

FACILITATOR PREPARATION

GANGS: IT'S YOUR LIFE deals with highly charged and potentially unsettling material, particularly Part II. It is strongly suggested that facilitators preview the video and study the accompanying materials before presenting them to the group. Included are concepts and related suggestions designed to help you to think of ways to work with your participants or group members, and to network with other professionals in your school or community to create effective support systems for gang prevention. An informed awareness and sensitivity to the many issues involved will enable you to be of greater assistance to the children with whom you are concerned.

You may also want to bring in other qualified support staff to help to facilitate discussion and/or activities. Certain aspects of the activities presented in the guide may need to be amended and tailored to your group, and we recommend that you do so. Review the Blackline Masters provided with this guide and duplicate any you wish to distribute.

We have included a handout on Resources for help with different gang-related problems. Some viewers may be experiencing difficulties with their own or their family or friend's gang involvement. Be prepared to provide local referrals to those who may need help.

PART ONE: UNDERSTANDING GANG LIFE

AUDIENCE/PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

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After viewing and discussion of Part One: Understanding Gang Life, participants/viewers should be able to:

- Understand and describe many reasons which cause youth to join gangs.
- Understand and describe risk factors which would make certain youth more susceptible to gangs.
- Distinguish between the "glamorous" allure of a gang, and the unforeseen consequences of gang membership.
- Understand the progression of gang involvement, from infatuation to the realization of grim realities and the difficulty of getting out.

SURVEY: PART ONE

Blackline Master #1: Survey is a diagnostic tool, based on the Objectives for Part One. It is designed to help you identify participants' knowledge of gangs, and their own risk and protective factors, before and/or after the administration of Part One. You may use this survey for information or as evaluation; it may be administered anonymously.

DISCUSSION TOPICS BEFORE VIEWING PART ONE

Below are a list of discussion topics to introduce before viewing Part One of the video. Introduce the topic to your participants by saying that in Part One of **GANGS: IT'S YOUR LIFE**, they will be exploring why youth join gangs and learning more about them. Distribute **Blackline Master #2: Definition of a Gang**, and **Blackline Master #3: Ten-Point Criteria for Gang Members**.

- Ask the group if they are aware of gang activity in their area, and if so, ask them to describe what they know about it (be aware that there may be information they may not want to disclose, and it is important not to press them for it). If not, ask them what they know about gang activity in other areas.
- Ask them how they feel about gang activity, and how their families and friends feel about it.
- Discuss the effects of gangs on their neighborhoods, cities or towns, and on society at large.
- Initiate a discussion with participants about their impressions of the reasons that kids join gangs.

(Understand that if youth in your classroom or group are thinking about joining a gang, they will usually not want to disclose it. One way to initiate discussion is to ask, "Without giving his or her name, if you know someone who's thinking of joining a gang, what would his or her reasons be?")

- Ask participants where they get their images of gangs. Discuss the media portrayal of gangs.
- **Blackline Master #3:** Based on the Ten-Point Criteria, discuss the fact that one can be perceived as a gang member by virtue of association, even if one has not been initiated into a gang. What potential consequences is someone risking by just hanging out, partying, or being seen with gang members?

Prior to viewing the video, distribute **Blackline Master #4: Glossary of Gang Terms**.

VIEW THE VIDEO

Part One: Understanding Gang Life

Viewing time: 22 minutes

DISCUSSION AFTER VIEWING PART ONE

- **"Youth join gangs to have specific needs met"**, states the Hand in Hand study. This comprehensive study of gang membership utilizes the Five Needs described in William Glasser's Control Theory to frame the major reasons why youth join gangs. These five needs are Love (Belonging), Power (Respect), Safety (Security), Freedom (Choices) and Fun. In this video, we will explore these and other risk factors and needs which lead youth into gang membership.

Distribute the Blackline Master #5: Five Needs. You may also wish to distribute or use as a reference **Blackline Master #6: Teenage Needs Met by Gangs**. Ask the youth in your class or group to name some of the reasons described in the tape for why kids join gangs. With each reason named, ask the group if they know someone who has considered joining a gang for this reason. Make it clear that you do not expect them to identify the person. Ask them to elaborate on the situation if they can.

2. The primary reason causing youth to join gangs is a need for love, belonging, support, "family," and community. The Hand in Hand study says, "Gangsters describe 'love' as being that sense of family and unconditional acceptance they were looking for. Love is described as the intense loyalty one gang member has for another. When parents were physically or emotionally unavailable or ineffective...youth found the gang to be responsive, active, nurturing, educating, parent replacements." Discuss the need for love, support, belonging, or "family." These are the most basic human needs, and it is important to acknowledge their validity. Facilitate the group in sharing some of their own needs on this level. In healthy situations, the needs for support and belonging are met primarily by the family of origin. In the video, Natasha says "I needed the support and the love that I wasn't getting at home." Statistics support the fact that gangs are most prevalent in areas where there are many single-parent families (particularly without fathers), where parents are addicted to drugs and/or alcohol, and/or where parents are not supportive or supervising their children. Discuss the types of family problems that children have which can lead them to feel unsupported at home. (It is important to know when the children in your classroom or group are not receiving support or supervision from their parents, or when their home environment is significantly disrupted, as these factors place them more at risk for gang membership.) The Hand in Hand study emphasizes the issue of "father hunger," when both boys and girls lacked an active nurturing male in their lives. "We saw it played out so often, we feel confident citing it as one of the norms for gang life that always needs to be addressed as a risk factor."

3. Violence and physical abuse are also common in the families of gang members.

Knowing that this is a sensitive subject, lead a discussion on how these could be contributing factors to youth joining gangs. You may wish to have qualified support staff present for this discussion.

4. Safety and Protection: Youth who feel unsafe in their neighborhoods, particularly if there are gangs there, are more likely to join a gang. Many of these youth reach out for help before they decide to join a gang. It is important that they have resources to which they can reach out if they feel unsafe, if they are being beaten or picked on by gangs, or if they have been threatened. Talk about what a youth could do under these circumstances to get help. Discuss a situation in which a youth has been threatened or beaten, or otherwise feels physically unsafe. How might joining a gang first help the person to feel safe, but then ultimately lead them to feeling much more unsafe? "In order to achieve security, he has to put himself in jeopardy."

The need for power, status, and "respect" is another reason frequently given for gang membership. In the video, Aaron states that he joined a gang because he was seeking power. "The primary need that male gangsters describe is the need to have power...For most gang members, this need is described as a feeling of being in control... Power, especially for the young male gangsters, very quickly becomes the reason for their affiliation."¹⁰ "Gangsters derive their power through fear and intimidation, creating a chronic lust for more."¹¹ "The issue of power and respect is a direct response to low self-esteem, especially for youth raised in poor economic circumstances and minority communities. Their gang experiences are often the first time they have felt a sense of their own ability and strength."¹²

"Fear and violence rapidly become intertwined with a sense of what is fun. Soon they cannot describe a day without some violent, fear-inducing episode."¹³

Discuss how kids in today's society might feel a lack of power or self-esteem, and how they might attempt to seek these through gang membership. Explore in your discussion healthier ways to meet these needs. How are they related to the need to feel protected? Talk about the need for "respect." What is the difference between this and self-respect? Do you need the first if you have the second?

- 6. Freedom:** Gang members appear to possess "...an autonomy society doesn't afford most rebellious teens. Imagine a 16-year-old with unlimited funds and no respect for authority. His choices are not limited by socially mature responsibility codes, as are our societies' adults with the same autonomy...the feeling of pure autonomy with no respect for authority usually leads to delinquent and criminal behavior."¹⁴

Although gangsters may seek freedom from the pressures of society, school, parents, etc., "...they are the ultimate conformists within the contexts of their gang rules...'Violations' (physical beatings) are regularly meted out to those who violate the gang rules."¹⁵

In the video, Jesse says that being in a gang is "like being in the army." O.G.s John, Paul and Salvador describe what it means to "be in violation," or go against the rules of the gang, and the consequences of being in violation. Discuss this contradiction: although gang members appear to be "free" from the rules of society, they are completely controlled by the rules of the gang.

Angie tells the story of her friend's betrayal of the gang and of her punishment. She also talks about her own role in the punishment. Ask the group if they can see any other options for Angie. If so, what are they? Discuss the ways in which females are even more controlled in the gang system, to the point of virtually being slaves of the gang.

- 7. Fun** is one of Glasser's "Five Needs" which lead youth to join gangs. Many youth in the video describe the "rush," the excitement, the adrenaline, parties, sex, etc. The desire for excitement and new experiences is a normal phase for most teenagers. How might someone acquire these things without joining a gang?
- 8. Poverty** is a significant factor contributing to gang membership. In the video, several people refer to the allure of making money, selling drugs, and having nice cars and nice clothes. The desire or need for money is given as a frequent reason by youth who have joined gangs. "Feeling marginalized" in our society – that one's economic prospects are bleak – can make the lucrative drug market seem highly attractive. Engage participants or group members in a discussion about whether they feel encouraged or discouraged about their economic futures. Discuss the appeal of the money that appears to be available to gang members, and talk about how short-lived it is and the other consequences that come along with it.
- 9. Neighborhood and peer pressure, and generational gang pressure,** are a reality for many youth. In the video, Paul says, "I was raised into the gang, bred for it." Talk about what this means. Discuss some of the pressures a child might feel if their parents, older siblings, or most of their friends are gang members, or if they come from a neighborhood where they are "expected" to join a gang. If the children with whom you work are subject to these pressures, it is essential that they find a support group to help them resist this pressure. Discuss what kind of support a youth might need to realistically resist the pressure to join a gang.

- . **Failure in school**, low scholastic expectations on the part of parents, facilitators or students, and/or being labeled "learning disabled" has been proven to be a significant risk factor for gang activity. It is important to be aware of the consequences of low expectations and labeling. What are/were the experiences of your participants or group members in school? Do/did they feel successful/ unsuccessful, supported/unsupported, connected/disconnected with facilitators and classmates? What do/did they feel to be the expectations of their facilitators and parents, and their own expectations, regarding their success in school?
 - . **Many youth are seeking a "sense of identity," and look for this in a gang.** In the video, Cody describes "not fitting in" anywhere, and looking for a place to belong. Also, youth who feel that they are "between cultures," e.g., immigrant Mexican and Asian youth, may feel alienated from both their culture of origin and their new culture, and the gang may provide a "home" for them. Talk with your group about the need for identity, and what it means to them. Ask if anyone (or if anyone they know) has had the experience of being "between cultures," and what that experience is like. Talk about the search for identity being a normal part of adolescence.
2. **Drug-involved and/or delinquent youth** are more prone to gang membership than those who are not. Discuss how someone involved with drugs and alcohol addiction might be attracted to joining a gang.
 3. **Racism:** The Hand in Hand document cites racism as a major reason for gang membership. Discuss with your group how experiences of racism might lead to gang involvement.
 4. **"You don't really know what you're getting into."** This is the most important concept emphasized in this section. As we have seen, most kids joining a gang envision a glamorous, exciting lifestyle. But those who have been in a gang tell a very different story of trauma, fear, betrayal, tragedy, remorse, regret, and devastated lives. Ask individuals in your group to describe some of the things kids in the tape were looking for when they joined a gang, how their expectations were only temporarily fulfilled, and how there were severely negative, unforeseen consequences. Examples:
 - John and others talk about the O.G.s manipulating the younger members, using them to do the dirty work. It has been said by gang experts, "It's hard to kill someone. So you get someone else to do it for you."
 - Natasha talks about being used and manipulated by her O.G.s, which is generally the role of women in the gang.
 - Francisco Gallardo talks about how the bad times are "so bad," they far outweigh the good times.
 - Elmer talks about the excruciating stress and trauma of drug and alcohol addiction, of committing shootings, of wanting to kill himself.

Others describe a life of "chaos," how you're never going to have success, never going to live comfortably, never going to win.
 5. **It's hard to leave the gang:** "The only way to leave the gang is dead" is a statement heard frequently. Talk about some of the reasons given in the video regarding the difficulty of leaving a gang:

- Jason talks about always looking over his shoulder, how the police and his enemies are always after him.
- Francisco Gallardo talks about the gang being like a drug or alcohol addiction - it's hard to walk away.
- Cody talks about having his life and his family threatened by his gang.
- Dean Askew talks about people wanting to go back to their families, but being unable to go back.

Discuss with your group their feelings about the lack of freedom of choice this implies, and how they would feel about ending up in a situation in which their freedom of choice was denied. Discuss the fact that when the criminal justice system started holding them accountable, they were motivated to leave the gang.

6. Gang Addiction:

Both Francisco Gallardo and Dean Askew make references to gang involvement being an addiction. Research shows that gang members describe their addiction to the "rush" of gang life as being harder to overcome than drug or alcohol addiction.¹⁶

Addiction is defined as the state in which a person engages in compulsive use of a substance or behavior even when faced with negative consequences; characterized by a loss of control in limiting use or behavior; an escalation in the use or behavior and by the compulsive seeking of the initial pleasure in the use or behavior and never finding it again.

Discuss the definition and characteristics of addiction and lead a discussion on how they apply to gang life. You may wish to refer to the section on **Gang Addiction** found in **Additional Information for Facilitators** in this Guide. Have support staff present who are familiar with addiction issues for this discussion.

7. From Fantasy to Nightmare:

Dean Askew describes how young people enter gang life "at the fantasy level" and that by the time they want to get out, "it's the hard-core reality level." **Distribute Blackline Master #7: Levels of Gang Involvement.** On the board or individually, have viewers diagram this journey as it is portrayed in the video: from the fantasy of wanting to belong to a gang, through the reality of getting jumped in, "doing dirt," gang rules and violations, to the difficulty of getting out. Discuss these diagrams and issues.