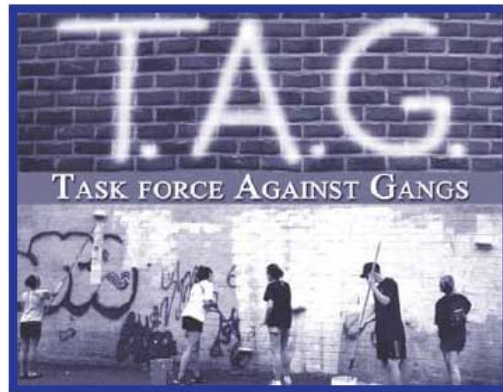


GANG AWARENESS

NASSAU COUNTY

TASKFORCE AGAINST GANGS



GANG AWARENESS

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS, GUARDIANS AND EDUCATORS

THOMAS R. SUOZZI
COUNTY EXECUTIVE



LAWRENCE W. MULVEY
POLICE COMMISSIONER



Taskforce Against Gangs



GANG AWARENESS

STREET GANG AWARENESS

A POLICE - SCHOOLS- COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Introduction

Nassau County's anti-gang strategy will be a unified effort among government, community, and law enforcement that encompasses three components:

PREVENTION – Eliminate the attractiveness of the gang environment to former and current gang members.

ENFORCEMENT – Prosecute and punish gang members who commit crimes

REDIRECTION – work in conjunction with the community, schools, and social services agencies to deter current and former members from staying in gangs and reduce recidivism rates.

The protection of our nation's most valuable resource, its children and young people, is a task that falls to parents, police, educators, and other social institutions. While each can be effective in its own way, a cooperative alliance among these entities can be much more so.

Offered in this packet is information to accomplish the foregoing in the area of gangs. Gangs are an insidious threat to our children and to the community at large. One of the strongest weapons against gangs is the dissemination of information about them: armed with knowledge parents, guardians, educators, clergy and similar community groups, working cooperatively with the police, can show gangs that they are unwelcome in our neighborhoods, deter young people from joining gangs, and lead to the eventual elimination of criminal gang activity in your area. The offerings in this booklet are certainly not all inclusive, and the Police Department, in conjunction with the Nassau County **Taskforce Against Gangs (T.A.G.)**, is committed to helping you in any way it can. If we can be of further assistance to you in this matter, please do not hesitate to call the contact numbers listed at the end of this informational packet.

Lawrence W. Mulvey
Commissioner of Police



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WHAT IS A GANG?

Young people have seemingly always formed cliques such as fraternities, sororities, posses, crews and turf groups. To differentiate these more benign groupings from their more sinister counterparts, the Police Department subscribes to the following definition of a *Street Gang*: a gang is any structured group of three or more individuals bound together on a continuing basis for the purpose of *committing antisocial or criminal acts*. Remember, not all youths who are members of a group should be classified as gang members, only those who have formed an alliance for *criminal* motivations.

Certain street gangs are more sophisticated than others and are known on a national level, while others are merely youth groups who have formed locally for many reasons. Each precinct and nearly every community in Nassau County has some form of the local youth group activity. These members are generally not organized, nor are they serious criminal offenders, and are the “disorderly youths” that many of us are familiar with. Their actions are usually limited to harassing other youths, criminal mischief, and similar such incidents abetted by substance abuse and underage drinking.

The more dangerous criminal gangs are formed for protection, financial gain, and territorial reasons. They are usually, though not necessarily, comprised of a single ethnic/racial group, allowing for a bond to form among the members. This “specialness” permits the gang members to remain apart from other youths in the community and affords them the feeling that they are above parental supervision.

Although protection is a major reason for joining a gang, often the focal point of a gang's formation is financial gain. Drug sales, extortion, protection rackets, and robberies are used as means to finance the gang's daily activities.

Gangs are territorial and are usually comprised of members who reside in a specific area. This allows for the formation of areas known as “turf”. This “turf” base allows for the members to insulate themselves from rival gangs and grants them a measure of insulation from the rules and controls of the law abiding residents in the neighborhood.



WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE JOIN GANGS?

Young people join gangs for many reasons. The primary reason, however, is a need to belong. When the need to belong and other related social needs go unmet through the young person's family life, activities, or other community institutions, the gang steps in to provide it. The kinds of social needs that gang membership seem to offer comprise what we call the "gangster mentality":

- **Sense of Family**
- **Identity / Acceptance / Respect**
- **Status / Protection**
- **Financial gain**

Some young people experience a sense of alienation and powerlessness due to a lack of traditional support structures, such as family, schools and church. This void can lead to feelings of frustration and anger creating a desire to obtain support outside of traditional institutions. The gang becomes a surrogate **Family**.

Everyone has a desire to be a part of something or attached to someone. The sense of belonging experienced as part of the group becomes the major source of **Identity** for gang members. The gang affords its members a sense of power and control with illicit gang activities seen as mechanisms to gain the **Acceptance** and **Respect** of their fellow gangsters.

One of the most basic human needs is a sense of personal security. To the young gangster it is being the "bad guy" and the fear that behavior creates in others, which translates to him as **Status** and that ultimately results in **Protection** from anyone "messing" with him.

WHAT ARE THE INDICATORS OF GANG PRESENCE IN AN AREA?

There are a number of indicators as to whether an area has a gang presence. The below listing is not meant to be all inclusive as there are too many variables; it must also be understood that **several** indicators should be present before any assumptions can be made about the presence of gang activity. It should be noted that many of the indicators of a gang presence may also be used as indicators of a young person's gang membership.

GRAFFITI

Initially, gang graffiti covers a small geographical area, which grows larger as the street gang becomes bolder and gains confidence. Their graffiti marks their turf, thus informing other gangs of their presence. Rival gangs will often cross out opposing graffiti.



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(Take note that cross outs are territorial insults and often lead to retribution). Graffiti is usually signed by the author (moniker or tag) and may also contain the names of other members. Murals or memorials contain the names of deceased members. All graffiti should be reported to the police as soon as it is observed.

COLORS

All gangs have designated colors. Their colors may be worn in any number of different ways, such as beads, bandanas, clothing (including sports team attire), hats, shoe laces, key chains, back packs, national flags, on the inside of pockets, and the like. Sample gang colors are:

<i>ALKQN</i> <i>Almighty Latin King Nation</i>	<i>Black & Gold</i>
<i>NETA</i> <i>flag)</i>	<i>Red/White/Blue (Puerto Rican</i>
<i>MSX3 (MS13)</i> <i>Mara Salvatrucha</i>	<i>Blue/White (Salvadorian flag)</i>
<i>SWP</i> <i>Salvadorians With Pride</i> <i>flag)</i>	<i>Blue/White/Yellow/Black (beads)</i> <i>Blue/White (also Salvadorian</i>
<i>BLOODS</i>	<i>Red</i>
<i>CRIPS</i>	<i>Blue</i>

HAND SIGNS

Most street gangs utilize some form of hand sign(s). It's their means of greeting, identifying and communicating with each other. While it is possible to name a gang simply by identifying the hand signs, you do not need to acquire the ability to read signs. Merely realizing that some type of hand sign is being flashed will allow you to make an assessment as to the presence of gang activity.



TATTOOS

Gang members will often tattoo their head, hands, arms, chest and back with gang markings. The tattoos play a significant role in identifying specific gang membership. Generally, at least one of the tattoos will clearly identify the gang.

ADMISSIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS

Gang members are proud. As such, given the right circumstances, they will not hesitate to readily admit their association. Once an individual has been identified as a gang member, other members can then be more easily identified. Remember, mere association with a known gang member does not confirm an individual's membership. You should look for additional identifying factors prior to making a decision regarding membership.

HANGOUTS

Gang members meet on a routine basis. They do so to conduct business, including everything from the collection of dues to the administration of punishments. Many of their meetings take place in public places such as parks, schoolyards, and the like.

WHAT ARE CLUES OF GANG MEMBERSHIP?

Gang involvement can begin as early as elementary school. Children as young as 7- 8 years have been recruited to work for gangs. Once in the gang, the child's behavior may change either suddenly or gradually, but it will follow a pattern. To be accepted by the gang, he or she must adopt a defiant attitude toward authority figures. The defiance may be expressed by violent behavior at school or home.

At school the child lets everyone know of his or her new status. He wears gang clothing and becomes less respectful toward the teacher and others. The new gang member may fight others to gain a reputation for being "bad." He will pick a victim, but before doing so, he will announce his intentions to friends and others so they can be there to cheer the gang member on and spread the word about his toughness.



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When at home, the new gang member's defiance may or may not manifest itself in violence, depending on the relationship with the parents and other family members. However, if the family interferes with the child's gang involvement, there may be repeated confrontations.

As stated previously, many of the indicators of a gang presence in a community may also be used as indicators of a young person's gang membership. Once again, however, *several* indicators should be present before any assumptions can be made about the young person's gang membership.

EARLY INDICATORS OF POSSIBLE GANG INVOLVEMENT

- Change of friends.
- Decline in grades at school / truancy.
- Keeping late hours.
- Having large sums of money or expensive items, which cannot be explained.
- Drug use.

MORE SERIOUS SIGNS OF GANG MEMBERSHIP

- Gang graffiti on items such as books, posters, and bedroom walls.
- Wearing gang clothing or colors.
- Using hand signals to communicate with others.
- Having photographs showing gang names, slogans, insignia, or gang-like activities.
- Gang tattoos or gang body markings.
- Credible people connecting the individual to gang activity.
- Actual admission of gang membership.

SUPPOSE MY CHILD'S JUST A "WANNA - BE" GANGSTER?

There is no such thing as a "wanna- be" gangster. Any group or individual who wants to form a "gang" or be in a gang, is in the opinion of the Police Department , a "gang" or a "gang member." The "wanna-be" actually has a greater potential to commit criminal acts, particularly violent acts, than the established gangster, as the "wanna-be" has something



to prove. Simply stated, the “*wanna-be*” may be likened to the “J.V.” member who hopes to make the “Varsity.” The same concerns you have regarding the more formal gang or gang member ***should not*** be lessened just because you perceive a youth as merely “*wanna-be*.”

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING IN A GANG?

Youths that fall prey to gang seduction pay a high price for membership. Initiation rights often involve committing serious criminal and usually violent acts, to prove loyalty. With this sort of a start, gang membership almost guarantees a criminal record, not to mention the physical risks and dangers of a violent lifestyle. Gangs often depend on the youngest members to carry out the most serious offenses because juveniles receive more lenient treatment and lesser penalties when found guilty of a crime.

Gang membership exacts a terrible toll from the lives of all who come into contact with the gang member. Indeed, friends who are not involved with gangs are cast aside and soon the youth's only friends are gang members. Families of gang members must be concerned for their own safety as well as that of their son or daughter who is in the gang.

HOW DO I DISCOURAGE MY CHILD FROM JOINING A GANG?

While the foregoing seems to paint a rather dismal picture, we are far from powerless to stop gangs; there is much we can do. The best solution, of course is preventative: some proactive steps that you can undertake are outlined below. Remember, gang involvement does not occur overnight - it develops gradually. Young people in trouble cry out in different ways. You must try to recognize the warning signs. Prevention begins with being concerned. It sounds simplistic, but it is the first and most important step.

Families and institutions that meet the needs of our young people go a long way in keeping them from becoming at-risk; the intervention of family members and institutions can bring needy children back from the edge and make them significantly less at risk. The key is healthy, constructive *communication* combined with an ability to provide the child with a high sense of *self-esteem*. Bonding with your child is essential. The following are family bonding strategies:



IDENTITY

Give them a sense of who they are in the family, what values your family represents, and a sense of personal importance, worth and self-esteem.

PROTECTION

The provision of food, shelter, clothing and familial warmth fosters the feeling that the family is a refuge from outside negative forces, a place where they can receive love and understanding. When an outside “hurt” occurs, the family (not the street) is the place where “wounds get licked” and healing takes place.

SENSE OF BELONGING

Acceptance is probably one of the strongest emotionally drawing forces. Families do not need to condone negative behavior, yet it is important to convey to our children that they are still loved and are an important part of the family - even when they make mistakes.

SETTING LIMITS

Children claim that they want freedom and they do need freedom. However, freedom with no boundaries or constraints places inordinate pressure on young minds. Our young people generally have not reached the appropriate level of maturity to make certain behavioral decisions. We can reduce their pressure by setting specific rules. Children do not feel loved or protected if there are no limits set. Unfortunately, we are sometimes hesitant to set these boundaries for fear of being termed ‘mean’ or rejected by our children. However, reasonable boundaries should be set for the purpose of teaching the child to make proper choices. If you are reluctant to be the “bad guy” just remember that gangs have no problems setting limits for their members - **"IF YOU CROSS THE LINE AGAINST US, YOU'RE DEAD."**

SET GOOD EXAMPLES BY YOUR OWN BEHAVIOR

Parent by example. Your own inconsistencies in alcohol abuse or illegal substance use and the use of intimidation or violence in resolving disputes does not go unnoticed by your children.

SPEND TIME WITH AND REALLY LISTEN TO YOUR CHILD

Develop good communication with your children. Good communication is open and frequent, and it takes on a positive tone. It does not condemn or put down, and



allows you to directly influence your child's choices, as well as working to encourage your child to seek answers from you and not from the street. Spend time with your children: occupy their free time by giving them responsibilities at home and by getting them involved in after-school sports, recreation, dance, the arts, and other busy activities; plan things that the whole family can enjoy and expose them to different places outside of your neighborhood - parks, museums, the beach, and the like, as best as you can afford.

SUPERVISE (age appropriate) YOUR CHILD'S ACTIVITIES

All of your child's free time **should not** be unchaperoned. You should know the where, what and with whom of your child's activities. Discourage your children from hanging around with a bad element or suspected gang members. If your child chooses friends that are mostly from gangs, then your child is probably involved or will become involved in one also.

MONITOR WHAT THEY SEE AND WHAT THEY HEAR

Music, reading materials, television and movies do have an influence on behavior.

BE ACTIVE IN SCHOOL / COMMUNITY / FAITH-BASED GROUPS

Support those institutions that inculcate positive values: cooperate and assist schools in the formation and enforcement of rules, monitoring of student activities, and student attendance.

SET BOUNDARIES

It has been said before and cannot be overstated: set limits for your children. At an early age, children need to know what is acceptable and what is unacceptable behavior. Do not allow your children to stay out late or spend a lot of unsupervised time out in the streets. Teach them respect for other people and other people's property.

FOSTER AN ANTI-GANG MENTALITY

Develop an anti-gang environment in your home. Clearly and continually express to your children at an early age your disapproval of gang activity and of any family members joining a gang. Do not allow your children to write or practice writing gang names, symbols, or any other gang graffiti on their books, papers, clothes, bodies, walls or any other place. Do not buy or allow your children to dress in gang style clothing. (If your children dress in gang style clothing, they are expressing an interest in gangs and will attract the attention of gangs; if they are in the wrong area at the wrong time, they could be victimized). Learn about gang and drug activity in your community. Attend informational meetings, learn about gangs, support community and law enforcement efforts to suppress gang activity: become an informed parent.



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It is unfortunate, but true, that nothing can guarantee that a child will not be lured into the gang life. However, by engaging in the foregoing you will absolutely minimize the likelihood of your child ever joining a gang.

HOW CAN T.A.G. HELP ME?

The Nassau County *Taskforce Against Gangs (T.A.G.)* can provide you with further information on gang prevention and assist you in matching the services available in your area to your particular needs. *T.A.G.* has access to a full range of help services: family counseling, mental health, drug and alcohol assistance, housing, job assistance, education, life skills training, gang awareness and gang intervention programs, just to name a few. Additionally, *T.A.G.* will collaborate with local community groups to help achieve the allied goals of decreased gang activity and the fostering of more secure neighborhoods.

HOW DOES T.A.G. WORK?

The first step is to contact your local *T.A.G.* coordinator listed on the back page of this packet. The *T.A.G.* coordinator is a specially trained Police Officer assigned to the Problem Oriented Policing Unit in your local Nassau County Police Precinct. If you reside in a village with its own police department, you may call that police department, or the nearest Nassau County Police Precinct POP Office for further information.

Local T.A.G. Coordinators

FIRST PRECINCT 900 Merrick Road, Baldwin, New York 11510

573-6170

Serving: Baldwin, Bellmore and Merrick (north of Sunrise Highway), East Meadow (south of Hempstead Turnpike), Freeport, North Bellmore, North Merrick, Rockville Centre, Roosevelt, South Hempstead, Uniondale (south of Hempstead Turnpike)

SECOND PRECINCT 7700 Jericho Turnpike, Woodbury, New York 11797

573-6270

Serving: Bayville, Brookville, Center Island, Cold Spring Harbor, Cove Neck, East Norwich, Glen Cove, Hicksville, Jericho, Lattingtown, Laurel Hollow, Locust Valley, Mattinecock, Mill Neck, Muttontown, Old Brookville, Oyster Bay, Plainview, (north of Old Country Road), Syosset, Upper Brookville, Woodbury

THIRD PRECINCT 214 Hillside Avenue, Williston Park, New York 11596

573-6370



GANG AWARENESS

Serving: Albertson, Bellerose, Bellerose Terrace, Carle Place, East Meadow (north of Hempstead Turnpike), East Williston, East Garden City, Floral Park, Floral Park Center, Garden City, Garden City Park, Hempstead, Herricks, Mineola, New Cassel, New Hyde Park, North New Hyde Park, North Hempstead, Old Westbury, Roosevelt Field, Roslyn Heights, Searingtown, Stewart Manor, Uniondale (north of Hempstead Turnpike), Westbury, Williston Park

FOURTH PRECINCT 1699 Broadway, Hewlett, New York 11557

573-6470

Serving: Atlantic Beach, Bay Park, Cedarhurst, East Rockaway, Grant Park, Hewlett, Hewlett Harbor, Inwood, Island Park, Lawrence, Lido Beach, Long Beach, Oceanside, Point Lookout, Quigley Beach, Woodsburgh, Woodmere

FIFTH PRECINCT 1655 Dutch Broadway, Elmont, New York 11003

573-6570

Serving: Elmont, Franklin Square, Garden City South, Lakeview, Lynbrook, Malverne, South Floral Park, Valley Stream, West Hempstead

SIXTH PRECINCT 100 Community Drive, Manhasset, New York 11030

573-6670

Serving: East Hills, Flower Hill, Glen Head, Glenwood Estates, Glenwood Landing, Great Neck, Great Neck Estates, Great Neck Plaza, Greenvale, Harbor Hills, Kensington, Kings Point, Lake Success, Manhasset, Manorhaven, Manorville, Munsey Park, North Hills, Plandome, Roslyn, Roslyn Estates, Roslyn Harbor, Roslyn Heights, Russell Gardens, Saddle Rock, Sands Point, Sea Cliff, Thomaston, University Gardens

SEVENTH PRECINCT 3636 Merrick Road, Seaford, New York 11783

573-6770

Serving: Bellmore and Merrick (south of Sunrise Highway), Massapequa, Massapequa Park, North Massapequa, East Massapequa, Seaford, Tobay Beach, Wantagh, West Amityville

EIGHTH PRECINCT 286 Wantagh Avenue, Levittown, New York 11756

573-6870

Serving: Bethpage, Farmingdale, Hicksville and Plainview (south of Old Country Road), Island Trees, Levittown, Old Bethpage, Plainedge, South Farmingdale

For Emergencies Dial 911



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