

Gangs and Your Child



PARENTLINE PLUS

Free*, confidential support for parents.

- Parentline: **0808 800 2222**
- Textphone: **0800 783 6783**
- Email: **parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk**
- Website: **www.parentlineplus.org.uk**

- For professionals: **www.parentlineplusforprofessionals.org.uk**
- Be Someone to Tell: **www.besomeonetotell.org.uk**
- Got a teenager: **www.gotateenager.org.uk**

*Free from landlines and most mobile networks.



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Parentline Plus, part of the Family Lives group. FamilyLives is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales
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Parentlineplus

because instructions aren't included

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Recently your teenager avoids you, stays out late and spends time with a new group of friends you don't know.

Normal teenage behaviour? Or has your child joined a gang?

Media reports about young people joining criminal gangs make it easy to believe this is widespread, which is not true. In reality only a very small percentage of young people are involved in crime.

Gangs

Gang membership isn't illegal, but gang members are more likely to commit crimes and carry or use weapons.

It's not only boys who join gangs. Girls can be involved too and they are particularly vulnerable to becoming involved in risky sexual behaviour.

Common reasons for joining a gang are:

- Protection
- Peer pressure
- Gain status / respect
- Territory
- Excitement
- Money from crime
- Escape from neglect/abuse



A person will be identified by the police as a gang member if he/she:

- Frequents a gang's area and adopts its style of dress
- Is arrested in the company of identified gang members
- Is identified by a reliable informant as a gang member for offences which are consistent with gang activity.

What you can do

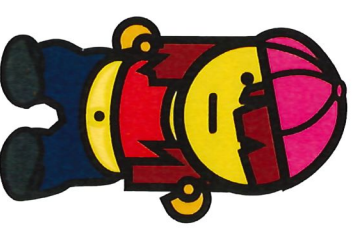
- Be a good role model. If you deal with conflict without anger or violence, it's more likely your child will too.
- Talk to your child about their hopes and worries. Praise their achievements.
- Accept they are growing up in a different time from you and face different challenges.
- Explain that if they want something they must earn it, not take it.
- Get to know their school, friends and friends' families.
- Keep discipline and boundaries consistent.
- Discover how your child uses social networking groups. Sites like Facebook are usually harmless, but gangs do communicate through them.
- Discuss gangs together, using news reports as your starting point.

Spot the signs

Suspensions that your son / daughter is involved in a criminal gang are not necessarily proof, though some indications might be:

Behaviour

- Withdrawing from the family
- Loss of interest/bad behaviour in school
- Dropping positive activities like sports
- Unexplained extra money/new possessions
- Staying out late without permission
- Increasingly secretive
- New nickname



Visual signs

- Dressing differently, perhaps in a particular style or colour
- Unexplained physical injuries
- Using tags or graffiti on books / possessions
- Using hand signals to speak with friends in 'code'

The sentence for having a knife in public without good reason is 4 years. Carrying any gun – including an imitation – in public carries a sentence of 3 years for 16 – 17 year olds and 5 years for adults. Police will search someone believed to be carrying a gun, knife or other weapon. Police and school staff can also search young people at school.

Being in a gang may lead to a longer sentence if caught with a weapon.

Useful contacts

- Parentline 0808 800 2222 / www.parentlineplus.org.uk
- Crimestoppers 0800 555 111 www.crimestoppers-uk.org
- www.neighbourhoodpolicing.co.uk
- Victim Support 0845 30 30 900 or www.victimsupport.org
- Childline 0800 1111 www.childline.org.uk
- Anti Bullying Alliance www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

Parentline Plus works with parents to help them understand gang issues and to improve the parenting skills and confidence they need to prevent young people getting involved with gangs, bullying and aggressive behaviour.

Parentline Plus websites www.gotateenager.org.uk and www.besomeonetotell.co.uk have information both on gangs specifically and bullying behaviour in general. You can also share your concerns about your child and gangs with other parents at www.parentlineplus.org.uk/community



Gang identity

Your child's group may be a gang if it has these characteristics:

- A name
- A defined territory
- A specific colour, particularly in clothing
- Specific hand gestures or signs
- Uses symbols shown in tattoos or graffiti

My child's in a gang – what now?

Your child may be scared to discuss it. Let them know you will listen and offer support. Be clear that they have a choice even when they may think they don't.

- Stay calm, however upset you are
- Ask questions. Try not to accuse, threaten or intimidate
- Listen to their point of view
- Ask what you can do to help
- Try to agree together what to do next
- Involve other members of the family (if appropriate)
- Talk to their friends' parents – they may share concerns
- Seek advice and further support – (see useful contacts section)

Weapons

If you suspect your child may have hidden a weapon at home it's vital to check. A knife or gun in the house puts the whole family in danger. If you find a weapon you must call the police, who will remove it safely. The safety of your family and those around you is vital.

The Law

Carrying a gun or knife puts your child at risk of arrest. This could lead to court, a prison sentence and a criminal record which may prevent them from getting a job, going to university or college or travelling abroad. It's illegal to buy a knife under 18, and to carry one to use as a weapon, even if it belongs to someone else.

