

Gangs, teenagers and your family

Support for you and your family



Gangs and your teenager

Recently your teenager has been avoiding you, stays out late and spends time with a new group of friends you don't know.

Normal teenage behaviour? Or has your child joined a gang?

Media reports about young people joining criminal gangs make it easy to believe this is widespread, which is not the reality according to the statistics of the number of young people actually caught up in gang membership.

Gangs

Gang membership isn't illegal, but gang members are more likely to commit crimes and carry or use weapons.

It's not only boys who join gangs. Girls can be involved too and they are particularly vulnerable to becoming involved in risky sexual behaviour.

Common reasons for joining a gang are:

- protection
- peer pressure
- gain status/respect
- territory
- excitement
- money from crime
- escape from neglect/abuse.

A person will be identified by the police as a gang member if he/she:

- frequents a gang's area and adopts its style of dress
- is arrested in the company of identified gang members
- is identified by a reliable informant as a gang member for offences which are all behaviours consistent with gang activity.

What you can do

- Be a good role model. If you deal with conflict without anger or violence, it's more likely your child will too
- Talk to your child about their hopes and worries. Praise their achievements
- Accept they are growing up in a different time from you and face different challenges
- Explain that if they want something they must earn it, not take it
- Get to know their school, friends and friends' families
- Keep discipline and boundaries consistent
- Discover how your child uses social networking groups. Sites like Facebook are usually harmless, but gangs do communicate through them
- Discuss gangs together, using news reports as your starting point.



Spot the signs

Suspensions that your child is involved in a criminal gang are not necessarily proof, though some indications might be:

Behaviour

- Withdrawing from the family
- Loss of interest/bad behaviour in school
- Dropping positive activities like sports
- Unexplained extra money/new possessions
- Staying out late without permission
- Increasingly secretive
- New nickname.

Visual signs

- Dressing differently, perhaps in a particular style or colour
- Unexplained physical injuries
- Using tags or graffiti on books/possessions
- Using hand signals to speak with friends in 'code'.

Gang identity

Your child's group may be a gang if it has these characteristics:

- a name
- a defined territory
- a specific colour, particularly in clothing
- specific hand gestures or signs
- uses symbols shown in tattoos or graffiti.

My child's in a gang – what now?

Your child may be scared to discuss it. Let them know you will listen and offer support. Be clear that they have a choice even when they may think they don't.

- Stay calm, however upset you are
- Ask questions. Try not to accuse, threaten or intimidate
- Listen to their point of view
- Ask what you can do to help
- Try to agree together what to do next
- Involve other members of the family (if appropriate)
- Talk to their friends' families – they may share concerns
- Seek advice and further support – (see useful contacts section).

Weapons

If you suspect your child may have hidden a weapon at home it's vital to check. A knife or gun in the house puts the whole family in danger. If you find a weapon you must call the police, who will remove it safely. The safety of your family and those around you is vital.

The Law

The government is looking into the use of "gang injunctions" which will allow courts to place a range of prohibitions and requirements on the behaviour and activities of a person involved in gang-related violence. These conditions could include prohibiting

someone from being in a particular place or requiring them to participate in rehabilitative activities.

Carrying a gun or knife puts your child at risk of arrest. This could lead to court, a prison sentence and a criminal record which may prevent them from getting a job, going to university or college or travelling abroad.

It's illegal to buy a knife under 18, and to carry one to use as a weapon, even if it belongs to someone else.

There is a 2-4 year sentence for carrying a knife in a public area.

Carrying any illegal firearm – including an imitation – in public carries a minimum sentence of three years for 16-17 year olds and five years for adults. Police will search someone believed to be carrying a gun, knife or other weapon. Police and school staff can also search young people at school.

Being in a gang may lead to a longer sentence if caught with a weapon.



Family problems? We can help.



Free¹ confidential helpline
on **0808 800 2222** for advice,
information and support on any aspect
of parenting and family life



Or Skype us via our website –
www.familylives.org.uk

We offer advice and information as well
as extended support for complex and
difficult issues.



Face-to-face support groups and
workshops. Find out what is available
in your area at –
www.familylives.org.uk/localsupport



Online advice and information on
all aspects of parenting and family life

Give and receive support and advice from
other parents and adult family members
experiencing similar problems –
forum.familylives.org.uk/forum

Advice and information for professionals
working with families at –
www.familylives.org.uk/professionals

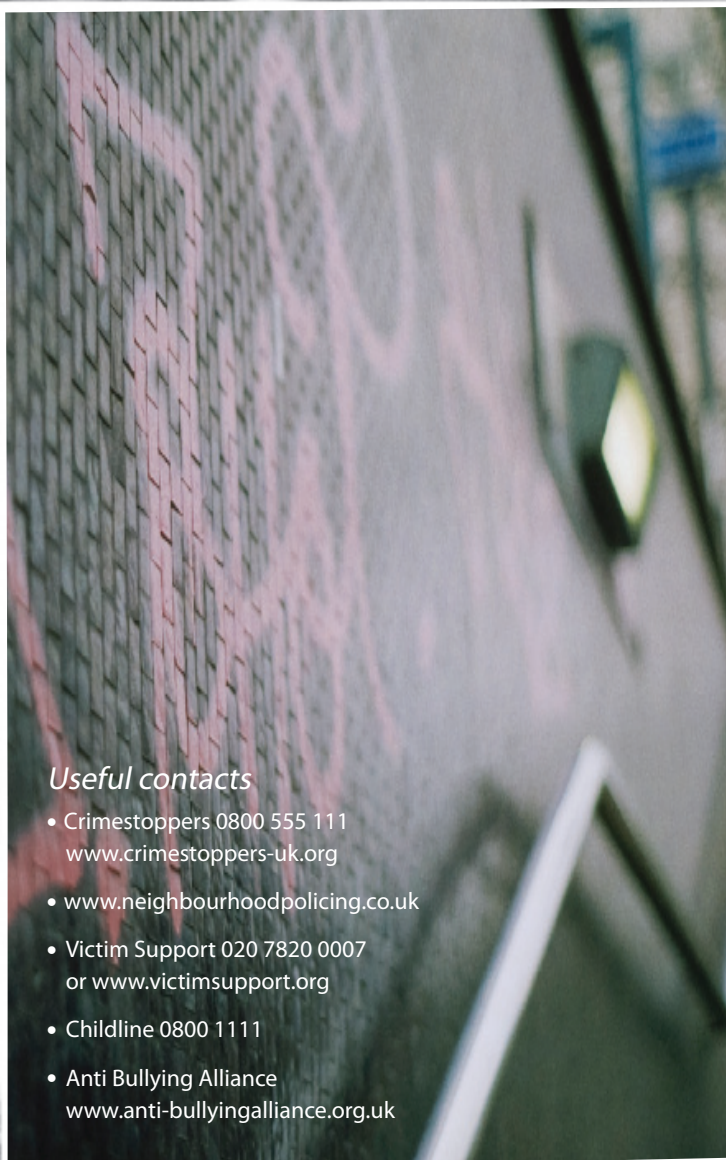
¹ From landlines and most mobile networks.



**family
lives**

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Useful contacts

- Crimestoppers 0800 555 111
www.crimestoppers-uk.org
- www.neighbourhoodpolicing.co.uk
- Victim Support 020 7820 0007
or www.victimsupport.org
- Childline 0800 1111
- Anti Bullying Alliance
www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk