

Shielding Kids From Criminals

Criminal activity and gang violence have become serious problems in urban areas and are rapidly spreading into suburban and rural communities as well. The gang members often engage in vandalism, theft, assault, and the sale of drugs in schools as well as in the community, as a result, many schools have become centers of violence and fear rather than safe centers for learning. Kids and youth join gangs for a variety of reasons: the need to belong, low self-esteem, peer pressure, boredom, academic failure, and lack of employment. Studies report that gang members are as young as 9 and as old as 30, and males outnumber females by 20-to-1. Though ominous the threat of gangs may seem, parents can prevent their children from joining, the support and nurturance children receive at home enable them to make good decisions and to find alternatives to gang involvement.

Try to safe guard your child from gangs by spending time with each of your children every day, show affection and make them feel special and important. Always contact your local police department to find out if any gangs are active in your community. Kids are attracted to gangs by their offer of friendship and support, start teaching your children early—from age 4 or 5—that gangs are dangerous and do not provide positive support or positive role models. Educate your children what to do if gang members approach them. And know your children's friends and families and your children's whereabouts at all times, set definite curfews for your children. Kids with a history of academic failure are at high risk for gang membership, if your child has learning difficulties, work together with his or her teachers. Do seek help from tutors and guidance counselors; help your child with his or her homework.

Always be on the lookout for signs of possible gang involvement: change in a child's friends, change in dress habits such as wearing the same color combination all the time, secrecy about activities, flashing hand signs, having income from unknown resources, having symptoms of alcohol and other drug use, and having a diminished interest in the family and school. And if you notice these signs, contact your school principal or guidance counselor, juvenile justice workers, or law enforcement personnel. Try to keep your children active in sports, clubs, and volunteer work, and family and community activities. Do have your children set aside quiet time for reflection to allow them to sort out their feelings. And if prayer is part of your family's religious tradition, you might encourage your children to pray when they need strength. Simple way for kids to feel confident and in control is for them to express compassion and provide help for the victims of disaster. Children can be transformed from victim into helper by writing letters to survivors or contributing to relief funds

About the Author

Jennifer Fairbanks is a community supporter and researcher in [violence against women](#) along with her side business [family violence prevention fund](#).

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