

## What Is A Gang?

The Webster's Dictionary definition of a gang is as follows: "A group of persons having informal and usually close social relations working together to unlawful or antisocial ends, *especially* a band of antisocial adolescents".

In other words, three or more people that form an allegiance for a common purpose and engage in unlawful activity is considered a gang. A "criminal street gang" means a formal or informal organization, association, or group that:

1. Has as one of its primary activities, the commission of criminal or delinquent acts.
2. Consists of three or more persons.
3. Consists of 2 or more members who, individually or collectively, engaged in a pattern of criminal street gang activity.
4. Has several things in common,
  - a) Identifying signs
  - b) The same name.
  - c) Identical colors worn.
  - d) Identical symbols drawn or displayed.

## Where Did Gangs Come From?

There are many theories as to how gangs originated and depending on who you ask, you would get a different answer every time. The origins of the "gang" mentality and activity first became known as far back as the late 1800's when pirates roamed the oceans. Though semi-organized throughout the 1800's until the mid 1900's, gangs didn't really become highly organized until the 1960's to early 1970's. A large criminal enterprise was born, drawing its power, money and reputation from drugs, intimidation, and incidents of extreme violence.

Various gangs have tried to become "legitimate clubs" over the years. Whether it's a grant given by the government to a group of young boys (which was actually the Black P-Stone Nation Gang Club) to start a youth center, or today's modern "car clubs". Organization is the key to all successful gang activity. Some of the more organized and financially successful street gangs are the Latin Kings, Gangster Disciples, Bloods and the Crips.

## Why Do Kids Get Involved In Gangs?

There are many reasons why individuals get involved with gangs. Some get involved because of the protection gangs provide, while others get involved for the respect they gain from other members within the gang. Some kids feel that they need something to belong to, something to devote their time and energy to, or crave the personal attention other gang members give them. Children seek attention and if they don't get it from their parent(s), they may be drawn to whoever provides it to them. Gangs offer the attention they crave.

Most gang members have had bad experiences with law enforcement sometime in their lives and have been in and out of jail. They become desensitized to the criminal justice system, so breaking the law and causing mayhem in the streets does not bother them and they have little or no remorse. Kids are also attracted to gangs because they see the material wealth gangsters possess and they want the same for themselves. It is sometimes hard for parents to compete with the wealth that comes from participation in criminal activity.

## Why Are Gangs So Violent?

Gangs control behavior and gain compliance through fear, intimidation and physical violence. Gangs have specific rules and regulations that must be obeyed. If a member breaks a rule, the member will suffer the consequences. It may entail being beaten by other gang members, with the severity of the beating depending upon the infraction they committed. Sometimes, if their violation is severe, the violator could be killed by the very gang members they swore allegiance to.

If rival gangs disrespect each other, the consequences could be, and often are, deadly. Gang members hold respect to a very high standard, so when a rival gang member disrespects a gang, violence is sure to erupt. A well-known form of retaliation is the "drive-by shooting". Often innocent bystanders are hurt or killed by the spray of bullets when "drive-bys" occur because of the careless disregard for others by the shooter. Not obeying turf restrictions are one way gang members disrespect each other. One member going into another's area would be considered a serious violation that results in a lot of gang fights.

## Gang Assessment Tool

Are any of the following in your community or neighborhood?

1. Graffiti (5)
2. Is the graffiti crossed out? (10)
3. Do the young people wear specific colors, jewelry, clothing, flash signs, or display other behaviors that may be gang-related? (10)
4. Are illegal street drugs readily available? (10)
5. Was there a significant increase in the number of physical confrontations between youth and citizens within the past 12 months? (5)
6. Is there an increasing presence of weapons? (5)
7. Has there been a drive-by shooting? (15)
8. Has the truancy rate and/or daytime burglaries been increasing? (5)
9. Have racial incidents increased? (5)
10. Is there a history of past gang activity? (10)
11. Is there an increasing presence of "informal social groups" or "car clubs" with unusual names that have words like: kings, disciples, queens, posse or crew within the title? (15)
12. Has there been an increased display of weapons? (10)

<b>0 - 20</b>	<b>Points</b>	<b>= No Current Problems</b>
<b>25 - 45</b>	<b>Points</b>	<b>= Emerging Problems</b>
<b>50 - 65</b>	<b>Points</b>	<b>= Problems Present</b>
<b>70+</b>	<b>Points</b>	<b>= There are Serious Problems</b>

If the total is well over 50 points, the need exists to develop a gang prevention and intervention program within your community.

For additional information on Gang Awareness Programs, contact your local law enforcement agency or the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office Gang Enforcement Section at:

**247-8710** or  
your local District:

- District 1 / North > 247-0600
- District 2 / East > 247-8555
- District 3 / West > 247-0330
- District 4 / South > 247-0455
- **EMERGENCY - 911**

Prepared and Presented by the  
Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office  
David Gee, Sheriff

6130 Rev.7/07

## Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office



## GANG AWARENESS



**1-877-GANG OUT**  
( 4 2 6 - 4 6 8 8 )

Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office  
Tampa Bay Area Gang Hotline

## How Do Gang Members Communicate?

In addition to the standard way of verbally speaking to each other and other rival gangs, gang members communicate in different ways. **These ways include:**

- Graffiti
- Hand Signs
- Tattoos
- Type and Method of Clothing Worn
- Colors or Emblems
- Body Language
- Printed Literature
- Gang Slang and Terminology

## What is Gang Graffiti?

Graffiti is many things depending upon who sees it. To most citizens, it's a nuisance. To gang members and rival gangs, it's a method of communication. To law enforcement, graffiti is a newspaper. It tells which gang left the graffiti and sometimes who specifically is the one that wrote it. It also helps tell the history of a gang when they "tag" specific areas with graffiti.

"Tagging" is a slang term for writing graffiti. Graffiti tells a story and tracks the gang's strength, member accomplishments, and gives off warnings to rival gangs that get too close to their turf.

Each gang member has his or her own "moniker". A moniker is a name or nickname given to a gang member. Normally, when the gang member tags an area with graffiti, he signs his artwork with his moniker. This could be a name that was earned by past acts (mostly prior crimes), or a name given to the member by others as a descriptor. Examples of monikers are: Sarge, Little-Bear, Shrek, Radar, Rabbit, Preacher, and many more. Tagging with a specific moniker gives the author credit for his work.

Graffiti can range from simple scrawled lettering to extremely ornate drawings using symbols, letters and numbers. Most graffiti is done with cans of spray paint in the colors red and blue. If graffiti is seen, it should be reported to a law enforcement agency because it is considered a crime of criminal mischief.

## Examples Of Symbols Used in "FOLK" Graffiti

The number "6" is used in several different symbols, such as:



Always on Six



Primary # of Folk Nation



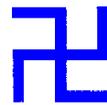
Oppression Suffered



Represents the 6 philosophies of life

The actual number "6" is used to represent life, love, loyalty, understanding, wisdom and knowledge.

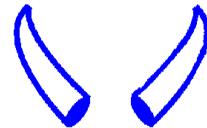
## Other Frequently Used Symbols



Superiority



Love of the Gang



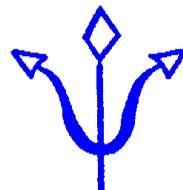
Determination to overcome obstacles



Player



Life and Death



Strength / Power

## Examples Of Symbols Used in "PEOPLE" Graffiti

The number "5" is used in several different symbols, such as:



Always on Five



Primary # of People Nation



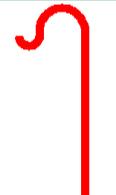
Spanish Cross



Represents the 5 philosophies of life

The actual number "5" is used to represent life, love, loyalty, wisdom and understanding.

## Other Frequently Used Symbols



Strength



Celebration



Superiority



Cholo - Shelter



Player

## Are There Female Gang Members?

Female gang membership is rising rapidly in the United States. Most females must go through the ritual of gang initiation which might consist of a beating with fists and/or clubs, an order to shoot someone, participation in an act of violence, such as assaulting or beating a rival gang member, or an innocent person.

Many females are initiated by being "sexed in." The prospective member may voluntarily agree to have sex with some or all of the male members and in some instances she may be raped.

Female gang members are often the ones in the gang who carry the weapons and drugs. Their way of thinking is that the police are reluctant to search a female, and even if they do and she goes to jail, she will be let-off easy because she is a girl. This can't be farther from the truth. Everyone in the gang is charged equally.

## What Warning Signs Should I Look For?

### A Child who...

1. Stops talking with family or seems withdrawn.
2. Exhibits changes in personality.
3. Has the unexplained and/or sudden appearance of money, jewelry, electronics, etc.
4. Has friends who are trouble-makers or appear to be poor decision-makers.
5. Wears specific colors and styles of clothing.
6. Wants to get or has secretly obtained a tattoo.
7. Has graffiti on books, clothing or in their bedroom.
8. Has anger problems and/or violent tendencies.
9. Is more loyal to their group of friends than family.

**Remember, individually these signs may not indicate gang involvement, however, several signs together might tend to show there is active gang participation by the child.**