Gang Prevention & Intervention Handbook

APPENDIX

Funded by:
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
The City of Oakland - Measure Y

Created by:
Oakland Interagency Gang Prevention Collaborative
Using this Appendix
This Appendix is to be used with the Gang Prevention and Intervention Handbook. We hope that you use the reference materials in this Appendix to support the development of a customized school wide strategy to prevent and/or address gang issues.

A. Risk Factors for Gang Membership ................................................................. 1
B. Aerial Map of Oakland and Gang Territories ............................................... 2
C. Oakland Gangs by Neighborhood ................................................................ 3
D. Signs and Symbols of Oakland-based Gangs ................................................. 4
   Traditional Gangs: Border Brothers ................................................................. 4
   Traditional Gangs: Norteños ............................................................................ 5
   Traditional Gangs: Sureños ........................................................................... 6
   Enterprise and Non-Traditional Gangs .......................................................... 7
E. OUSD Administrative Regulations-Gangs .................................................... 8
F. OUSD Board Policy-Gangs ........................................................................... 9
G. Oakland Gang Prevention and Intervention Community Resources .......... 10
H. 2009-2010 Gang Prevention and Intervention Guest Speakers.................. 12
I. Parent Guide .................................................................................................. 13
   Signs .............................................................................................................. 13
   What Can I Do? ............................................................................................. 15
J. NCCD Article. “Youth Gangs: Who is at Risk?” ............................................. 16
# A. Risk Factors for Gang Membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>Risk Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Individual   | General delinquency involvement  
|              | Antisocial/delinquent beliefs  
|              | Early onset of aggression/violence  
|              | Authority conflict  
|              | Hyperactive  
|              | Poor refusal skills  
|              | Substance use  
|              | Physical violence or aggression  
|              | Violent victimization*  
|              | Mental health problem or conduct disorder**  
|              | Illegal gun ownership/carrying  
|              | Early dating/sexual activity/fatherhood  
|              | Life stressors***  
|              | Excuses for delinquent behavior                                                                                                           |
| Family       | Broken home/changes in caregiver or parent figure  
|              | Poverty/low socioeconomic status  
|              | Family history of problem behavior/criminal involvement  
|              | Siblings who exhibit antisocial behavior/are delinquent or gang involved  
|              | Having a young mother  
|              | Low attachment to child  
|              | Poor parental supervision  
|              | Low parent education  
|              | Child maltreatment (abuse or neglect)  
|              | Parental pro-violence attitudes                                                                                                           |
| School       | Low achievement in elementary school  
|              | Frequent truancy/absences/suspensions/expulsions  
|              | Identified as learning disabled  
|              | Low school attachment or commitment  
|              | Poor school attitude or performance  
|              | Poorly functioning schools/negative labeling by teachers  
|              | Low academic aspirations  
|              | Low attachment to teachers  
|              | Low parent college expectations for child  
|              | Low math achievement test score (males)                                                                                                     |
| Peer Group   | Association with delinquent or gang-involved peers or relatives                                                                                   |
| Community    | Residence in a disadvantaged or disorganized neighborhood  
|              | Availability or perceived ready access to drugs  
|              | Feeling unsafe in neighborhood  
|              | Low neighborhood attachment  
|              | High-crime neighborhood  
|              | Availability of firearms  
|              | Neighborhood youth in trouble                                                                                                               |
B. Aerial Map of Oakland and Gang Territories

Gang Territory Map

Sites
- ▪ Border Brother Gangs
- ◆ Norteno Gangs
- ∆ Sureño Gangs
- □ Gang Turfs
- ♯ Known Gang Neighborhood

Gang Zones
- § Border Brothers
- □ Norteno
- ✠ Norteno and Border Brothers
- ® Sureño

Source: Oakland Police Department
C. Oakland Gangs by Neighborhood

The following list provides some current Oakland gangs/sets organized by neighborhoods, often claiming turf in specific geographic areas where they pursue illegal activities such as drug dealing. These turf designations may change over time and should be updated on a regular basis.

**West Oakland Turfs**
- Chestnut – 18th St / 14th St
- Ghosttown – 29th – 34th St
- Acorn Towers – 7th & Market
- Lower Bottoms – Campbell Village
- Cypress Village – behind Cole School
- Active Team – West Oakland
- P-Team – Acorn, 8th & Adeline

**North Oakland**
- North Side Oakland – North Oakland
- Bushrod – near Mosswood Park
- Norteño – Near Oakland Technical High School

**San Antonio / Fruitvale**
- Asian Crips - San Antonio Park area
- Norteños – 2nd Ave to High Street
  Common Norteño groups include:
  - East 7th
  - Quince (15th Ave)
  - 23rd Ave.
  - UNT
  - Mitchell St.
  - 38th Locos
  - 36th
  - 60’s
  - TFC - “Too Fuckin’ Crazy”

**50’s (Avenues)**
- Sureños – 53rd Ave to 58th Ave (bordered by East 10th to East 14th / International Blvd)
  Common Sureno groups include:
  - South Side Locos (SSL)
  - East Side Locos (ESL – female gang)

**East Oakland**
- Black Team – Allendale area
- Border Brothers – 70th Ave – 105th Ave
  Common Border Brothers groups include:
  - 81st Street
  - 94th Street
  - 96th Street
  - Varrios Latino Brothers (VLB)
  - Don’t Fuck with Latinos (DFL)
  - On One BB’s – reference to being “on” drugs

**No Particular Neighborhood/Turf**
- 211 MOB Squad named after Penal Code “211” for crimes such as robbery and muggings
- 2FC (“Too F*ckin Crazy”)
- Gas Team – West Oakland (and greater Oakland)
- Baby Gas Team, Lady Gas Team & OG Gas Team
- Dip Set
## D. Signs and Symbols of Oakland-based Gangs

### Traditional Gangs: Border Brothers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color: Black</th>
<th>Number: 2 or 22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Bandana" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Rosary" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gang members wear black accessories such as bandanas, rosaries, belts and backpacks. Rosaries and bandanas are often tucked away during school hours to avoid confiscation.</td>
<td>Gang members identify with the number 2 or 22 as B is the second letter of the alphabet. The B is often paired with two dots. The tag on the left was from a student backpack. The two B's with dots represent Border Brothers, the crossed out “S” is a sign of disrespect to Sureños. The tag in the middle is from the same backpack, 187 is the penal code for murder and the crossed out X4 is “14” or Norteño. The tag on the right is confiscated from a student notebook. The “ON-1” represents a faction of the Border Brothers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sports Teams: Border Brothers wear apparel from a number of sports teams whose colors and logos are similar to the gangs.</th>
<th>Hand Signs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Boston Red Sox" /></td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Oakland A's" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston Red Sox for the “B”, but only in black and white.</td>
<td>A black Oakland A’s hat indicates active membership.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Graffiti

The picture on the left and in the middle are examples of Border Brothers graffiti found in Oakland. The graphic on the right incorporates “BB”, “22”, and the Aztec sun god often depicted in gang member tattoos.
### Traditional Gangs: Norteño Gang Signs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color: Red</th>
<th>Number: XIV (14)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Red Bandana" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Number XIV" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gang members wear red accessories such as bandanas, rosaries, belts and backpacks. Rosaries and bandanas are often tucked away during school hours to avoid confiscation. Gang members identify with the number 14, as N is the fourteenth letter in the alphabet. The tag on the backpack reads OG (Original Gangster) 14.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol: Bird</th>
<th>Symbol: Nautical Star</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Bird" /></td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Nautical Star" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Bird is a recurring theme. Note the bird in the graffiti and on the t-shirt logo paired with Norte 14. It is important to recognize that the flag shown on the t-shirt is the symbol of the United Farm Workers and does not by itself imply gang status. The Nautical Star is a play on the northern star. The picture on the right is a tag on a backpack.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sports Teams: Norteños wear apparel from a number of sports teams whose colors and logos are similar to the gangs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image5" alt="St. Louis Cardinals" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

St. Louis Cardinals for the red bird. The Cincinnati Reds for the color red. The Nebraska Cornhuskers for the color red and “N”. A red Oakland A’s hat indicates active membership.

### Additional Examples

| ![Red Backpack](image9) | ![Loco/Crazy Tag](image10) | ![Norteño Graffiti](image11) |

The red backpack and nautical star indicate this youth is a member of the Norteños. The ”30” means the youth lives in the 30’s—between 30th and 39th Ave. This tag as found on a backpack is “LOC”, short for loco/crazy. The crossed out “S” is a sign of disrespect to the Suríeos. The above is an example of Norteño graffiti note the red writing and nautical starts.
Traditional Gangs: Sureño Gang Signs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color: Blue</th>
<th>Number: 13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gang members wear blue accessories such as bandanas, rosaries, belts and backpacks. Rosaries and bandanas are often tucked away during school hours to avoid confiscation.</td>
<td>Gang members identify with the number 13 as a sign of respect for the Mexican Mafia (M = 13th letter of the alphabet). Note that the 13 is often paired with three dots. The tag on the left was confiscated from a student notebook. The graffiti on the right was from a school wall.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sports Teams: Sureños wear apparel from a number of sports teams whose colors and logos are similar to the gang’s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sports Teams</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA Dodgers for the color blue and southern California connection.</td>
<td>Seattle Mariners for the color blue and “S”. The exploding star is seen as a sign of disrespect towards Norteños.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hand Signs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hand Signs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Shoes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shoes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Cortez Nikes are often worn by Sureños.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graffiti

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graffiti</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The graffiti above is from a confiscated backpack. The three dots and blue lettering indicate Sureño. 58th Ave is a reference to the gang member’s neighborhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This graffiti seen on a school bathroom door reads 187, X4, X3”. 187 is the penal code for murder, which translates into “kill Norteño, signed Sureño”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Enterprise and Non-Traditional Gangs

Unlike the traditional Latino gangs, African American and Asian or Pacific Islander gangs and crews are generally Enterprise or Non-traditional gangs. Both Enterprise and Non-traditional gangs are organized around illegal activity. Enterprise gangs are focused on money-making activities, usually drugs and prostitution. While Non-traditional gangs may be involved in drugs and gangs, their focus is the violence and shock factor of crimes. As such Enterprise and Non-traditional gangs try to fly below the radar and do not have a large visual display of signs, symbols or colors.

There are, however, a few signs and symbols that might indicate membership in an Enterprise and Non-traditional gang or crew. See the pictures below for two examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Traditional or Enterprise Gangs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="A's Baseball Cap" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="R.I.P T-shirt" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An A’s baseball cap of any color can represent active status in a gang. Some members will discreetly write or embroider the name of their crew/turf on the cap. Some gang members will wear a t-shirt or hoodie with the name of deceased gang or crew member to represent their gang or crew and to intimidate rivals.

It is more likely that staff may overhear student conversation about what neighborhood, block or turf they claim, but may not recognize graffiti or traditional gang signs. It is important to remember that there is no formula that tells someone a student is a gang member.

The signs and symbols highlighted for Traditional, Enterprise and Non-traditional gangs are just examples. Not all youth who have clothes and backpacks decorated with sport team logos, United Farm Workers flags, birds, stars, specific number or colors are affiliated with a gang or crew. Many of these items are common across youth culture in Oakland and are included in this Handbook as one of multiple indicators for gang involvement. It is especially important to note that youth often wear Rest In Peace t-shirts as a sign of respect and love for deceased friends and families.
Prevention and Intervention Measures

In order to discourage the influence of gangs, school staff shall take the following measures:

1. Any student displaying behavior, gestures, apparel or paraphernalia indicative of gang affiliation shall be referred to the principal or designee.
   a. The student’s parent/guardian shall be contacted and may be asked to meet with school staff.
   b. The student may be sent home to change clothes if necessary.
      (cf. 5132 - Dress and Grooming)

2. Staff members shall be provided with the names of known gang members.

3. Students who seek help in rejecting gang associations may be referred to community-based gang suppression and prevention organization.
   (cf. 1020 - Youth Services)

4. Any gang graffiti on school premises shall be removed, washed down or painted over as soon as discovered.
   a. Daily checks for graffiti shall be made throughout the campus.
   b. Graffiti shall be photographed before it is removed. These photographs shall be shared with local law enforcement authorities and used in future disciplinary or criminal action against the offenders.
      (cf. 3515 - Campus Security)
      (cf. 5131.5 – Vandalism, Theft and Graffiti)

5. Classroom and after-school programs at each school shall be designed to enhance individual self esteem, provide positive reinforcement for acceptable behavior, and foster interest in a variety of constructive activities. Some examples include:
   a. Explain the dangers of gang membership
   b. Provide counseling for targeted at-risk students
   c. Include lessons or role-playing workshops in gang avoidance skills and nonviolent conflict resolution, including communication skills, anger management, ethnic/cultural tolerance, and mediation skills.
   d. Assign individual gang members to cooperative learning groups in which they may work toward common goals with students who are not members of their gang
   e. Provide school-to-career instruction
      (cf. 6030 - Integrated Academic and Vocational Instruction)
   f. Provide positive interaction with local law enforcement staff
      (cf. 5137 - Positive School Climate)

6. Gang prevention lessons may be taught jointly by teachers and law enforcement staff.
7. Staff shall actively promote membership in authorized student organizations which can provide students companionship, safety, and a sense of purpose and belonging, including:
   a. Positive sports and cultural activities and affiliations with the local community (cf. 6145- Extracurricular and Co-curricular Activities)
      (cf. 6145.2- Athletic Competition)
   b. Structured, goal-oriented community service projects (cf. 6142.4- Learning through Community Service)

Community Outreach
Gang prevention classes or counseling offered for parent/guardians should address the following topics:

1. The dangers of gang membership
2. Warning signs which may indicate that children are at risk of becoming involved with gangs
3. The nature of local gang apparel and graffiti
4. Effective parenting techniques
5. Conflict resolution techniques

Community programs should address:

1. The scope and nature of local gang problems
2. Strategies by which each segment of the community may alleviate gang problems.

F. Oakland Unified School District Board Policy—Gangs

BP 5136: Students: Gangs (8/25/04)

The Governing Board desires to keep district schools free from the threats or harmful influence of any groups or gangs which exhibit drug use, violence or disruptive behavior. The Superintendent or designee shall take steps to deter gang intimidation of students and staff and confrontations between members of different gangs. He/she shall exchange information and establish mutually supportive efforts with local law enforcement authorities.
   (cf. 3515.1- Crime Data Reporting)
   (cf. 5131.4- Campus Disturbances)
   (cf. 5131.7- Weapons and Dangerous Instruments)

The Superintendent or designee shall provide in-service training which helps staff to identify gangs and gang symbols, recognize early manifestations or disruptive activities, and respond appropriately to gang behavior. Staff shall be informed about conflict management techniques and alerted to intervention measures and community resources.

The Board realizes that students become involved in gangs for many reasons, such as peer pressure, the need for a sense of belonging, and lack of refusal skills. Age-appropriate gang violence prevention education shall start with students in the early elementary grades, K-5.
To further discourage the influence of gangs, the Superintendent or designee shall ensure that school rules of conduct and any school dress code prohibiting gang-related apparel are enforced consistently. If a student exhibits signs of gang affiliations, staff shall so inform the parent/guardian.

(cf. 0450- Comprehensive Safety Plan)
(cf. 5132- Dress and Grooming)
(cf. 6164.2- Guidance/Counseling Services)

G. Gang Prevention & Intervention Community Resources

Below is the Gang Prevention and Intervention section of the Oakland Community Resources Directory. The full directory is available online at: [www.ousd.k12.ca.us/communityresourcedirectory](http://www.ousd.k12.ca.us/communityresourcedirectory).

Project New Start

Service- Tattoo removal (ages 13-25)
Alameda County Public Health Department, 1000 Broadway, 5th Floor, Oakland, CA 94607
[www.acphd.org/user/services/AtoZ_PrgDtls.asp?PrgId=53](http://www.acphd.org/user/services/AtoZ_PrgDtls.asp?PrgId=53) ♦ 510-208-5926
Mon-Fri 9am-5pm ♦ English and Spanish ♦ Bus:14

Youth ALIVE! (Teens on Target and Caught in the Crossfire Programs)

Service- Case management for Highland Hospital gun shot or physical assault victims and peer-to-peer violence prevention workshops to middle and high school students (ages 14-20)
3300 Elm Street, Oakland, CA 94609
[youthalive.org/caught.html](http://youthalive.org/caught.html) ♦ (510) 594-2588 ♦ Bus:1

Crisis Response and Support Network

Services- Support groups for people affected by homicide, critical family needs and emergency housing assistance, emancipated foster youth program, refugee services
433 Jefferson Street, Oakland, CA 94607
[www.cceb.org](http://www.cceb.org) ♦ (510)-768-3100

LIBRE – Spanish Speaking Citizen’s Foundation

Services – L.I.B.R.E. Leading the Impedence of our Barrios for Raza Empowerment is for youth who have demonstrated “at-risk” behaviors such as gang affiliation, truancy, suspension and/or expulsion for violence, or on probation. The program involves culturally-specific and gender-specific cohorts of Latino young men and women.
Office Address: 1470 Fruitvale Avenue, Oakland, CA 94601-2324
[www.sscf.org](http://www.sscf.org) ♦ (510) 434-1808

California Youth Outreach

Services- Street outreach in Central and East Oakland to reduce street violence. CYO also provides school based services with a Youth Intervention Specialist providing case management
Office Address: 4173 MacArthur Blvd #4, Oakland, CA 94619
[www.cyoutreach.org](http://www.cyoutreach.org) ♦ (510) 434-1949
Healthy Oakland

Services - Street outreach in West Oakland to reduce street violence
Mailing Address: 2580 San Pablo Avenue, Oakland, CA 94612
www.healthycommunities.us ♦ (510) 444-9655 ♦ (510) 653-1599

Project ReConnect – Parenting Groups on Gang Awareness / Prevention

Services - Parent workshops (targeting parents of youth ages 12-16 years old)
6939 MacArthur Blvd, Oakland, CA 94605 ♦ projectreconnect@sbcglobal.net
http://www.projectreconnect.net/ (510) 482-1738 ♦ (510) 482-1253 Fax

The Mentoring Center

Services - Serves adjudicated and incarcerated youth - Young Men’s Groups, Young Women’s Groups, Mentoring, Parenting and Re-entry programs
1221 Preservation Parkway, Suite 200, Oakland, CA 94612
www.mentor.org ♦ (510) 891-0427 ♦ (510) 891-0492 Fax
M, Th, F 9am-5pm and T, W 9am-7:30pm ♦ Bus:1

M.I.S.S.S.E.Y., Inc:

Services - Treatment and recovery for sexually exploited children (involved in “child or teen prostitution”)
470 27th street Oakland Ca 94612
www.misssey.org ♦ On-Call Number: (510) 290.6450 ♦ Office 267-8840
Case workers: M, F- 9am-6pm and M, W, F - 2pm-6pm ♦ Bus:51

California Cities Gang Prevention Network

Services - California Cities Gang Prevention Network led by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) and the National League of Cities. This network brings together leaders from Oakland (including the Mayor and law enforcement officials) with leaders from twelve other California Cities to share best practices related to gang violence.
Page Tomblin: (510) 238-2350
**H. 2009 – 2010 Guest Speakers on Gang Awareness**

**Oakland gang awareness speakers. This is by no means an exhaustive list.**

**California Youth Outreach**
Oakland based gang prevention and intervention agency providing both street outreach and school based services.

- **Henry Woods** – (510) 434-1949 ♦ [hwoods@cyoutreach.org](mailto:hwoods@cyoutreach.org)

**Jermaine Ashley – Turf Ministries**
Mr. Ashley is currently starting up a non-profit called Turf Ministries.

- **(510) 508-7935** ♦ [jermaineashley@gmail.com](mailto:jermaineashley@gmail.com)

**Juan Carlos Carmona – PRIDE / HTA Consulting**
Statewide consultant and gang expert, Mr. Carmona provides technical assistance on gang issues.

- **(510) 695-0509** ♦ [mrcarmona@hotmail.com](mailto:mrcarmona@hotmail.com)

**Karina Najera – LIBRE Program with Spanish Speaking Citizen’s Foundation**
Raised in Oakland, Ms. Najera runs LIBRE, a program serving youth who are gang-affiliated.

- **(510) 261-7839 x 16** ♦ [knajera@sscf.org](mailto:knajera@sscf.org)

**Lt. Steven Fajardo - GREAT Curriculum**
Long term OUSD employee, Lt. Fajardo has worked with gangs in all facets including prevention, intervention and suppression.

- **(510) 879-3670** ♦ [Steven.fajardo@ousd.k12.ca.us](mailto:Steven.fajardo@ousd.k12.ca.us)

**Systemic Solutions Group**
Provides assessments, lectures and trainings on the subjects of education equity, poverty consciousness and gang prevention.

- **(415) 202-3069**

**Victor Rios - Homeboy Goes to Harvard**

[www.homeboygoestoharvard.com](http://www.homeboygoestoharvard.com)
I. Parent Guide

Schools occasionally have incidents that involve youth, either specific students, groups of students or youth from the community and want to provide parents with information, either school-wide or on an individual basis. Please adapt this section as necessary for your school.

The Oakland Unified School District is committed to keeping all of our students safe at school and, as much as possible, to and from school. As a parent, we are sure you share our commitment to safety for your son(s) or daughter(s).

As you probably know, we have a serious gang problem in Oakland. It affects us all by making our streets into rival gang turf. If we are not careful, these problems will enter our schools and make them unsafe for students. We are doing our best to eliminate gangs from our schools, and we hope you will join us in keeping your children safe from the influence of gangs.

You might ask, “What can I do to help?” Our hope is that we can communicate with you and give you support and that you can help us as well. One important way you can help is to be very aware of the “signs” of potential gang involvement among your children and their friends.

Signs

The presence of any one of the following “signs” by itself does not necessarily mean that your child or their friends are involved in a gang. But some warning signs are a cause for more concern - such as practicing gang hand signs and graffiti. Warning signs should be considered together.

How your child is dressing. Many gangs use colored clothing, sports team logos on clothing, a certain style of clothing, or clothing accessories (hair ties, shoe laces, belts, etc.) to denote gang membership (i.e. a hat of a particular sports team). You should keep an eye out for groups of youth who are wearing the same hairstyle, nail polish, shoes/laces, belt and rosaries in the same color. These may signal membership in a particular gang. But parents should also be aware that typical student dress may include sports team jackets, white tee shirts, jeans and a hoodie, and this is not gang attire. If your son or daughter likes a certain sports team and dresses with that team’s logo, it could be normal behavior.

Tattoos. Gang members use tattoos to say which gang they claim. Elementary or middle school kids may use a pen or magic marker to draw the gang’s name or initials on their body. They may also draw their gang nickname and use other gang slogans for their tattoos. Older children/youth may carve gang-related symbols or words into their skin. Eventually this can lead to getting a permanent tattoo. A teen who proudly displays a fake or real gang tattoo is demonstrating that she or he wants to join a gang. Girls sometimes tattoo the letter abbreviation for a gang on their neck.¹

Defiant Behavior and Tough Image. Most teens are defiant sometimes. If they are involved in a gang they might be very defiant toward you as a parent and even threaten you. If your child is involved with a gang they may believe that a very tough image is important. He or she may begin to act very tough, cursing and being defiant whenever they are confronted.

¹ In between these letters, put numbers/dots/roman numerals associated with the gang.
New friends. Your teen may begin to associate with a new group of friends and no longer associate with long-time friends. If these new friends all dress in similar styles or colors, parents should discuss why he/she is associating with this new group of friends.

Starts using nickname. In the world of gangs you are nobody until you have earned a nickname. Gang members refer to each other by nickname. You should be aware if your teen is referred to by a new nickname that may be associated with gangs or violence, such as “Sniper, L’il Killa, C-Dawg, Flaco”, and so on.

Secrecy. Gang-involved teens often have gang-related paraphernalia, pictures, samples of graffiti, etc. They may hide gang paraphernalia, drugs or weapons in the house. They may not want you to see graffiti written on clothing, backpacks, furniture or the walls of their bedrooms. They may try to install a lock on the bedroom door or threaten you if you try to get into their bedroom. MySpace and Facebook and Twitter accounts may also be used for gang communications.

Money. Some teens get involved in gangs to make money illegally. Crimes may include armed robbery, selling drugs, being a lookout for drug dealers, auto theft/burglary, and so forth. You should be concerned if your teen has unexplained money or expensive items like new clothes, cell phones, video game players, computer games or jewelry that begin to appear without a reasonable explanation.

Unusual sleeping patterns. Teenagers naturally need more sleep than adults, but gang members like to hang out late at night when they conduct their illegal activities. If your teens are sleeping very late, missing school, and appear to have been under the influence of drugs or alcohol, you should be concerned – whether this is as a result of gang activity or other issues.

Cuts and bruises. Gang members tend to get into more fights than other teens. Be aware of unexplained cuts and bruises, especially on the knuckles and hands, and secrecy as to how they occurred.

Graffiti and Tagging. Graffiti can be the name of a gang, initials, numbers or symbols that are associated with the gang. Graffiti is not just written on the walls of buildings but can be found on books, notebooks, backpacks, clothing and furniture. Graffiti is used to mark gang territory or demonstrate involvement in a gang. If your teen is involved with a gang, he/she will generally have graffiti written on personal possessions. This may also include drawings and doodling of gang related themes of violence, guns, or symbols.

Practicing behaviors. Teens who are interested in a gang will practice gang-related behaviors. They will usually practice graffiti writing on paper or notebooks. You may observe your son or daughter staring into a mirror, practicing a tough and menacing stare, often referred to as “mad-dogging”. Teens just beginning gang involvement will spend hours practicing the hand signs of the gang.

Alcohol/drug abuse. Gang members often have easy access to alcohol and other drugs. Some youth get involved with gangs just to “party”. Alcohol/drug abuse can include common household
medicines like Robutussin (also known as “bo” when mixed with Sprite) or sniffing glue. Students may conceal alcohol drinks in soda containers.

**What Can I Do?**

Try to talk calmly with your child no matter how upset the possibility of gang membership makes you. Ask your child if they are in a gang, and why. Avoid being quick to judge. Recognize that gang membership is not just the child's problem, it's the family's problem as well.

- Talk to your children about gangs and ways to avoid them.
- Let them know that you disapprove of gangs and do not want to see them hurt or arrested.
- Redefine the rules your child must follow and enforce them.
- Seek outside help if your child won't talk, is difficult to communicate with, or if you suspect your child is lying.
- Supervise your child's activities, know their friends and their friend's parents. Make sure you know how your child is spending their free time.
- Get your child involved in supervised, positive group activities that interest them and help them develop a sense of belonging.
- Develop open and frequent communication with your child so that they will come to you if they have a problem. Make no topic off limits.
- Spend positive time with your child. Plan activities the whole family can enjoy, but also spend time alone with your child.
- Get involved in your child's education. Put a high value on education and help them to do their best in school. Keep close contact with your child's teachers before any problems develop.
- Do not allow your child to dress in gang-style clothing, use gang gestures or write gang names, symbols or graffiti on books, clothes, public property or on themselves.
- Establish a clear family position on drugs. Kids who know their parents disapprove of drug use are less likely to use them.
- Build your child's self-esteem. Focus on your child's good points and praise positive behavior. Help your child feel good about themselves.²

The advice above presumes that you still maintain some control over your child. If you feel, however, that you have lost any ability to control his/her behavior, it is time to look for help from one of the agencies that specializes in gang prevention and intervention. (See Gang Prevention and Intervention Resources on page 10.) Sometimes a “peer” case manager or mentor can make an effective intervention with your son/daughter because they have had personal history with gang involvement and have managed to get out of the gang lifestyle. It is very important that the case manager knows that you, as the parent(s), are backing them up at home and that you communicate with each other while still respecting the confidentiality of the relationship between the case manager and your child.