



What is a gang?

A gang is a group of people who claim some territory known as “turf” and use it to make money. Gangs make money through illegal activities such as drug trafficking and extortion.

Gangs are violent and dangerous. Although gangs seem more popular in urban neighborhoods, they are actually present everywhere. Do you know any kids in your neighborhood who belong to a gang? Don’t let them talk you into thinking joining is a good idea. It could cost you your life.

Quick facts about gangs

- Gangs can be organized around race or ethnic groups, money-making activities, or territory.
- Gangs are normally made up of members eight to 22 years old.
- Gangs usually claim a territory within a community known as their “turf.” Much of their time is spent fighting rival gangs to keep them out of this territory.
- Gang members wear particular items of clothing, such as bandanas or baseball caps of a specific color, or display gang-related tattoos or symbols.
- Gangs often use special hand signs or handshakes to tell others which gang they belong to.

Why do young people join gangs?

- To belong to a group
- To get protection
- To earn money
- To seek excitement

So what can I do if I don’t join a gang?

- Join a sports team.
- Join an afterschool club.
- Hang out at your local community center.
- Get a part-time job.

Why should I avoid gangs?

- Joining a gang will not give you more protection; it could enhance your chance of being targeted as a victim.
- Gang members make far less money than those who do not join gangs.
- Gang members usually don’t get a good education, making it hard to find a good job.
- Gangs are violent and dangerous, and members are also at a higher risk for getting arrested.

Take Action!

If gang members threaten you, don’t overreact, stay cool, and tell a trusted adult.
If gang threats continue, tell your parents, law enforcement, or school officials.
Hang out with kids who are not involved and don’t want to be involved in a gang.
Start a youth group to help clean graffiti or improve the neighborhood.

If you or someone you know is involved in a gang, talk to a trusted adult or call your local teen crisis hotline for help on getting out.

The National Center for Victims of Crime Helpline: 800-FYI-CALL

