

GANG VIOLENCE & GUNS

Gangs pose a significant threat to community safety as well as those who are members of a gang. Understanding how gangs develop and what they offer to their members is critical in order to create effective intervention and prevention strategies. Although gangs all engage in criminal behavior, extensive research reveals that they have different codes of conduct, are motivated by different values, and commit different types of crimes. Understanding such distinctions is crucial to developing effective local responses.



Here are tips on how to help make your community safer:

- Encourage schools and other community organizations to adopt and enforce alcohol-, drug-, and smoke-free environments.
- Join community organizations that promote policies to help kids, like restricting the marketing of tobacco or reducing community violence.
- Support businesses that promote healthy choices for kids.
- Help other kids in your community by becoming a mentor to them, or by equipping them to become a mentor to younger kids.
- Get involved with the youth group at your place of worship or local community center
- Distance yourself from unhealthy, negative risk-taking behaviors.
- Avoid imitating the violence you see.

Recognize that gangs, weapons and violence are tough issues to deal with. Violence in the media, in neighborhoods and even in schools contribute to individuals feeling frightened, unsafe and insecure.

If you ever see someone bringing a gun onto your school campus, report it immediately. The worst cases of school violence all have one thing in common: Guns

If you see or find a gun, DO NOT HANDLE IT. Encourage everyone to stay away from it. Report what you have seen immediately. If you see a person with a gun, walk the other way, quietly. Report what you have seen. If you don't feel safe reporting it, call 9-1-1 anonymously.

CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES

“Tookies Story”

When Stanley “Tookie” Williams was seventeen years old he teamed up with Raymond Lee Washington to start the Crips. In April of 1981, Tookie was found guilty of murdering four people and was sent to San Quentin’s death row.

When Tookie was young, he thought it would be cool to go to jail. He wanted to prove to the world how “hard” he was. As a young person, he was influenced by individuals that referred to prison as “gladiator schools.” Through life experiences, including the reality of his incarceration, he realized how “messed-up” his thinking was.

Over the years, Tookie grew to regret the violence that he and his gang caused. While serving time on death row, he did as much as he could from prison to guide young men and women away from tough street lives and incarceration.

In addition to several children’s books that denounce gang life and encourages youth to make positive changes, Tookie wrote *Life in Prison*. In this book, he describes just what it’s like to live life “locked up.” He details the humiliation, boredom, loss of freedom, and loneliness he experienced.

In December 2005, Tookie Williams was executed by lethal injection.

(Excerpt adapted from Power Source, Taking charge of your life)

