

## 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.

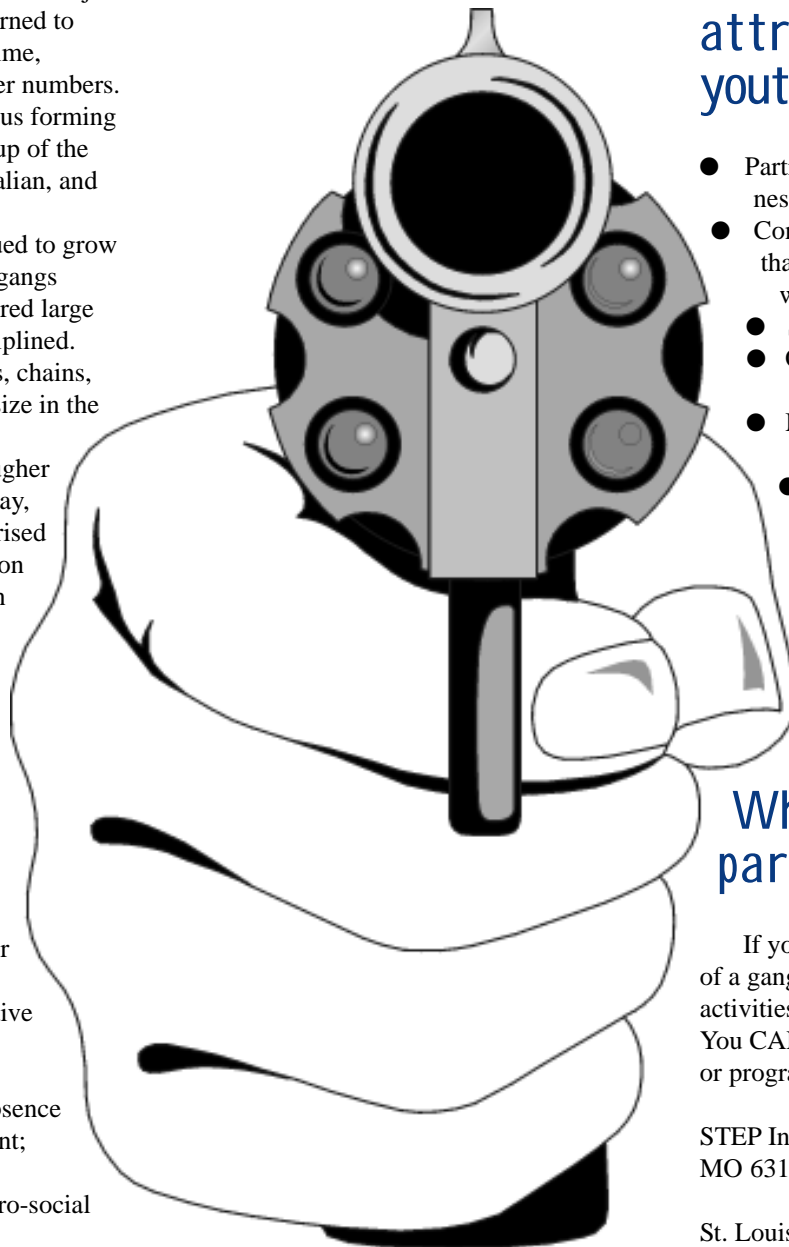
These reasons and correlates of gang participation, coupled with a society that is more violent and one that glamorizes gangs and criminals on television and in movies, make it no surprise that our youth are in gangs. Within the gang, they find identity, security, companionship, and a sense of belonging 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

Produced by:  
the Public Information Education Division  
Published by:  
Missouri State Highway Patrol  
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An Internationally Accredited Agency  
SHP-543 9/2000

Source: 1998 National Survey Streetgang Report,  
U.S. Department of Justice.

