

Don't forget to talk about gangs. The best time is before there's a major problem. Tell your child that:

- ☆ You disapprove of gangs
- ☆ You don't want to see them hurt or arrested
- ☆ You see them as special, and worth protecting
- ☆ You want to help them with their problems
- ☆ Family members don't keep secrets from one another
- ☆ You and other parents are working together against gangs

Don't forget to listen to your child as well!

### **3. Help keep (or put) Gangs Out Four Things You Can Do**

Everyone (except gang members) wants a gang-free community. Parents stand to lose the most, the well being or even the life of a child, if gangs take or keep hold. But gangs are often violent and intimidating. What can you do in the face of this?

FIRST – Develop positive alternatives. Are there after school & weekend activities kids can enjoy? Can the school offer it's facilities? Can parents organize clubs or sports? Can older kids tutor or mentor younger ones? Can the kids themselves help with ideas?

SECOND – Talk with other parents. For one thing, you'll find out what other parents really said. For another, you can support one another and share knowledge that will help identify problems much sooner.

THIRD – Work with police and other agencies. Report suspicious activity; set up a Neighborhood Watch or a community patrol. Let the police know about gang graffiti. Get and share with other parents the facts on the gang problem in your community. Find out what local services, non-profit as well as government, will work with communities against gangs.

FOURTH – Get organized against the gang organization. Use your neighborhood association or a new group. Get help from a variety of sources right in your community. Try these resources in addition to the police: priest, minister, family counselor, community association, school counselor, principal, athletic coach, Boys' & Girls' Club, YMCA, Scouts, drug abuse prevention groups, youth-service agencies and community centers – just to name a few.

**The Lakeland Police Department provides free of charge Gang Education courses for parents and community groups.**

**Lakeland Police Department  
Gang Unit**

**Det. Dan Jonas 834-2512  
Gang/Drug Hotline 834-2549**

## **A Parent's Guide for Preventing Gangs**



Many communities, perhaps the one in which you live, have serious problems with gangs. There are many kinds of gangs, but whatever kind your community is dealing with, gangs spell trouble. They cause fear, destroy property, threaten or hurt peaceable residents, and drive out businesses.

Parents can do a lot to prevent gang problems or to reduce gang problems already in place. Most importantly, there's a lot that parents like you can do to keep your children from joining gangs:

- ☆ Learn about gangs and signs of gang activity
- ☆ Sharpen your skills as a parent and use them
- ☆ Join with others to make or keep your neighborhood gang free

## 1. Learn About Gangs

Young people, as young as nine or ten, join gangs for reasons that make sense to them, if not to adults. They give reasons like these:

- ☆ To belong to a group
- ☆ For excitement
- ☆ To get protection
- ☆ To earn money
- ☆ To be with friends

Gangs leave signs of their presence. Your child may adopt some of these signs, either as a gang member or an imitator:

- ☆ Specific colors or emblems
- ☆ Special hand signals
- ☆ Gang symbols on walls as graffiti or on books or clothing
- ☆ Major and negative behavior changes, such as:
  - Worsening grades
  - Staying out without good reason
  - "Hanging" with known or suspected gang members
  - Carrying weapons
- ☆ Wearing certain kinds of colors of clothing in very specific ways
- ☆ Possessing unexplained, relatively large sums of money



## 2. Sharpen Your Skills as a Parent

Many gang members have said they joined because the gang offered them support, caring, and a sense of order and purpose; all the things that most parents try to give their kids. The odds are that the better you meet these needs, the less need your children will see for gangs. Here are some parenting skills that are especially important:

- ☆ Talk with and listen to your child, spend some special time with them
- ☆ Put a high value on education and help your child to do his or her best in school. Do everything possible to prevent dropping out
- ☆ Help your kids identify positive role models and heroes – especially people right in your community
- ☆ Do everything possible to involve your children in supervised, positive group activities
- ☆ Praise them for doing well and encourage them to do their very best, utilizing their skills to the utmost
- ☆ Know what your children are doing and with whom they are spending their time with. Know about their friends and their friends' families