



## A Message from the Dept. of Safety

Adults can often feel uncomfortable discussing sensitive issues like gangs and violence with young people. However, if young people are dealing with gangs in their school or community, they need opportunities to talk candidly about these issues with trusted adults. The significance of an anti-gang message increases when it comes from a person who has a caring relationship with the young person.

### **How Do I Know if My Child Is in a Gang?**

Here are some signs that may indicate gang involvement:

- Shirts, hats, and other clothing in matching colors or with matching logos and symbols. Also check for insignia on jewelry, belts, shoelaces, or tattoos.
- Gang graffiti on notebooks, clothing and other personal belongings. Watch for things written in Old English-style letters or in hard to decipher handwriting.
- Newly acquired and unexplained money or expensive possessions that are displayed, worn, or shared with peers.
- Carrying or showing off a gun, knife, or other weapon.
- Changes in the behavior and lifestyle of their children, such as:
  - Poor or failing grades in school.
  - A hostile or defiant attitude.
  - Secrecy about activities or time away from home.
  - Drug or alcohol use.
  - Involvement in illegal activities or trouble with law enforcement.

Here are some factors to consider when talking about gang-related issues with youth:

- Be sensitive to the child's level of understanding. What is he/she aware of? What is he/she seeing in the neighborhood and at school?
- Take a strong, no-tolerance stand against gangs and violence. Do not allow your child to glorify gangs, dress in gang-style clothing, or use gang-related slang or insults.
- Talk about the negative effects of gang membership on young people, their families, friends, schools and communities.
- Have everyday discussions with your child about positive life choices.
- Emphasize to young people that their choices matter because their happiness and well-being are important not only to themselves but to the people who care about them.
- Emphasize your child's positive qualities and give them positive feedback regularly.

Finally, please understand that consistency is key. Young people need to hear consistent messages about gangs delivered by the adults they know and trust: family members, teachers, coaches, neighbors, etc. Remain accessible and involved with these young people. These long-term, caring relationships with adults can provide them incentives and a support network to stay out of gangs.