activity and gang related crime in Bergen County, the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office created the Bergen County Gang Task Force. The creation of the task force was in conjunction with the Office of the Bergen County Sheriff. Each police department in Bergen County has designated a police officer(s) as a gang liaison task force member. The purpose of the County Task Force is to more effectively and jointly combat the rising increase in gang membership, gang activity and gang crime throughout Bergen County.

**SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER:**

Many young people are unaware of the dangers of gangs. Gang involvement can affect your future in a number of ways:

- **B**ad or failing grades for missing school
- **D**rug abuse
- **C**riminal record
- **I**mprisonment
- **D**eath
- **H**arm to family members

Gangs primarily victimize each other, but ANYONE can be a victim of a gang-related crime.

**HERE ARE SOME FACTS FOR YOU TO DISCUSS AND THINK ABOUT:**

- A gang will not protect you
- You are far more likely to be injured or killed if you are involved with a gang
- Joining a gang will not increase the number of friends you have. It will increase the number of enemies you have
- Your gang will not be "like a family." Real families don't force people to commit crimes to get respect and love
- You will not make a lot of money if you are in a gang. Most members make very little money
- If you are already in a gang, you can get out. It might not be easy, but there is help for you
- Gang colors are used to represent membership and identify gangs. Wearing "colors" and pretending to be affiliated can get you hurt or killed
- Don't be fooled by gang "recruitment tactics: Gang members will confront you in your neighborhood, at your school and at social gatherings to make you feel unsafe. Members will lure you into joining them by false promises of personal security, financial opportunity and "family" support, love and respect
- Gangs use extreme forms of intimidation: a member will threaten you with violence and harm to get you to join. They might threaten to harm your family and friends if you don't cooperate



**THE CHOICE IS YOURS. BE SMART AND BE SAFE. For more information: Bergen County Prosecutor's Office**  
**www.bcpo.net**  
**Bergen County Gang Task Force, 201-226-5684**