

Why Young People Join Gangs

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Gang members join a gang by either committing a crime or undergoing an initiation procedure wherein they are beaten by fellow gang members to test their courage and fighting ability. Their motivations for joining the gang are varied, but usually fall within one of the following:

- **Identity or Recognition** - Being part of a gang allows the gang member to achieve a level of status he/she feels impossible outside the gang culture.
- **Protection** - many members join because they live in the gang area and are, therefore, subject to violence by rival gangs. Joining guarantees support in case of attack and retaliation for transgressions.
- **Fellowship and Brotherhood** - To the majority of gang members, the gang functions as an extension of the family and may provide companionship lacking in the gang member's home environment. Many older brothers and relatives belong, or have belonged to the gang.
- **Intimidation** - Some members are forced to join if their membership will contribute to the gang's criminal activity. Some join to intimidate others in the community not involved in gang activity.
- **Criminal Activity** - Some join a gang to engage in narcotics activity and benefit from the group's profits and protection.

Unfortunately, few youths realize the hazards associated with gang involvement. In many cases, parents are unaware of their children's gang activity and are unable to intervene until it's too late.