

## What can you do?



### Talking and listening:

The most important thing is to encourage your child to talk to you and for you both to listen to each other.

Share with them your concerns and highlight the risks of being involved in a gang so that they can understand. Encourage them not to associate with gang members.

### Get to know your child's friends:

Be aware of their attitudes towards drugs, alcohol, gangs. When children start to feel pressure to use drugs or join gangs, it usually comes from their friends.

### Familiarise yourself with your child's online activity:

Communicate with your child about the potential negative consequences of online activity, including what he or she may post online. Spend time online with your child. Ask your child to show you his or her favourite online activities, sites and online contacts. Keep their computer in a common area and use the computer and web site parental controls.

### Peer pressure:

Help your child practice simple ways to respond to peer pressure. For example, if your child was challenged by a peer who says, 'if you were my friend you would,' your child can respond, 'if you were my friend, you wouldn't ask.' Then he or she can walk away.

### Talk about what is happening and what your child knows:

Find a way to talk about gangs directly. If it helps, use reports in the news, or storylines on television programmes as a starting point. Your son or daughter may know more than you think and will have opinions.

### Always offer encouragement:

Talk to your child without judgement. Remember that they are growing up in a different time from you, facing unique challenges. Discuss their hopes and aspirations as well as their fears and worries. Praise them for their achievements and make sure they know you are always there for them.

### Plan family time:

Make time for your family to play, eat meals together and take trips.

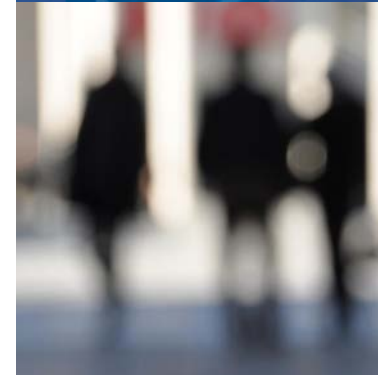


## For more information

For more information regarding gangs, please visit the suggested organisations below:

- Crimestoppers, [www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org) – free, confidential service where you can give information about crime anonymously. Call 0800 555 111
- NSPCC, [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk) – information and advice to people involved in gangs as well as families and friends who are concerned. Freephone: 0808 800 5000
- Family Lives, [www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk) – free advice on all aspects of parenting.
- Anti-Bullying Alliance, [www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk) – advice on bullying.
- Victim Support, [www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)
- ChildLine, [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk) – a free, confidential helpline dedicated to children and young people. Call 0800 1111.
- Kent Police, [www.kent.police.uk/advice/gangs](http://www.kent.police.uk/advice/gangs)

# A parents' guide to gangs



A guide providing answers to questions about gangs, helping to recognise and prevent gang involvement to keep their child safe.



## Kent Police

## How can you help keep your child safe?

As parents we play an important role keeping young people out of gangs. But it can be difficult to know what to do to help protect them.

There are many things you can do to help prevent your child getting involved with a gang. The most important being to maintain a close relationship with your child and keep talking, having a close relationship will help you recognise any changes in their behaviour and their activities.

## What is a gang?

A gang is usually considered to be a street based group of young people (members) that share an identity and are typically linked to a name. Members view themselves as a gang and are recognised by others as a gang. They may engage in a range of criminal activity, violence and lay claim over territory.

## Why do young people join gangs?

There are many reasons why young people feel the pressure to join a gang. It could be they are bored and looking for excitement or are attracted to the status and power it can give them. They may also think, even believe they can earn a lot of money. It could be a result of peer pressure or family problems. Gang membership can make a child feel protected and that they belong.



## Consequences of gang membership?

There are many consequences stemming from gang involvement, all have varying degrees of short and long term negative outcomes.

Young people who become involved in gangs face the increased risk of:

- dropping out of education
- teenage parenthood
- unemployment
- victimisation
- drug and alcohol abuse
- committing petty and violent crimes
- juvenile conviction and imprisonment

## How do I know?

The most common age that young people join a gang is around 15, but the early adolescent years (12-14) are a crucial time when young people are more likely to be exposed to gangs and may consider joining a gang. Whilst some may believe it is more common for boys to be involved in a gang, today both boys and girls are equally as likely to join a gang and for the same reasons. For parents, it can be harder to spot a daughter's gang involvement.

As parents we need to look for the warning signs and sudden changes in our child's lifestyle and behaviour.

## Warning signs

### At home:

- rebelling
- withdrawing from family activities, avoiding regular meals
- increased angry out bursts, excessive aggression or increased level of defiance
- In possession/access to large sums of money
- possession of new expensive items
- friends no longer visit the family home
- develops an unusual desire for privacy
- refuses to tell you where they are going and who with
- if you hear your child talking and you hear a word you don't understand, take note of it and look it up online. It's important you understand what they are saying.
- social media, do you know their social media names?
- can you follow them on social media?
- has their mobile phone usage changed?
- do they suddenly have more than one phone?
- have you spotted things missing from the family home? Do you know what is in their room?
- concealing items such as weapons/knives in bedroom
- displaying symptoms of trauma – every child will at some point become angry, but any excessive behaviour that impacts on the child and their family could indicate trauma, some symptoms could include; overly controlling behaviour, difficulty concentrating, risky behaviour, unhealthy relationships, running away, unable to see a positive future or sleeplessness

### Away from home:

- sudden drop in school grades – or falling grades
- declining school attendance
- missing from home or travelling outside of normal area?
- experimenting with drugs and alcohol
- suspected to be street living or staying with adults?
- change in friends
- acquires a new nickname/street name
- a sudden drastic change in their appearance
- non-accidental injuries, such as injuries to their hands and knuckles
- is your child avoiding going into certain areas
- tagging/graffiti – are they tagging school books, school bags or their belongings with symbols, letters, postcodes, street names or nicknames?

