

# ❖ SDFS NOTES ❖

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## Gangs

*“A street gang is a group of children, adolescents, and adults ranging in ages from 8-80. They have members, which range from marginal to hard-core or leaders. They meet often, and a primary function is to engage in criminal behavior with group participation or group backing. They often satisfy the need to belong by having a gang name, slogan, territory, logo, handshake, or other gestures.”*

*- Johnson Institute*

### *Gang Trends*

**T**he profile of a modern day gang is markedly different than our *West Side Story* image of gangs in the past. Gang activity, membership, and paraphernalia has changed considerably.

- Today's gang members are more mobile than ever before. They may travel across the country to commit a crime.
- They have access to more and deadlier weapons and are more involved in criminal activity.
- Gangs are more involved in drug trafficking today than in the past.
- Fists, chains, knives, and small handguns have been replaced by shotguns, automatic weapons and explosives.
- On-foot hit and run attacks have become drive-by shootings.
- Gangs today are less concerned about protecting what they consider their turf, than in the past.
- Gang members today are much younger than in years past. A youth gang individual is defined as someone under 18 years of age. Youth are used as weapons carriers and errand boys since mem-



- bers know the courts will be more lenient on them.
- Youth gangs are in all 50 states.
- Gangs are no longer confined to inner cities but have spread to rural and suburban areas as well.
- Only a few large cities are gang-free and half of cities and towns under 25,000 have gang problems.
- Students who are gang members often use school as a site for drug distribution.
- Females are joining gangs in record numbers. They are no longer just appendages to male-dominated gangs or transporters of drugs and weapons. “Female only” gangs are on the rise.

*(National School Safety Center)*

## Why Youth Join Gangs

Youth may join gangs in hopes of finding:

- Prestige and recognition
- A sense of belonging
- Protection - to decrease fear of potential victimization
- Financial gain – perceived to be inaccessible through legal means. Drug dealing is of special concern and is becoming a primary gang activity. Kids who were raised in poverty are lured into dealing drugs by the promise of quick and lucrative income.
- A sense of purpose and meaningful participation
- Stability - gang affiliation may guarantee food and shelter
- Friendships

Other reasons youth join gangs include:

- Tradition - an individual is born into gang family
- Fear - existing gangs may pressure potential members. Targeted individuals may feel they have no choice.
- The individual lives among neighborhood gangs
- Reaction to middle-class life
- Boredom and alienation (some gang members are from affluent homes.)

Contrary to popular media depictions, gang members can come from all walks of life. Some research indicates that gang members participate in both mainstream and deviant activities. They may be involved in families, schools, the community, and also with gangs activities.

## History

Gangs have been in existence for centuries. In the United States, historians trace gang activity to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when Mexican migrants found themselves marginalized and impoverished. Gangs burgeoned during the industrial revolution when immigration and populations levels in big cities sky rocketed. However, gang formation ebbs and flows during any given time in history.

Most historians claim that gangs develop as a result of racial and ethnic discrimination, factors that have historically kept individuals in low socioeconomic positions. Lack of jobs, education, and opportunities to participate in mainstream society have historically contributed to gang formation. Gang membership is perceived as offering individuals a sense of self-worth, higher status, acceptance, and perhaps most important, personal protection.



## Types of Gangs

**A**frican-American, Hispanic, and Asian gangs, including Chinese, Samoan, and Vietnamese are the predominant ethnic- and race-based gangs in the United States due to historical racial and ethnic discrimination toward these groups. However other gangs are increasing in numbers, including white supremacist/skin head gangs, outlaw motorcycle gangs, prison gangs and white satanic and stoner gangs (usually heavy metal fans who sometime become involved in satanic activities and are becoming increasingly problematic). Some gangs organize around a specialty crime. Each group has a separate history and separate identifiers.

## Gang Organization

**G**angs operate as an organization, with leadership, core members, peripheral members, and wanna-bes. The organization can be tightly organized with distinct leadership, activities, and membership, or it can be loosely organized and in a constant state of change. Gang size varies though many researchers agree that there can be up to 100 members in any one gang. Some research indicates that the size of a gang may increase when a crisis occurs or during the autumn, when gang members identify new recruits in school.

Wanna-bes or recruits tend to be younger than gang members and strive to belong. They are the most vulnerable. Palm Beach law enforcement officials believe wanna-bes can be even more dangerous than active gang member because of the risks they are willing to take for notoriety. If schools can decipher between core members and wanna-bes, efforts can be more appropriately focused.

## Characteristics Of Gang

Gangs have very specific indicators. Members may wear a certain color or type of clothing, or favor the left or right side with colors, bandanas or other forms of dress. They communicate through hand signs, graffiti, tattoos, and their own unique slang language.



### Graffiti

Graffiti are drawings, symbols, or language written on school property, notebooks, desks, and public walls. Graffiti is a form inter- and intra-gang communication.

It is used for gangs to:

- Claim their turf
- Communicate threats
- Challenge rival gangs

Graffiti encourages violence. The name of an individual above a death symbol can indicate intention to kill that individual. Graffiti may claim credit for a crime. It may challenge rivals to a fight. Crossing out the graffiti of another gang, or writing upside down on top of it has incited fights and vio-

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## Gang Styles

Examples of gang style include:

- Shoe of right or left foot that has only five holes laced with the gang color displayed on the tongue (Favoring right or left is a common identifier of gang allegiance)
- Cap bills tilted to the right or the left
- Pants rolled up on one leg
- Stocking hats
- Certain brand of pants or sports jacket
- Shaved head
- Bandana of gang color poking out of right or left pocket
- Make-up on girls applied in a certain way

Gang identifiers are numerous. It is important for schools to work with resource officers, community agencies, and law enforcement to learn the identifiers of school and community gangs.

*Students involved in gangs commit more acts of violence, vandalism, extortion, and threats to both students and teachers. Detective Keith V. Peaton with the St. Petersburg Police Force, Gang Intelligence Unit, says inciting fear and intimidation in other students is routine gang activity on campus. "Gang members openly threaten people or threaten an area of a school by claiming it as their own. It may be a bathroom or a social meeting place, or any place on campus that they've claimed. Kids are then afraid to go near those places."*

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lence.

## Gang slang

Gang slang is usually a mixture of English and another language and includes buzz words.

## Hand Signals

Hands signs are using the fingers and hand to communicate. Flashing hand signals shows:

- Affiliation to a particular gang
- Challenge to rival gang
- Disrespect to a rival gang and consequent confrontation

## Tattoos

Tattoos are usually in symbols that have a particular meaning to the members of a gang.

## Clothing

Clothing and style vary from gang to gang. Wearing certain types of clothing, jewelry, hairstyles, colors, and bandanas can demonstrate allegiance to a gang.



# What Schools Can Do

## Policy

A policy statement that spells out how incidents of gang violence will be handled is critical to reducing or preventing gang activity on campus. A good policy would enable school administrators to:

- Establish school rules on gang involvement
- Write the rules down in simple language and distribute them to all students, staff, and parents
- Communicate norms of acceptable behavior through school-wide campaigns
- Enforce behavior codes firmly, fairly, quickly, and consistently

## Gang Assessment

Schools can better understand the extent and type of gang activity on campus by conducting a gang assessment. A Gang Task Force comprised of members who have experience working with gangs can conduct the assessment and make recommendations for policy.



The assessment would be a review of archival data, interviews with key informants, surveys of school personnel, and focus groups. Information should be gathered on:

- Graffiti
- Gang membership
- Expulsions related to violations of rules on gang dress and behavior
- Gang fights
- Injuries and fatalities related to gang activity
- Weapons confiscation related to gang activity
- Drug use and sale related to gang activity
- Fear and intimidation related to gang activity
- Locations, dates, and times of violent or criminal gang activity

The district's School Environmental Safety Incident Report (SESIR) contains much of this data.

The Gang Task Force will want to investigate gang presence on campus through gang indicators such as:

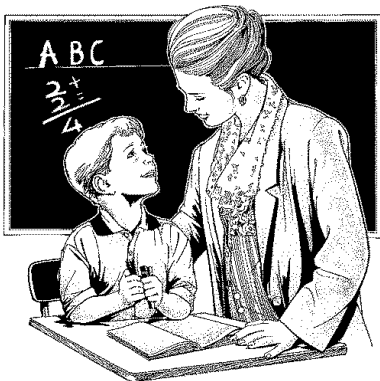
- Graffiti on or near campus or on school books and papers (Crossed out graffiti indicates at least two gangs are on campus.)
- Students wearing gang colors, jewelry, or clothing, and flashing hand

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- signals, or wearing gang logos on belts or tee shirts
- Drugs available at or near school
- Increased physical confrontations or stare downs
- Increased presence of weapons on campus
- Students using beepers, pagers, cellular phones
- Displays of weapons at or around campus
- Increased truancy rate
- Increased number of racial incidents
- Increased presence of informal social groups with unusual names like Woodland Hills Posse, or Rip-off and Rule, or Kappa Phi Nasty

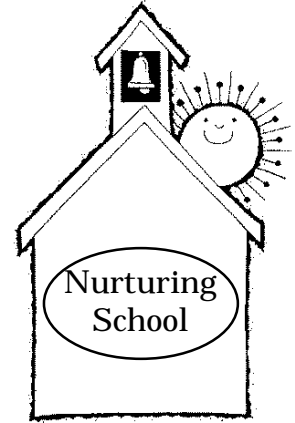
*The National School Safety Center has a gang assessment tool available for school and district use. Contact: (805) 373-9977 Website: [www.nssc1.org/index.htm](http://www.nssc1.org/index.htm)*



# What Schools Can Do

## ***School Climate***

Students need to feel welcomed and valued at school. They should be given a sense of competence, usefulness, and belonging. A cooperative learning environment offers students, including gang members, opportunities to work together toward a common goal. Teachers who hold high expectations for the success of all students are more likely to turn out successful students with a greater sense of self-worth. A nurturing school environment can go a long way toward reducing the risk of youth affiliating with gangs.



## ***Academic Success***

A fundamental prevention strategy for gang-affiliated youth is academic assistance and student success. Without emphasis on academic progress, other programs are unlikely to be maximally effective. Many at-risk youth need individualized instruction. Schools that are able to provide for differing learning styles have increased capacity to improve academic performance.

## ***Effective Programming***

Effective programming means that all four components of the U.S.D.O.E. , Principles of Effectiveness are used in program development.

- Programs are built upon needs identified through a comprehensive needs assessment.
- Realistic and measurable objectives are established.
- Research-based effective strategies or programs are implemented.
- Ongoing evaluation is undertaken to measure effort and success of program.

## ***Graffiti Removal***

Removing gang graffiti as quickly as possible deters gang activity. Quick removal invalidates the gang responsible for the graffiti and prevents cross-out graffiti from rival gangs which could lead to violence. Some schools have procedures in place to remove graffiti within one hour of spotting it. Publicly-recognized student murals are a good counter-action to campus graffiti.

## ***Social Skills Building***

Social skills instruction is research based and has been found to be effective if it is:

- Delivered and reinforced from elementary through high school and delivered in age-appropriate lessons. Single year programs are far less effective.

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# What Schools Can Do

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- Interactive instead of didactic. Students are given opportunities to rehearse skills and engage in using skills at home and in school.
- Organized so that students receive praise and feedback on skill enactment

A good social skills building program focuses on

- Self-control
- Stress-management
- Decision making
- Social problem solving
- Communication
- Gang resistance

## ***Mentoring***

Mentoring develops resiliency. Arnold Goldstein, author of Gangs in Schools says, "Good mentors are available, consistent, provide support, encouragement and connection to resources and the wisdom of experience. Primarily, however, they model."

## ***School Environment***

There are numerous methods for controlling the school environment. Some of these measures include:

- Uniforms - Uniforms will discourage the wearing of gang attire, reduce clothing theft, and may enhance students' sense of community.
- Increased security measures for students en-route to and from school and in certain locations on campus such as the school parking lot
- Restricted student movement
- Random locker searches
- Metal detectors
- Anonymous hotlines to report gang or illegal activity



*Palm Beach County School District Police Department and member of the Multi-Agency Gang Task Force, Robert E. Leh, says communication between all stakeholders is the most important tactics to use in preventing gang involvement. "Parents need to communicate with their kids. They need to be aware of who their children's friends are, who they hang out with. They need to know what their kids are drawing on their homework and if they have a computer, they need to find out what kids are logging in to."*

## ***Collaboration***

Piecemeal efforts in violence and gang resistance have been shown to be ineffective. Involve all stakeholders when developing policy and implementing programs, including:

- Parents - include parents and provide training to parents. Parent involvement is one of the most viable solutions to gang prevention. Frequently the effects of working with parents becomes most evident with younger siblings who opt not to join an older sibling's gang.

- Students - youth input allows schools to select initiatives tailored to a troubled neighborhood.
- Community leaders, activists, neighborhood leaders, and businesses. Programs that address ethnic issues may find differences of opinion as to what values are to be defined, respected, and included in program.
- Violence and gang prevention agencies.
- Community after school programs.
- Law enforcement and most importantly the school resource officers.

## ***In-service training***

In-service training to all school personnel on gangs is an important strategy. Training components may include:

- The reason students join gangs
- How to recognize if a student is involved in gang activity
- How to avoid and respond to gang violence



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