

Your Child and Gang Awareness

Sheriff Fontoura Says Gang Awareness Can Save Your Child

Gangs bring fear and violence to our neighborhoods as they traffic in drugs, destroy property and recruit new members. Gangs can be organized around race or ethnic group, money-making activities or territory.

Youngsters join gangs to belong to a group, for protection, to earn money, for excitement, and to be with friends. Gangs signal their existence and solidarity through their clothing and head coverings, a special vocabulary, tattoos, hand signs and "tagging"; their territory with graffiti.

Signs That Your Child Might Be in a Gang

These include changes in type of friends or dress habits, such as wearing the same color combination all the time, gang symbols on books or clothing, tattoos, secretiveness, extra cash from unknown sources, carrying a weapon, declining interest in school and family, and being detained by police.

Make Sure Your Child Doesn't Need a Gang

Show your child love and reassurance. Talk with and listen to your child. Supervise your children's activities. Help them become involved in wholesome activities that interest them. Know about your child's friends and their families. Put a high value on education. Do everything possible to prevent your child from dropping out of school.

What Communities Can Do to Keep Gangs Out

Develop positive after-school, weekend and summer alternatives. Provide activities where youngsters can learn, expand their world and have fun. Encourage parents to talk to one another through school forums, social events, networks, parenting classes and support groups. Cooperate with police and other law enforcement agencies. Report suspicious activity, set up a neighborhood watch or citizen patrol, volunteer to clean up graffiti. Get organized and show gangs that your neighborhood has zero tolerance for their activities.