

Why do kids join gangs? (this information was taken from the website: www.nationalgangcenter.gov – and is located in the May, 2006 United States Attorney’s Bulletin)

Kids join gangs for different reasons. If you ask former gang members, they will describe the following motivations for them when they joined a gang:

- Respect
- Excitement
- Social Opportunities
- Protection
- Money

Gang membership offers youth a shortcut to obtaining respect from their peers. It also provides them with an opportunity to be involved in risky and delinquent behavior, such as parties with alcohol/drugs and members of the opposite sex, marking graffiti on private property, etc. It gives youths the opportunity to interact with their peers and bond through the act of committing crimes. Some youths believe that joining gangs provides them protection from other youths. In reality, they are not safer because gang members are more likely to become victims of violence due to embracing a lifestyle where violence begets more violence. Lastly, although some gangs do make large amounts of money through their criminal organization, the majority are not organized enough to carry out these operations, and the majority of the money they do make stays in the hands of a few members.

What are some of the Risk Factors for youths?

Risk Factors are: factors that make it likely those youths will participate in risky behavior.

Risk factors can be cumulative, meaning that the more risk factors present, the more likely the youth will engage in risky behavior.

Risk factors include, but isn’t limited to the following:

Individual:

- Antisocial behavior/delinquent beliefs/general delinquency involvement/drug dealing
- Life stressors
- Poor refusal skills
- Mental disorder/mental health problem

Family:

Family history of problem behavior/parent criminality
Family management problems/poor parental supervision and/or monitoring
Poor family attachment/bonding
Pattern of high family conflict

School:

Low academic achievement
Suspension
Dropping out of school
Identified as learning disabled
Frequent school transitions

Peer:

Gang involvement/gang membership
Associated with delinquent/aggressive peers
Peer rejection
Availability/use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs in the neighborhood
Availability of firearms

Community:

Low community attachment
Feeling unsafe in the neighborhood

(Information was found on the website: <http://guide.helpingamericasyouth.gov/programtool-factors.cfm>)