

**As a Citizen.** If you suspect gang activity in your area, contact law enforcement immediately. Gangs often lead to an increase in crime, and law enforcement should be made aware of any potential problem areas.

**Work with law enforcement and other agencies.** Do not be afraid to call to report suspicious activity; set up a Neighborhood Watch or a community patrol. Let law enforcement know about gang graffiti and obtain and share the facts on the gang problem in your community. Find out which local services, including non-profit and government agencies, will work with communities to help avoid gang problems.

**After Law Enforcement Contact.** Get organized against the gang organization. Use the system. Work with local authorities and city or school organizations. Use your neighborhood association or get together with others to form a new group. Get help from a variety of sources right in your community, including: law enforcement, religious leaders, family counselors, community associations, school counselors or principals, athletic coaches, Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCA/YWCA, Boy Scout groups, drug-abuse prevention groups, youth serving agencies, and community centers.

Parents can protect their children from a gang's influence. The key is prevention and detection.

If you notice these patterns, you can get help. Contact the gang crimes unit of your local law enforcement agency. The unit may be able to help you find counseling and inform you on how to help your child.



BILL BROWN  
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Information Web Site  
National PTA  
[WWW.PTA.ORG](http://WWW.PTA.ORG)

## SANTA BARBARA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE HEADQUARTERS

P.O. Box 6427  
4434 Calle Real  
Santa Barbara, CA 93160-6427  
(805) 681-4100

### SBSO STATIONS

Buellton (805) 686-8150  
Carpinteria (805) 568-3399  
Isla Vista (805) 681-4148  
Lompoc (805) 737-7737  
New Cuyama (661) 766-2310  
Santa Maria (805) 934-6150  
Solvang/Santa Ynez (805) 686-5000  
Marketplace-Goleta (805) 571-1540

WEB-SITE: [www.sbsheriff.org](http://www.sbsheriff.org)

## SANTA BARBARA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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## KIDS AND GANGS



What can parents do to prevent their children  
from joining a gang?

This brochure is full of tips that can help you as a  
parent or as a citizen to learn about gangs and why  
some kids are drawn to them.

# KIDS AND GANGS

**Today many communities, maybe even yours are facing serious problems with gangs.** As a member of the community, you may feel helpless against gangs, but there are things that you can do, in conjunction with the authorities, to prevent or reduce gang problems. Also, as a parent, there is much that you can do to keep your own children from joining gangs.

## GANG EDUCATION

**Learn about gangs:** Learn about gangs and signs of gang activity. Join with others to make or keep your neighborhood gang-free. Sharpen your skills as a parent and use them. Young people (as young as 9 or 10) are joining gangs in ever-growing numbers in all parts of the country. The reasons they give for joining are remarkably similar:

- To belong
- To get protection
- To earn money
- To be with friends
- To be noticed

**Warning signs of gang affiliation.** As gang members, young people may adopt specific behavior, such as:

- Wearing specific colors or emblems.
- Using special hand signals.
- Wearing or drawing gang symbols on walls, as graffiti, or on books, paper, or clothing.
- Carrying weapons.
- Wearing certain kinds and colors of clothing in very specific ways.

- Possessing unexplained, relatively large sums of money.
- School grades dropping and interest in school declining.
- Staying out late without good reason.
- “Hanging” with known or suspected gang members.

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

- Talk with and listen to your child. Spend some special time with each child.
- Put a high value on education, and help your child 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 in your community.
- Do everything possible to involve your children in supervised, positive group activities, such as sports, clubs, or church.
- Praise them for doing well, and encourage them to do their very best to challenge and attain their goals.
- Know what your children are doing and with whom.
- Know about their friends and their friends’ families.

**Address the issue.** It is important to discuss gangs and the problems they can create with your child. The best time to talk about gangs is before there is a major problem. Tell your child that:

- You disapprove of gangs.
- You do not want to see him/her hurt or arrested.
- You want to help him/her with any problems he/she might face.
- Family members do not keep secrets from each other.
- You and other parents are working together against gangs.

It is important that you really listen to what your child has to say.

**Talk with other parents.** You can support each other and share knowledge that will help identify problems sooner rather than later.

**Develop positive alternatives.** Are there after-school and weekend activities kids can enjoy? Does the school offer its facilities for positive outlets? Can parents organize clubs or sports? Can older children tutor or mentor younger ones? Can the children be involved with giving helpful ideas?

