



DISCLAIMER

The information and graphics displayed in this booklet are intended to assist law enforcement officers, teachers and parents in identifying gang symbols, graffiti and practices. The information was obtained from sources which to the best of our knowledge are reliable and authentic. It is not our intention to encourage persecution of any person, group, organization or religion, or to inhibit free speech under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. This text should only be used as a general guide and not a definitive source of identification of all gang symbols and practices. Furthermore, this text contains information that may only be current up to the printing date.

Because of the nature of gang activity and practices that fluctuate over time and distance, we urge you to learn as much as possible from all other sources about gang symbols and practices for your own knowledge and protection. It is not our purpose to reprint all information, but to educate and inform. We hereby disclaim responsibility or liability to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused or alleged to be caused directly or indirectly by the information contained in this text.

Material in this booklet was adapted from several sources, including Project SAFE Salisbury's "Gangs 101", "Gang Tattoos: Signs of Belonging and the Transience of Signs," the Cumberland County Sheriff's Office's Gang Awareness Booklet, research from the National Youth Gang Center, and information provided by the Durham Police Department Gang Units.

**If you need assistance, please contact
Special Deputy Patrick Merrill, Drug & Gang Awareness Investigator,
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For more information on gangs, visit the Winston-Salem Police Department on the Web at www.cityofws.org.



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WHAT IS A GANG?

Different agencies use different definitions to identify gangs. However, there are some factors that are common to all gang definitions. Those factors are:

- a group of people
- common signs, symbols or name
- criminal activity

The terms “youth gang” and “street gang” are often used interchangeably, although “youth gang” typically refers to a gang made up mostly of juveniles, while “street gang” usually refers to a gang with adult members.

Under North Carolina law, a criminal street gang is defined as “any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, having as one of its primary activities the commission of felony or violent misdemeanor offenses, or delinquent acts that would be felonies or violent misdemeanors if committed by an adult, and having a common name or common identifying sign, colors, or symbols.” N.C.G.S. 15A-1340.16.d(2a)

In other words, a street gang is a group of three or more people who may have a common identifying sign, symbol or name, and who individually or collectively engage in criminal activity.

The most important fact that distinguishes gangs from other groups is that gangs engage in criminal activity. Otherwise, these gang definitions could describe a youth soccer team or Boy Scout troop.



TYPES OF GANGS

Non-Traditional Gangs

Non-traditional gangs have little structure or organization, and a relatively short history of existence. While these gangs tend to evolve slowly into traditional gangs, they have not been around long enough to develop long-standing traditions. Non-traditional gangs form and dissolve frequently, and struggle to form a cohesive identity. They are generally unique to a local area, and not aligned with national gangs or gang alliances. Often, the name of the gang is taken from a geographic location.

Examples: Few Crew, Few Garden Posse, Dog Pound, West End Boys

Traditional Gangs

Traditional gangs have existed over a significant period of time and have a long history. Traditional gangs have a defined structure and organization, an established system of motivation, and identifiable colors and hand signs. They are usually aligned with a national gang or gang alliance.

Examples: Bloods, Crips, Latin Kings, MS-13 (Mara Salvatrucha), Vice Lords

Criminal Enterprise

A criminal enterprise is a highly organized gang with a common criminal interest. These organizations are usually composed of career criminals, primarily adults. Most criminal enterprises are involved in the wholesale of narcotics, but they may also be involved in prostitution, gun trafficking, fraud, identity theft and other criminal activities. The primary motivating factor for a criminal enterprise is money, and violence is generally used only as a tool to make money or protect the integrity of the enterprise.

Examples: Mafia, Outlaw Bikers, Jamaican Posse

Pseudo-Traditional/Hybrid Gangs

Pseudo-traditional, or hybrid gangs, are a subset of non-traditional gangs that adopt the name, signs, or symbols of traditional gangs. Hybrid gangs may “mix and match” traditions and identifiers from a number of older, more established gangs. While they may use the names of traditional gangs, hybrid gangs have no or very loose affiliations with traditional gangs and gang alliances.

TYPES OF GANGS

Gang Nations/Alliances

Gang nations are not gangs themselves, but alliances under which gangs are aligned. A helpful comparison would be to the National and American baseball leagues. The National League is not a team - it is the alliance under which teams like the L.A. Dodgers and Atlanta Braves are aligned. The American League is the alliance under which the Baltimore Orioles and New York Yankees are aligned. Gang nations are similar in this respect. Each nation has a set of symbols and identifiers which each gang under the alliance will use in addition to the gang's identifiers. Depending on the nature of gangs and gang activity in a particular location, the member gangs of an alliance may or may not cooperate, and may even be in violent conflict with one another. In some cases, hybrid gangs will adopt the name of the alliance as the name of the hybrid gang.

Examples of gang alliances/gang nations:

- **People Nation**
People Nation gangs include Bloods (West Coast), Latin Kings, Vice Lords, El Rukn, Bishops, and Gaylords.
- **Folk Nation**
Folk Nation gangs include Crips, Black Gangster Disciples, Black Disciples, Gangster Disciples, Latin Disciples, and La Raza.
- **United Blood Nation (East Coast Bloods)**
UBN gangs are all Bloods, and include Mad Stone Villains; Valentine Bloods; Nine Trey Gangstas; Gangster Killer Bloods; One Eight Trey (183) Bloods; Hit Squad Brims; Blood Stone Villains; and Sex, Money, Murder Bloods.



Taggers/Tagging Crews

A tagger is a person who seeks notoriety by vandalizing as many properties as possible with graffiti without getting caught by law enforcement. Tagger graffiti is much more elaborate and "artistic" than gang graffiti, which is typically simple or crude. Taggers consider themselves to be artists, and may band together to form tagging crews for greater notoriety. They do not, however, consider themselves gang members, and seldom engage in criminal activity other than vandalism. Membership in tagging crews is fluid, and members may belong to multiple crews.

WHY KIDS JOIN GANGS

- Gangs can meet needs that go unfulfilled by other aspects of a child's life.
- Gangs can give a sense of security, structure, belonging, and discipline that is missing at home.
- The gang appears loyal when others are not.
- The child may lack positive influences and interaction with parents and adult role models.
- Gangs offer a powerful group identity.
- If there are many gangs in an area, joining one may offer protection from a rival gang.
- Gang activity may seem attractive to kids who are bored, lack outside interests and direction, or have low self-esteem. Movies, music, and video games have glamorized gangs, adding to the excitement of associating with them.

Research conducted by the National Youth Gang Center cites protection and having a friend already in a gang as the top two reasons youth join gangs. Other reasons identified in the research include:

- Money
- Respect
- To fit in
- For fun
- Sibling in the gang
- Forced to join



Students participating in the Choosing Sides violence prevention program at New Horizons School in Durham, N.C., gave these reasons for joining gangs:

- A gang protects you. They are there when your family isn't.
- They have your back.
- They give you respect.
- Money and sex
- Somebody loves you besides your family.
- Confidence
- Loyalty
- Gang members help each other.
- Organization
- Rules
- Feeling love
- Structure



LEVELS OF GANG INVOLVEMENT

LEVEL I – Fantasy

- Knows about gangs primarily from newspaper, newscasts, and movies.
- May know about “real” gangs.
- May know one or more gang members, but does not associate with them.
- See gang members “living out a fantasy.”

LEVEL II – At-Risk

- Knows about gangs and gang members first-hand.
- Occasionally casually associates with gang members.
- Lives in or near gang areas.
- May like or admire gangs or gang members as individuals.
- May like or admire the gang lifestyle, but not participate fully.

LEVEL III – Wanna-Be/Associate

- Knows and likes gang members first-hand.
- Regularly associates with gang members.
- Considers gangs and related activity as normal, acceptable and admirable.
- Finds many things in common with gang members.
- Is thinking seriously about joining a gang.



LEVEL IV – Gang Member

- Is officially a gang member.
- Associates almost exclusively with gang members to the exclusion of family and former friends.
- Participates in gang crimes and most other related activities.
- Is not considered hard-core by fellow gang members or others.
- Has substantially rejected the authority or value system of family and society.

LEVEL V – Hard-Core Gang Member

- Totally committed to the gang and gang lifestyle.
- Totally rejects anyone or any value system other than the gang.
- Is considered hard-core by self, other gang-members and authorities.
- Will commit any act with the approval of or a demand from the gang.
- Does not accept any authority other than the gang.

RiSk FACTORS*

Community/Neighborhood Risk Factors

- Availability/perceived access to drugs
- Neighborhood youth in trouble
- High-crime neighborhood/feeling unsafe in the neighborhood
- Residents in poverty or family poverty
- Availability of firearms
- High level of gang activity in neighborhood
- Lack of pro-social activities

Family Risk Factors

- Sibling with anti-social behavior
- Poor family management
- Family transitions (divorce, death, remarriage)
- Child maltreatment
- Low parental supervision/control/monitoring
- Family member involved in gang
- Incarcerated parent(s)
- Lack of positive support from family

School Risk Factors

- Poor school performance
- Low achievement in elementary school
- Identified as learning disabled
- Low academic aspirations
- Low degree of commitment to school
- Multiple suspensions/expulsion

Peer Group Risk Factors

- Association with peers who engage in delinquency
- Association with aggressive peers
- Association with gang members or associates of gang members

Individual Risk Factors

- Involvement in delinquency and violence
- Early dating/precocious sexual activity
- Early marijuana use and early drinking
- Life stressors and mental health problems
- Illegal possession of guns
- Low self-esteem/sense of hopelessness
- Lack of respect for authority

* Excerpted from research by the National Youth Gang Center. For a comprehensive list of risk factors, please visit http://www.iir.com/nycg/tool/risk_factors.htm

SIGNS OF GANG INVOLVEMENT

Early identification of youthful gang-related behavior is critical. Specific patterns of anti-social and counterproductive behavior can signal a willingness to associate with criminal street gangs. Adults who care about the safety and future of young adults can redirect youth toward a safer and wiser lifestyle by recognizing these negative gang behaviors. Some typical signs of gang involvement are:

- Skipping school or missing work often
- Sudden negative change in school performance
- No longer associates with old friends
- Associates with new friends that parents don't know
- Expresses a preference for one color, or avoids certain colors
- Graffiti on papers, walls, bed sheets
- Shows a strong disrespect for authority
- Alcohol or drug use
- Shows unusual moods or patterns of behavior
- Marks personal property with specific codes and symbols
- Displays unexplained wealth, jewelry and clothing
- Speaks of needing protection and carries a weapon
- Displays unexplained bruises, cuts, brands or tattoos
- Unusual desire for privacy, time away from family.
- Refuses to take part in family activities.



GANG IDENTIFIERS

GRAFFITI

Gangs use graffiti as their “newspaper” or “bulletin board.” It marks their territory or turf and also sends clear messages to rival gang members. By being able to read gang graffiti, a person can know what is happening in a particular neighborhood.

When you take time to analyze its messages, you learn that gang graffiti is not just “writing on the wall.” Gang graffiti is filled with clear messages to mark territory, identify the gang’s purpose, glorify the gang, advertise a “plan of attack,” and disrespect or degrade a rival gang. Many times, gang graffiti will contain a roll call, or list of members in a particular gang or set, informing you of who belongs to that particular gang.

Gang graffiti can be found almost anywhere. Buildings, walls, personal property, streets and sidewalks, traffic signs, and dumpsters are just a few popular targets. Gang members will often mark their personal property with gang graffiti, drawing gang symbols on clothing, room walls, shoes, hats, bed sheets, books and even school papers such as homework and tests.

Elements of Gang Graffiti

- Almost all gang graffiti has initials or symbols identifying the gang.
- Many times members will use street names or monikers to identify themselves.
- The graffiti often includes symbols or letters that identify the neighborhood or the area the gang is from.
- Graffiti often contains messages to rival gangs.
- The message in gang graffiti is almost never meant for the general public.
- Graffiti is often written in the gang’s colors. Examples: blue for Crips, red for Bloods.
- Gang members will show disrespect for a rival gang by drawing the rival’s signs and symbols backwards, upside-down, crossed out, or cracked.
- Numbers are often substituted for letters. For example, Black Gangster Disciples: 274 = BGD (B=2, G=7, D=4).

It’s important to understand that all graffiti is not gang graffiti. “Tags” are used by taggers and tag crews to gain notoriety and express their identity in what they consider to be a creative manner. Tags are usually multicolored and much more elaborate than gang graffiti.



GANG IDENTIFIERS



Words ↑

① N - Niggaz	6	100
I - Kill	6	6+
E - Staff/ly		
② K - Kill		
S - Alox		
W - whinn		
I - 422		
S - 100%		
③ S - 100%		
I - Kill		
K - Kill		
E - Staff/ly		
④ A - all		
D - down		
D - day		
I - dell		
A - all		
S - 100%		

6 popper
8 droppin
9+4
IGD
Rollin
30#
412 crip
107

6+

8 dooz

270
RGT
4
3#7
Rollin



GANG IDENTIFIERS

HAND SIGNS

Hand signs, often referred to as gang signs, were first used by Chinese Triads several hundred years ago. Black gang members introduced hand signs to the gang culture in the mid-1970s in Los Angeles. It is believed they copied their hand signs from family members who used secret hand signs in their fraternal societies and Masonic groups. Over time, gang members have developed hand signs unique to their particular gangs. Hand signs are often a physical representation of gang nomenclature, such as using fingers to spell the word "blood," or of symbols found in gang graffiti, such as pitchforks and numbers. This nonverbal form of communication has been quickly accepted and adopted by gangs across the nation.

Hand signs are a nonverbal form of communication much like American Sign Language, but hand signs should not be confused with sign language. A quick flash of the hand is used as an announcement of gang affiliation or as a challenge or insult. These hand signs, which are quickly displayed with the fingers, hands, and body, have very specific meanings to gang members. Gang members will often invert or modify the signs of a rival gang as an insult, known as "throwing down."



TATTOOS

For gang members, tattoos are a way of asserting membership in the gang. Tattoos are the strongest piece of evidence that a person can display indicating he or she is a street gang member. The most common tattoo among gang members is one that denotes the gang that they are in. Generally, only the most dedicated gang members will get a tattoo bearing the name of the gang, but many members will get tattoos depicting gang symbols. Playboy rabbits, crowns, five- and six-pointed stars, pitchforks, and other symbols are all common gang tattoos.

"Dog paws" are a good example of a tattoo identifying a particular gang. Worn by East Coast Blood gang members, especially Nine Trey Gangsters, "dog paws" are usually a brand and not an ink tattoo. The tattoo consists of three



GANG IDENTIFIERS

dots about the size of a dime burned into the right shoulder in a triangular pattern. The mark must be earned, usually by committing an act of violence, and is worn only by serious gang members.

A common tattoo among Hispanic gang members from many different gangs is the pachuco cross tattooed on the hand between the thumb and index finger. Alternatively, the same area is often embellished with three dots in a pyramid shape, a symbol that stands for "mi vida loca," "my crazy life." Southeast Asian gangsters have adopted the same tattoo of the three dots, defining its meaning as "To O Can Gica," or "I care for nothing."



Often gang tattoos will simply say the name of the gang that the wearer is in, usually in Old English lettering or script. Often the gang name will be slightly disguised by giving it an assigned number. For example, the Nortenos will often use 14, X4, XIV (all denoting the 14th letter of the alphabet, N) in their

tattoos. Surenos affiliated with the Mexican Mafia (La eMe) use the number 13, X3, and XIII (for M, the 13th letter of the alphabet). The Vice Lords of Chicago are often recognizable by their tattoos of the number 312, which is the Chicago area code. The 18th Street gang of Los Angeles, not surprisingly, uses the number 18.



Gangs also find other ways to identify themselves without using their full gang names. The Nortenos use the Spanish word for "fourteen," "catorce." The Surenos (Sureno means "southerner," for Southern California) sometimes use the Aztec language, Nahuatl, in their tattoos. "Kan," for example, means "South," and "Kanpol" means "Southerner." They will also use Aztec numerology to denote the number 13.

In addition to advertising gang membership, tattoos can tell other details about the bearer, including rank in the gang and number of "hits" or other services performed on the gang's behalf. Which side of the body the tattoo is on also carries significance. Tattoos can also tell more personal details about gang members' lives, such as memorials to deceased loved ones, the names and birth-dates of their children, what country or region they are from, and how many of their loved ones have died while they were incarcerated. A common tattoo among gang



GANG IDENTIFIERS

members is a small teardrop below the eye. Although some take this symbol to mean that the bearer has killed someone, others use it to show that someone close to the bearer has died, especially if this occurred while the tattooed individual was incarcerated. Tombstones with "R.I.P." and a date show the loss of a loved one. Often these tattoos are reserved for fellow gang members who were killed in gang related violence.

Tattoos can appear anywhere on a gang member's body. Traditionally, tattoos are on the arm. Larger tattoos may appear on the chest or back and can be very detailed. Tattoos may also be found on the face, neck and hands. Gang tattoos are usually somewhat crude and done only in blue or black ink. The most serious gang members will often have multiple tattoos and display them prominently, while juveniles and other gang members may cover their tattoos with clothing, especially in the presence of law enforcement, parents, or school officials.



LET'S TALK

Today's children learn about gangs from a wide variety of sources. Music, movies, video games, news, and school peers are just some of those sources. The one source they often don't hear from is their parents. Children as young as nine can be gang members, and younger children often know gang signs and symbols. It's important to teach your child about gangs while he or she is still in elementary school, and to continue to talk honestly with them about gangs as they grow older. Talk with your children about the dangers of gangs and the reasons people join them. Help your child learn that he or she has the inner strength—and your support—to make the right choice.

WHAT TO SAY (PARENT TO CHILD)

Good Groups vs. Bad Groups

- "Good groups get together to do good or positive things."
- Examples: Scouts, sports teams, hobby clubs, volunteer organizations, church youth groups
- "Gangs are bad groups because they break the law and do things that hurt people."
- "Avoid gang members. Don't hang out with them or go to parties where they will be present."



Gangs Break Laws

- "People in gangs may damage property, use drugs, steal, carry illegal weapons, and hurt other people. Doing any of these things can get you arrested."

Dangerous Membership

- "Some gang members get hurt or killed in fights between gangs and in committing criminal acts. Sometimes they hurt or kill innocent people."
- "Gang members may say they are your "family" and that they "love" you. But if you break their rules or don't do what they say, they may hurt or kill you."
- "When you join a gang, you lose your freedom. You can't leave when you want."

Talking to Adults

- "Gangs may scare you or try to hurt you to make you join. If this ever happens to you, say 'NO,' leave fast, and tell me what happened."
- "Sometimes we all need help from other people. If you feel threatened by a gang, or you think one of your friends may be in a gang, talk to me, or a teacher, police officer, or other adult. Gangs are a big problem for one person to handle. There's nothing wrong with asking for help."

HELP YOUR CHILD STAY OUT

Help Your Child Develop Positive Self-Esteem

- Support your child's goals and ideas, even if they differ from your own.
- Encourage your child to make independent choices.
- Give your child a chance to contribute to the family. Assign chores or jobs that your child is old enough to do. Don't assign chores as punishment, and thank your child for helping.
- Focus on your child's good points. Praise positive behavior.
- Let your child know you expect good efforts and hard work.
- Praise your child's efforts as well as achievements.
- Ask for your child's opinions on family matters.
- Express your feelings and encourage your child to do the same. Try not to judge or criticize your child's feelings.
- Make it clear that you love your child as he or she is.

Be a Good Role Model

- Don't abuse alcohol or other drugs.
- If you have a problem with drugs, violence, or anything else that interferes with family life, get help.
- Honor your word, and expect your child to do the same.

Be Involved in Your Child's Life

- Show interest in your child's schoolwork, hobbies and friends.
- Work to build open, ongoing communication with your child.
- Listen without being quick to judge.
- Set aside time for positive family activities.
- Monitor what your child watches and listens to, especially television shows, music, movies and video games that promote gangs or are full of violence.
- Encourage your child to spend time wisely studying, working, volunteering or participating in sports, hobbies, art or church groups.

Teach Good Values and Responsibility

- Emphasize strong values, including respect for yourself and others, tolerance for differences, and responsibility.
- Be consistent about discipline.
- Hold your child accountable for his or her behavior.
- Teach your child respect for authority.
- Set clear, reasonable limits and rules and stick to them.

Safeguard your Child

- Know the "Three W's"
WHERE your child is at all times, **WHAT** he or she is doing, and **WHO** he or she is with.

