

## What can a parent do?

If you believe your child is involved with gangs, contact your school and inquire about counseling or intervention programs. Some schools have gang intervention services, or may be able to help with referrals. Local police departments may also have information on intervention programs.

Talk to your children at an early age about the dangers of gang involvement, and watch for any changes in behavior which may indicate interest in gangs. You should also talk with other parents and school officials about any signs of gang activity in their neighborhood or community.

## Resources:

### The National Youth Gang Center

Phone: 850-385-0600, ext. 224

Web site: [www.iir.com/nygc](http://www.iir.com/nygc)

### Washington State School Safety Center:

Information on local gangs & gang-like groups

Web site: [www.k12.wa.us/safetycenter/gangs](http://www.k12.wa.us/safetycenter/gangs)

### For more information, contact:

Tyson Vogeler, Program Supervisor

Washington State School Safety Center

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

PO Box 47200

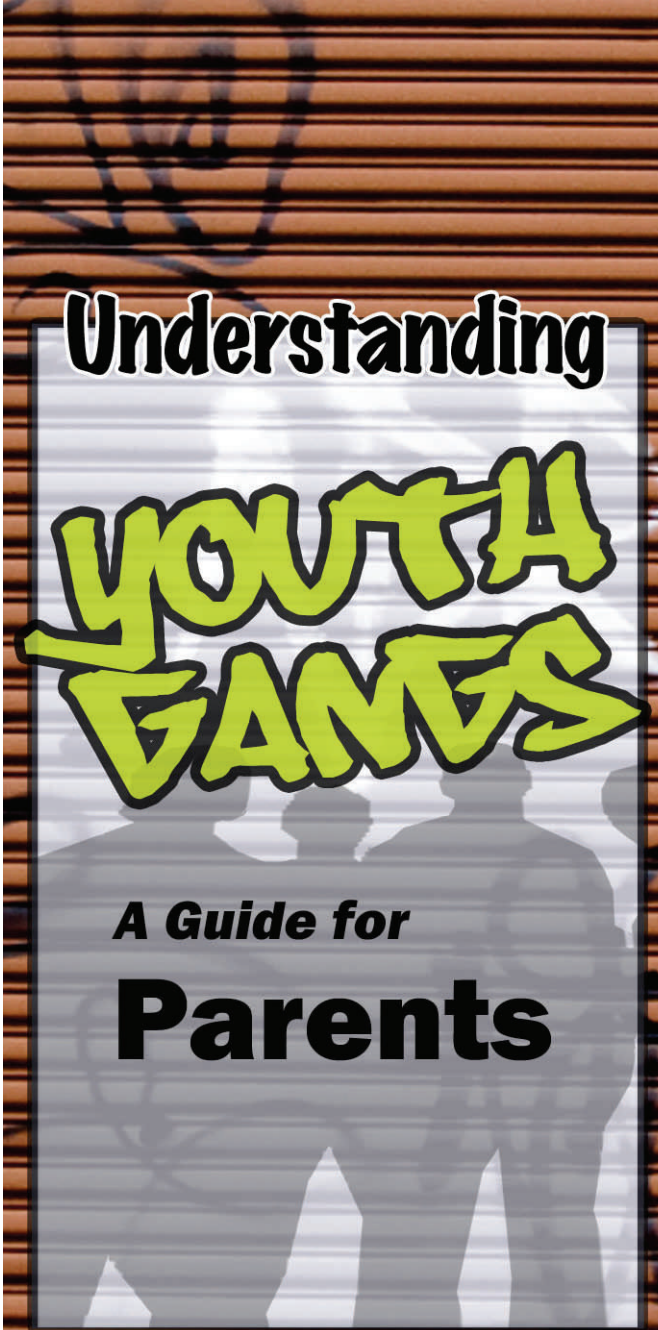
Olympia, WA 98504-7200

E-mail: [tyson.vogeler@k12.wa.us](mailto:tyson.vogeler@k12.wa.us)

Phone: 360-725-6044



Revision: April 23, 2009



Washington State School Safety Center  
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

## Is my child at risk for gang involvement?

Children in the early adolescent years (12-14 years old) are in a vulnerable period when they are more likely to join a gang, however *children as young as third grade are recruited*. There are many identified risk factors for gang involvement — including school difficulties, lack of parental supervision, alcohol/drug use, truancy, and peer influence. Experts agree that parents can play an important role in keeping children out of gangs. Positive actions to prevent gang involvement include monitoring your children's activities, using positive discipline strategies, talking with your children about the risks of gangs, and meeting your children's friends. This brochure provides information to help parents recognize gang involvement, and recommended interventions.

## Why do kids join gangs?

Adolescence is a time in life when children begin to define their own identity. Many seek out new peer groups as a means of gaining acceptance. Gangs can meet this need. Gangs can provide things children may not get at home or elsewhere — not just acceptance, but structure, money, food, activities, companionship, and even love. Kids don't run toward gangs, they are running away from something else and find gangs. You can help prevent gang involvement by ensuring all your children's needs are met in some other way.

## Behaviors Associated with Gang Involvement

Youth who are involved in gangs may exhibit changes in behavior. You should watch for these behaviors and the other indicators listed in this brochure:

### Negative behavioral changes:

- Withdrawing from family and family activities.
- Increased truancy or school discipline.
- Declining school performance.
- Staying out late without reason.
- Unusual desire for secrecy.
- Confrontational behavior including disrespect for parental and school authority.
- Sudden negative attitudes toward police.
- Changes in attitude about usual activities including school, church, or sports.

### Additional Behavioral Warning Signs:

- Unusual interest in one or two colors of clothing or a particular brand or logo.
- Interest in gang-influenced music or movies.
- Gang-type drawings or gang symbols on schoolbooks, clothing, notebooks, or walls.
- Withdrawal from longtime friends and forming of a new peer group who wear the same colors, numbers, or symbols.
- Use of unusual hand signals to communicate with friends.
- Sudden changes in the style of dress.
- Possession of firearms or other weapons.
- Unexplained injuries, such as being beaten or injuries to hands and knuckles from fighting.
- Unexplained cash or goods such as clothing.

# Recognizing Gang Symbols and Indicators

Gangs use colors, clothing, numbers, and symbols to identify members of their group and to communicate their membership to others. To a person with even a little gang knowledge, these signs are often obvious.

You should not make conclusions about gang membership based on only one sign or indicator. Gang-like clothing is a popular style that many youth wear, and can change continually. Please consult with a knowledgeable source such as the school if you are unsure about your student's gang involvement.

## Clothing Styles and Colors:

Gang members commonly use clothing and colors to show their membership. You should be aware of any changes in the way your child dresses, especially if he or she insists on only wearing certain colors, numbers, or brands. Another common sign is a student who refuses to wear a certain color.

Gangs members commonly wear clothing styles popularized by Hip Hop artists, such as oversized pants worn below the waist (known as "sagging"). Colored bandanas are used as symbols, as are colored belts and colored shoes. Teamwear and team logos are sometimes used to show membership. Teamwear in non-traditional colors can be purchased to show membership.

## Graffiti and Artwork:

Gangs use graffiti to mark their territory and to communicate with or challenge other gangs. Gang graffiti usually includes the same symbols, colors, and numbers that gang members wear. Gang members will also "tag" their notebooks and papers with gang symbols, and will often have drawings that represent

their membership. The Old English style (*Like This*) of writing is commonly used by gangs in artwork.

## Symbols and Numbers:

Gangs members will wear or use certain numbers and symbols that represent their gang, set, or clique. Symbols include stars, pitchforks, Playboy bunnies, crowns, and three dots in a triangle. Common numbers used include 5, 13, 14, and 74. Numbers may represent letters of the alphabet (b=2, c=3). Local sets may use their area code to communicate their home. Gang members will tattoo these symbols and numbers, or even the name of their gang.

## Hand Signs:

Some gangs use hand signs to show loyalty to a gang and to challenge or disrespect rival gang members. You should question any hand signs your child uses that you don't recognize.

## Music:

"Gangsta" rap is a style of music that uses lyrics to glorify gang life and violence. Rap music can glorify a specific gang, and can also be derogatory to other gangs, police, and other groups.



Gang graffiti is used to claim turf and to communicate with rival gangs. This F13 tag is in the Old English lettering style, and claims territory for the Florencia gang, and the NK is a threat to the rival Norteños. (Courtesy Northwest Gangs)

# Indicators of Some Common Washington Gangs

These gangs are some of the most common in our state. The indicators may vary somewhat in different regions, as there are local gang "sets" or groups.

## Crips:

A California-origin street gang. Rivals with Bloods.

- Blue bandanas and clothing
- Six-point star and Pitchforks pointing up
- May wear orange and blue (Hoover Criminals)
- May replace "ck" in words with "cc."
- Graffiti includes "BK" for "Blood Killer"

## Bloods:

A California-origin street gang. Rivals with Crips and Black Gangster Disciples.

- Red Bandanas and clothing
- Boston Red Sox hats (for the letter B)
- Five-point stars, pitchforks pointing down
- May cross out the letter "C" in writing
- Graffiti includes "CK" for "Crip Killer"

## Latin Kings:

A Chicago-origin street gang. Rivals with Crips.

- Yellow or black bandanas or clothing
- Five-point star & pitchforks pointing down
- Number 360, 5-pointed crowns
- Graffiti or drawings with "LK" or crowns

## Black Gangster Disciples:

A Chicago-origin street gang. Rivals with Bloods.

- Black and blue clothing, white/black bandanas
- Six-point stars and pitchforks pointing up
- Numbers 74 and 274 (GD and BGD)
- Graffiti and pictures include "GD" or "BGD"

## Vice Lords:

A Chicago-origin street gang. Rivals with Crips and Black Gangster Disciples.

- Black or red bandanas and clothing
- Number 5 and 5-point star
- Pitchforks pointed down
- Graffiti or drawings with "VL" and "VLN"

## Sureños:

A California-origin street gang associated with the Mexican Mafia prison gang. Rivals with Norteños.

- Blue bandanas and blue clothing
- Letters "S" and "M" or "eme"
- Number 13 (for "M" - may be X3 or XIII)
- May reverse the letter "N" in writing

## Norteños:

A California-origin street gang associated with the Nuestra Familia prison gang. Rivals with Sureños, 18th Street, Florencia.

- Red bandanas and red clothing
- Letters "N" or "ene" and number 14
- Huelga bird and UNLV teamwear
- May cross out the letter "S" in writing

## Florencia:

A California-origin street gang associated with the Sureños. Rivals with Norteños.

- Blue bandanas and clothing
- Number 13, and letter "F"

## 18th Street

A California-origin street gang associated with the Sureños. Rivals are Norteños & Florencia.

- Black, grey, or blue bandanas/clothing
- Number 18 (may be XVIII or X8)

## Other Gangs and Gang-Like Groups:

Some youth may join gang-like groups that differ from "traditional" street gangs. These groups usually reject the label "gang" but may engage in criminal, violent, and anti-social activity.

Examples include:

- Straight Edge
- Insane Clown Posse / Juggalos
- Skinhead and neo-Nazi groups
- Tagger crews

Information on these gang-like groups is available on the School Safety Center Web site.