



SAY “NO” TO GANGS

→ A GUIDE TO GANG PREVENTION FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

What are gangs?

A gang is a group of three or more people who:

- Have a common sign, symbol or name;
- Are frequently and deliberately involved in criminal activity;
- Create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation within the community.

Are gangs a real concern?

Yes, gangs are no longer a big-city or an inner-city problem. They are not a problem of a particular race or culture. Gangs cross all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and geographic boundaries.

The gangster mentality that has plagued large cities and urbanized counties across America now exists in our community. The gangs that have been identified in our area may take on names such as “Crip” or “Blood,” but they may also use street or neighborhood names. These gangs are frequently referred to as “wannabes” because they have no direct affiliation to the gangs in California, New York or Chicago. They are sometimes assumed to be of no concern or little danger to our community, but this assumption can be dangerous.

The youth who belong to these “wannabe” gangs believe they are real gang members and will strike out in violence to prove themselves. Gang members may be involved in a variety of crimes to support the gang. These crimes include graffiti, assault, robbery and homicide. The Henrico County Police Division has documented evidence of gang influence or activity in a number of schools and communities within the County.

Why do kids join gangs?

- Acceptance
- Excitement
- Peer Pressure
- Protection
- Neighborhood/Society Norm
- Earn Money
- Respect

Warning Signs

YOUR CHILD MAY BE INVOLVED WITH A GANG IF THEY:

- Admits to hanging out with kids in gangs.
- Shows an unusual interest in one or two particular colors of clothing or logos.
- Uses unusual hand signals to communicate with friends.
- Has specific drawings or gang symbols on school books, clothes, walls, computers or tattoos.
- Comes home with unexplained physical injuries (fighting-related bruises, injuries to hands/knuckles).
- Carries a weapon.
- Has been in trouble with the police.
- Develops a violent or aggressive attitude
- Interest in gang-influenced music, videos and movies.

OTHER NEGATIVE CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR MAY BE EXHIBITED, SUCH AS:

- Withdrawing from family.
- Declining school attendance and performance.
- Staying out late without reason.
- Displaying an unusual desire for secrecy.
- Breaking rules consistently.
- Speaking in gang-style slang.
- Unexplained large amounts of money or goods.
- Signs of drug/alcohol use.

What can parents/guardians do?

- Create an anti-gang self-concept.
- Establish a drug free and gang free home.
- Spend quality time with your children.
- Ensure school success.
- Be a positive role model.

- Know your child's friends and their families.
- Get involved in your community.
- Get your child involved in supervised activities.
- Talk to your children about the dangers of gang involvement.

EXPLAIN TO YOUR CHILDREN THAT THEY SHOULD NOT:

- Associate with gang members.
- Use hand signs, symbols, or emulate gang-like behavior.
- Post on social media displaying hand signs/emojis which could be interpreted as gang signs.
- Wear clothing, including specific colors, that may have meaning to gangs in your area.

Gang Laws

GANG PARTICIPATION

An active participant or member of a criminal street gang who participates in certain criminal acts will be charged with a felony. This offense is punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

GANG RECRUITMENT

Any adult who recruits a juvenile into a gang may be charged with a felony. The offense is punishable by up to 5 years in prison. A juvenile who recruits another juvenile into a gang may be charged with a misdemeanor, which is punishable by up to a year in jail.

You can help Henrico Police by becoming involved in your community and schools.

Report suspected gang activity and educate children on the harsh consequences of becoming a member of a criminal street gang.

(Information updated July 2026)