

# PARENT HANDOUT:

## Understanding Gang-Influenced Behavior

### WORKING TOGETHER TO SUPPORT YOUTH AT RISK OF GANG INVOLVEMENT



This resource is designed to help families, schools, and community members recognize behaviors that may indicate gang influence or affiliation and take meaningful steps to intervene early and prevent further involvement. The goal is not to label, but to connect, support, and protect youth through collaborative efforts.

### BEHAVIORS TO WATCH FOR:

- Drastic changes in clothing, especially consistent use of colors like red or blue
- Sudden appearance of new clothing, shoes, or accessories without a clear source
- Drawing graffiti-style names, numbers, or symbols repeatedly
- Secretive behavior or withdrawal from usual friend groups
- Increased aggression or fascination with violence
- References to specific numbers (13, 14), sets, or slang like "scrapa," "set," "jumped in"
- Social media activity suggesting threats, group loyalty, or targeted bullying
- Not knowing who they're with, where they go, or who they're communicating with

### WHAT THESE BEHAVIORS COULD MEAN:

- Seeking belonging or protection
- Responding to bullying, social isolation, or community threats
- Mimicking older peers or family members
- Attempting to appear strong in unsafe environments

### WHAT TO DO (AS A PARENT, SCHOOL STAFF, OR COMMUNITY MEMBER):

- Stay curious, not confrontational: Ask open questions like "What does that mean to you?" or "Where did you hear that?"
- Build consistent, trusted adult connections through mentoring or check-in systems
- Spend time together as a family; shared routines and activities build trust and stability
- Meet your child's friends and their families. Know who they are and where they are.
- Don't just trust, but verify. Ask where they're going, who they'll be with, and follow up.
- Go into their rooms regularly, not to snoop, but to stay involved. Know what items they have and what content they're consuming (both online with social media, and in real life)
- Engage youth in sports, art, leadership, or service activities that build identity and purpose
- Create safe, supervised spaces at school and in the community (after-school programs, peer circles, teen events)
- Document and follow up on reports of bullying or targeting; support students facing repeated harassment
- Offer trauma-informed counseling or referrals for emotional support
- Involve parents early, not just after discipline; invite families to be part of the plan

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### DIGITAL SAFETY & INTERVENTION:

- Know what platforms and terms/slang are trending
- Ask youth what they're seeing online and talk to them about it
- Use device settings or service providers to manage access or limit time
- Have access to your child's passwords and accounts, remind them: you own the phone, not the other way around
- Collect phones or turn off internet access at night, many youth are most vulnerable online during overnight hours when unsupervised. FBI reports show that youth seeking validation, friendship, or support, especially those who feel disconnected from parental figures, are increasingly targeted or drawn into harmful online communities after hours
- Work together (school, family, law enforcement) to track and address online threats or harassment

### COMMUNITY-WIDE PREVENTION:

- Host school-family forums or town halls on youth safety and online behaviors
- Train youth mentors to serve as positive peer leaders in school and after-school settings
- Support family engagement nights on topics like healthy identity, belonging, and digital habits
- Promote an inclusive school culture and community programs where youth feel they belong

### GRAFFITI RESPONSE & COMMUNITY CLEAN-UP:

- Graffiti (especially gang-related tags or symbols) can signal territorial behavior and may escalate conflict if left unaddressed.
- Prompt removal is key: It sends a message that the community is alert, active, and unified in not tolerating intimidation or hate.
- Encourage schools, parents, and city staff to report graffiti immediately and coordinate with local cleanup crews.
- Partner with local law enforcement or neighborhood watch groups to monitor and map tagging patterns.
- Organize positive art projects or mural programs to give youth a chance to reclaim community spaces and express identity in healthy ways.
- A clean and cared-for community tells youth: You are seen. You are safe. You belong.

**REMEMBER: Prevention starts at home with consistent presence, boundaries, and connection. When families take the lead and communities wrap around with support, youth are less likely to seek identity or safety in unsafe places. Whether you're a parent, educator, or community member, your role in noticing, connecting, and following through can change the path forward.**