

North Putnam Community School Corporation

October 25, 2010

Tips for Parents

Parents are the most powerful influence in preventing gang membership, drug use and other risky behaviors in their teens. By being involved in your teen's life and staying alert to signs and symptoms of risky behavior you can help your teen seek out positive relationships and stay away from gangs and drugs.

Specific ways to help are:

- **Talk to your teen about high risk behavior like involvement with gangs and drugs.**
Let your child know that you don't want to see him or her hurt or arrested. Explain to your child that he or she should NOT:
 - Use illicit drugs under any circumstances, and to do so will result in serious consequences.
 - Associate with gang members.
 - Attend parties or social events sponsored by gangs.
 - Use hand signs, symbols or language that is meaningful to gangs.
 - Intentionally wear clothing, including specific colors, which may have meaning to gangs in your area.
- **Monitor your teen.**
Know who your teen's friends are and make a point to meet their parents. Know where your teen is and what he/she is doing during unsupervised time. Set clear rules about what teens' are allowed to do, where they are allowed to go and who they are allowed to go with. If your teen has a cell phone, have him/her check in periodically with you.
- **Identify risk factors for delinquent behavior, violence and gang involvement for your teen.**
The following risk factors have been found to predict delinquent behavior like violence and gang membership. The more risk factors in a youth's background the more likely he/she is to engage in these types of behaviors. However, getting teens involved in after school activities, such as sports and volunteer opportunities, is an excellent way to reduce the likelihood of them falling into negative behaviors.
 - Individual factors: early delinquency (especially violence, very early marijuana use and other drug use), as well as early dating and sexual activity.
 - Family factors: other gang-involved family members, non-two-parent family structure and poverty.
 - School factors: low achievement, commitment and aspirations; absenteeism; negative labeling by teachers; and lack of a sense of safety in school.
 - Peer factors: associations with delinquent or aggressive peers.
 - Community factors: poverty, drug availability, lack of structured activities, gang presence, lack of a sense of safety and attachment.²
- **Recognize warning signs indicating your teen may already be involved with a gang.**
Parents should familiarize themselves with local gang symbols and look for multiple signs to indicate possible gang involvement because some of these indicators alone, such as clothes or musical preferences, are also common among youth not involved in gangs.
 - Has unexplained cash or goods, such as clothing or jewelry.
 - Carries a weapon.
 - Has been in trouble with the police.
 - Exhibits negative changes in behavior such as: withdrawing from family; declining school attendance, performance or behavior; staying out late without reason; displaying an unusual desire for secrecy;

exhibiting signs of drug use; breaking rules consistently; and speaking in gang-style slang, especially when certain letters of words are substituted (like "flue" for blue, in Blood slang).

- They "hang out" with kids who are obviously in gangs.
 - Shows an unusual interest in one or two particular colors of clothing or a particular logo.
 - Has an unusual interest in gangster-influenced music, videos, movies or Web sites.
 - Uses unusual hand signals to communicate with friends.
 - Has specific drawings or gang symbols on school books, clothes, walls or tattoos.
 - Comes home with unexplained physical injuries (fighting-related bruises, injuries to hand/knuckles).³
- **If you suspect that your teen is involved with a gang - ACT QUICKLY.**
As with drug use, parents are encouraged to seek help early. Many of the same strategies for intervening with drug use apply. For additional assistance, parents can also consider contacting school personnel, local law enforcement, faith leaders and community organizations.

1 Snyder, N. [Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report](#). Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), 2006. [E](#)→

2 Synder, H. and Sickmund, M., Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, National Center for Juvenile Justice, "[Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report](#)" March 2006. [E](#)→

3 The Department of Justice's "[A Parent's Quick Reference Card: Recognizing and Preventing Gang Involvement](#)" [E](#)→

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Keeping Our Kids Safe

Ten Tips for Parents

1. Remember that children want, need, and expect clear limits on their activities.

- Establish clear, fair, and reasonable boundaries, rules, and expectations.
- Set consequences for violations.
- Do the right thing for your child, even if it hurts you to do so.
- Do not yield to protests such as "But, Mom, everybody gets to do that!" (Answer: "Then you will be the exception.")
- Make the call; you are the parent.
- Stick to your decisions.
- Do not try to be the "nice guy"; it makes a mockery of your disciplinary efforts in your child's eyes.

2. Do not allow children to attend or host unsupervised activities, especially parties.

- Give your child a touchstone rule by which to live and judge situations when you are not present to guide him, such as:
 - Be where you are supposed to be...
 - When you are supposed to be...
 - With whom you are supposed to be...
 - Doing what you are supposed to be doing.

3. Develop open lines of communication with your child.

- Talk and listen frequently, openly, and positively.
- Use humor whenever possible.
- Spend time with your child; keep him busy and occupied.
- Assign home responsibilities.
- Involve him in after-school activities.
- Eliminate "just hanging out" time with friends.
- If your child attends an activity, know when, where, what, and with whom he will be at all times.
- Be certain that reliable adult supervision is present at activities.
- Help him find, work at, and learn from an after-school job.
- Participate in your child's education; attend his events.
- Emphasize that school and grades are important.

4. Establish a reasonable curfew for weekend and holiday evening activities, considering your child's level of maturity, responsibility, and truthfulness:

- No later than 9:00 - 10:00 p.m. for children under 16.
- No later than 10:00 - 11:00 p.m. for children under 17.
- No later than 11:00 - 12:00 p.m. for children under 18.

5. Know your child's friends.

- Meet his friends, especially if he does not want you to meet them.
- Find out what they look like, talk about, how they spend their free time.
- Try to ascertain what influence they have over him.
- Meet and interact with their parents.

6. Discourage your child from any involvement with gangs by:

- Discussing the negatives of gang affiliation.
- Stressing that gangs are dangerous.
- Convincing him that he is an important part of the family.
- Teaching him your values.

7. Ask questions about gang activity.

- Do you know what gangs are, and what they do?
- Are there any gangs at your school or in the community?
- Do you know any gang members?
- Has a gang ever approached you in any way?
- Are you in a gang?

8. Teach your child what to do if gang members approach him/her.

- Do not respond to gang contacts.
- Do not make eye contact.
- Do not be around gang members or in gang areas at any time.
- Best response is just to walk away.

9. Warn your child he must not:

- Attempt, even in jest or play, 'false flagging' (display by non-gang member of any kind of gang signing, language or symbol).
- Wear gang-related clothing.
- Draw, write, or practice gang writing, gang names, or graffiti; especially on or in:
 - Books
 - Notebooks
 - Paper
 - Clothes
 - Book bags
 - His own body
 - Other belongings
 - Rooms
 - Anywhere!

10. Watch for changes indicating gang involvement.

- Behavior
 - Diminishing grades, poor attendance, and behavior problems.
 - Drops out of family, school, sports, church, and other activities.
 - Shows interest in gangster-influenced music, behavior, writing, talking.
 - Imitates or affects gang attitude, writing, symbols, signs, behavior, clothes.

- Shows signs of use of alcohol and other drugs.
- Abrupt change in personality, behavior, and overall attitude.
- Demonstrates violent behavior or threatens violent behavior.
- Develops an interest in guns and other weapons.
- Carries a weapon, or is obsessed with weapons.
- Begins to develop streetwise vocabulary, behavior.
- Evidences hatred of other groups or persons for no apparent reason.
- Develops unusual desire for privacy and secrecy.
- Rearranges room or living quarters to create more privacy.
- Arrested, or friends or associates are arrested.
- Does everything to the left or right ('orientation').
- Says he is "hanging around," but does not explain.
- Possesses gang literature.
- Possesses photographs showing gang games, gang slogans, gang insignias, or gang activities.
- Defiant toward authority, often violent toward parents, teachers, others.
- Brags about or struts about his new gang status.
- Eager to gain reputation of being "bad"; fights willingly, unnecessarily.
- Often is not where he/she supposed to be.
- Sneaks out of house.
- Often spends evenings away from home without permission.
- **Symbols**
 - Wears personal property with gang symbols.
 - Has gang tattoos.
 - Has new haircut with stripes or patterns cut into hair.
 - Writes or draws gang graffiti on notebooks or belongings.
 - Has gang photographs, books, posters, and graffiti in bedroom, especially on bedroom walls.
- **Dress**
 - Seems obsessed with just one or two particular colors of clothing; will wear no other colors.
 - Wears gang clothing, styles, colors.
 - Wears belt buckle or other accessory with initial not his own.
 - Favors one particular professional team logo or uniform.
 - Wears sagging pants.
 - Affects gang dress.
 - Wears all clothes, jewelry, and other accessories to the left or the right.
 - Wears head covering, hood, bandana, etc., with gang colors or aligned to one side.
 - Has gang symbols inside cap or on underside of brim.
 - Wears belt buckle, sometimes military style buckle, with initials not his own.
- **Money, Jewelry**
 - Wears excessive jewelry with distinctive designs or with gang symbols.
 - Wears beads in same color as clothes.
 - Affects right or left orientation in jewelry, colors, other items. (Does everything to right or left.)
 - Suddenly possesses unexplained cash, clothing, jewelry, and other items.
 - Has newly acquired or unexplained wealth, often showered on or shared with friends or family.
 - Frequently requests to borrow money.
- **Physical Changes**
 - Unexplained physical injuries (such as being beaten), or lies about events surrounding the injuries.
 - Injuries to body, but not to face. (Injuries inflicted during gang initiations are often deliberately on the recruit's body so they will be less obvious than injuries to the face and other exposed areas.)
 - Appears proud of injuries.

- Peculiar drawings or language on personal belongings or on body.
- Tattoo or 'brand.'
- Gang signs cut into hair.
- Changes in physical appearance.
- Often drowsy, eyes red, swollen, speech blurred.
- **Family**
 - Withdraws from family.
 - Increasingly defiant.
 - Breaks family rules.
 - Refers to new friends as 'family.'
- **Friends**
 - Undesirable friends and associates replace previous desirable friends and associates.
 - New friends either do not visit or are secretive when they do.
 - Often males with unusual, unexplained first names.
 - New friends all wear same colors, sports clothing; indicate gang affiliation in other ways.
 - Attend functions sponsored or attended by known gang members.
 - Loiter, ride, meet, or hang out with gang members.
 - Undesirable influences with/from unknown sources, have negative role models.
 - Streetwise, anti-social, hostile, aggressive.
 - Lack respect for parents; break parental and school rules consistently.
 - Loose family ties, inadequate family attention and supervision.
 - Sometimes the victims of abuse or neglect.
 - Often are from economically/socially deprived backgrounds.
 - Low or diminishing grades, poor attendance, or are dropouts.

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excerpted from Dr. Russell's book

"CHILLING AND KILLING: Street Gangs in America"