

# Identifying and Addressing a Gang Problem

National Crime Prevention Council  
2006



# Objectives

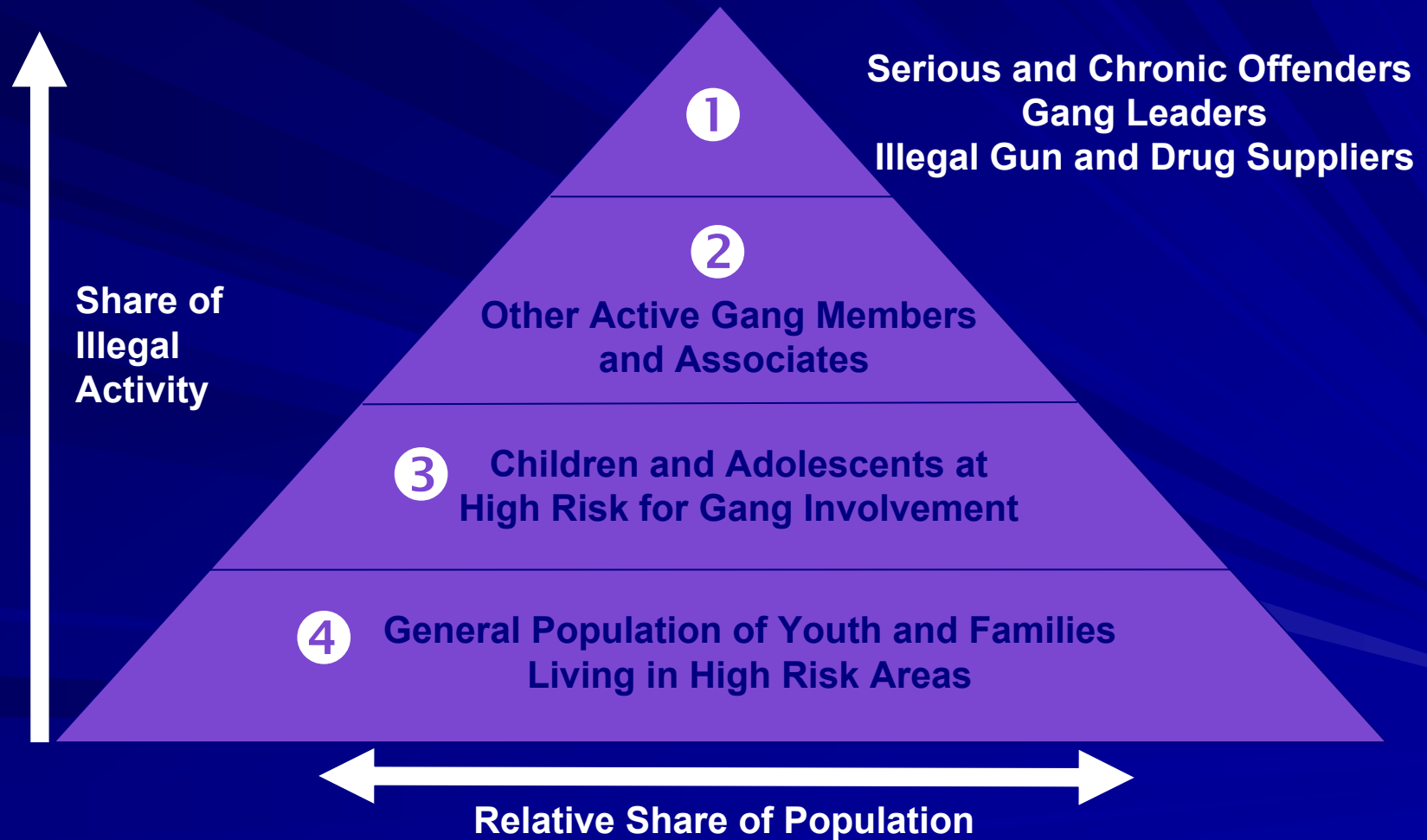
- Look at a definition of a gang
- Look at prevention and intervention strategies
- Learn several indicators and risk factors of gangs in your community
- Explore tips of what can be done by parents, schools, and neighbors to prevent gang activity

# What is a Gang?

There is no nationally accepted definition, but most agree on the following elements:

- A group of three or more people
- These people share a common identifying sign, symbol, or name
- Gang members individually or collectively engage in an ongoing pattern of criminal or delinquent activity
- They are often between 12 and 24

# Crime and Gang Involvement



# Types of Gangs

- Traditional gangs
- Business/profit gangs
- White hate gangs
- Copy-cat gangs
- Delinquent social gangs

# Conditions that Enable Gangs To Grow

- Socializing agents are ineffective
- Abundance of free and unstructured time
- Limited exposure and access to good jobs and careers
- A place to congregate, a well-defined neighborhood

Do we have a gang problem?

Are our children at risk of  
joining a gang?

# Indicators of Possible Gang Involvement

- Purchasing or desire to buy or wear clothing of all one color or style
- Changing appearance with special haircuts, eyebrow markings, or tattoos
- Using hand signs

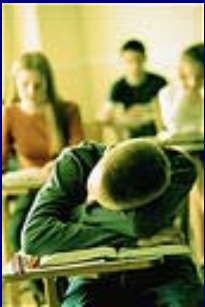




# Indicators of Possible Gang Involvement (cont.)



- Gang graffiti on folders, desks, walls, and buildings
- Developing a bad attitude towards family, school, and authorities



- Staying out later than usual
- Carrying weapons



# Indicators of Possible Gang Involvement (cont.)

- Withdrawing from family activities
- Changing friends; spending time with undesirable people
- Having more money or possessions





Hand signs are used to show allegiance to a specific gang.



Some gangs also use symbols to identify their gang. This gang is called “Mara Salvatrucha,” clique-Centrales



**“Mi Vida Loca” -  
My Crazy Life**

**Tear Drop**



# Is All Graffiti Gang Graffiti?



No, some graffiti is tagger graffiti.

# What is Tagger Graffiti?



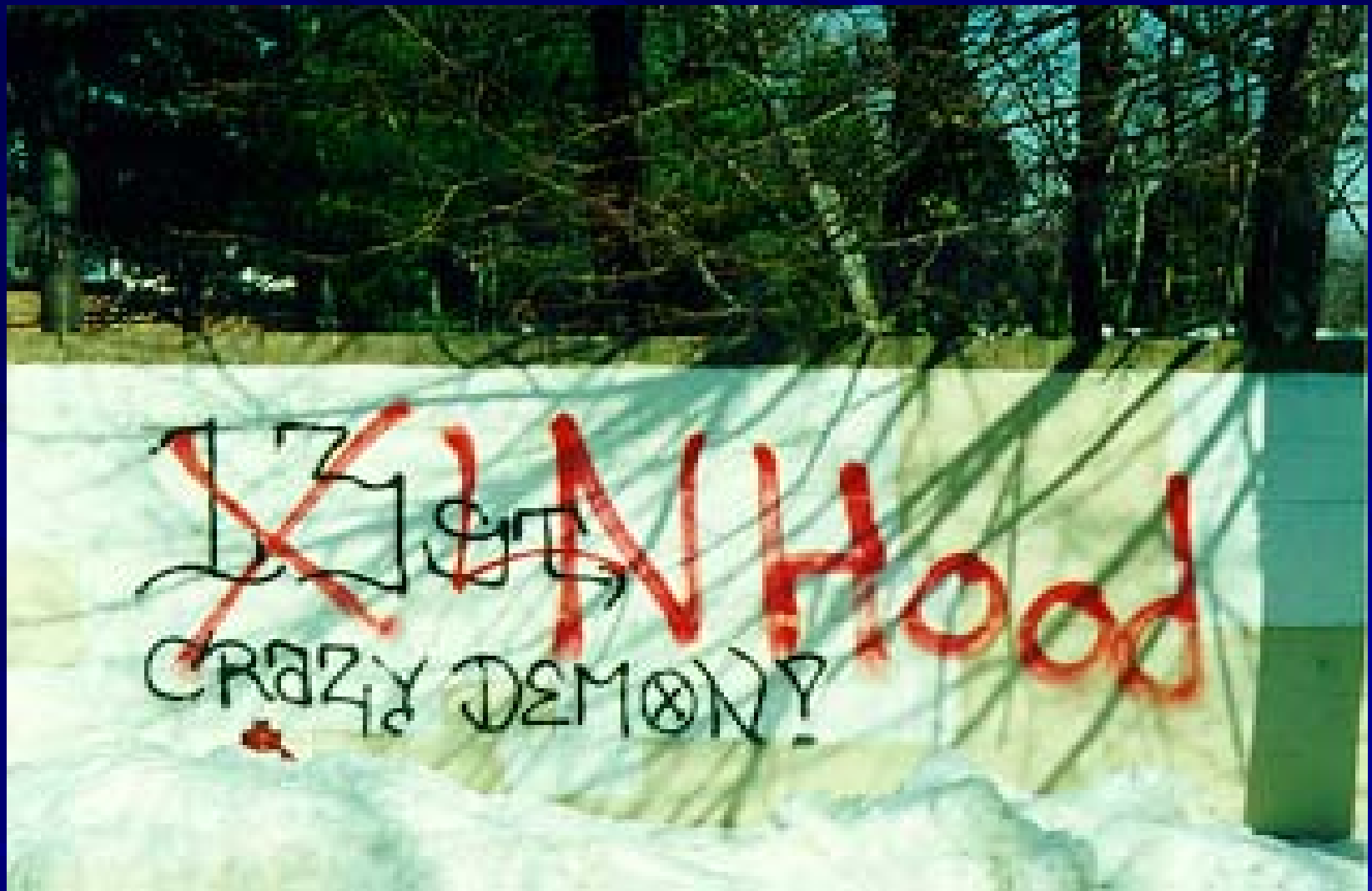
It is usually more artistic.

# What Can We Learn From Graffiti?



Gangs may use graffiti to claim a particular area as their turf.





Graffiti may show what gangs are fighting, arguing, or “beefing.”



Graffiti may present the gang roll call.

# Why Individuals Join Gangs

- Fun and excitement
- Identity and sense of belonging
- Peer pressure
- Financial gain/drugs
- Protection
- A family tradition
- A failure to understand what being in a gang means



# Who Joins Gangs?

- Recruits generally range in age from 12 to 24 years
- Most members are boys, but 10 percent of all gang members are girls
- All ethnic groups and income levels are represented, and gangs are found in all parts of the country
- Certain risk factors increase the likelihood of gang involvement

# Associated Risk Factors

- Living in an area with a high level of gang activity, drug/alcohol use, available firearms
- Lack of a positive support system at home
- Violence against family members
- Exposure to TV shows, movies, and/or music that glorifies violence



# Associated Risk Factors (cont.)

- Lack of alternative activities, such as community youth programs
- Lack of positive role models
- Low self-esteem and/or a sense of hopelessness about the future
- Poor decision-making and communication skills
- Too much unsupervised free time



# Associated Risk Factors (cont.)

- Poor school achievement
- Problematic child-parent relationship
- Lack of respect for authority (parents, teachers, law enforcement officers)
- Family members who are or were gang members



# Responding to a Gang Problem

- Prevention
  - Primary and secondary
- Intervention
- Suppression
- Reentry



*TIPS*

What Parents  
Can Do

# What Parents Can Do

- Be a positive role model.
- Do everything possible to involve your children in supervised, positive group activities.
- Praise your children for doing well and encourage them to do their very best.
- Get to know your children's friends and their parents.



# What Parents Can Do (cont.)

- Set limits for your children, and enforce them.
- Do not allow your children to dress in gang-style clothing, to practice gang hand signs, or to write gang graffiti on any surface, including their bodies.



# What Parents Can Do (cont.)

- Know where your children are at all times, and schedule activities to occupy their free time.
- Get involved in your children's education, and encourage them to stay in school. Be active in the PTA.
- Teach your children to set positive goals, to hold high standards, and to prepare for a positive future.



# What Parents Can Do (cont.)

- Explain to your children that only a very small percentage of youth join gangs.
- Help your children to understand the natural consequences of being involved in a gang.
- The more connected a child is with family, school, community, and positive activities, the less likely he or she will be attracted to gangs.



## *TIPS*

# What Schools Can Do

# What Schools Can Do

- Identify at-risk students and students who are already gang members. Encourage them to participate in sports, drama, music, art, and other positive activities that will increase their confidence and sense of belonging.
- Don't allow anyone to wear gang clothing, paraphernalia, or other items associated with gang activity at school; don't permit gang hand signals.
- Photograph and remove all graffiti from the school grounds and property.
- Promote afterschool programs that address the prevention of violence.

# What Schools Can Do (cont.)

- Work with parents, counselors, School Resource Officers, and school personnel to determine when intervention is necessary and what steps should be taken.
- Ensure that gang and drug prevention are part of the curricula, and present gang and drug awareness programs to parents.



# What Neighbors Can Do

- Get to know your neighbors and their children.
- Communicate.
- Maintain a standard for your neighborhood's appearance that tells gangs that they are not welcome.
- Work with your local law enforcement agency to develop a community strategy against gangs.

# Getting Out of a Gang

- Speak to a counselor, police officer, clergy, or other professionals about ways youth can create distance between themselves and the gang.
- Relocate.
- Get information about tattoo removal programs.

# Notable Quotes

“Knowing gang life was so surrounded by death, I don’t know how anyone could WANT to get into a gang.”

*Miss Moni, former gang member*

“The way out is not by guns and violence. It is by using [your] minds. Educate yourself.”

*EZ-T, former gang member*

*Quotes taken from Gangstyles; [www.streetgangstyle.com](http://www.streetgangstyle.com)*

# Gang Program Resources

- National Youth Gang Center Website  
[www.iir.com/nygc](http://www.iir.com/nygc)
- OJJDP Summary: Youth Gang Programs and Strategies (Howell, 2000)  
[www.iir.com/nygc/PublicationLinks.htm#YGPI](http://www.iir.com/nygc/PublicationLinks.htm#YGPI)
- Addressing Community Gang Problems: A Practical Guide (BJA, 1998)  
[www.iir.com/nygc/PublicationLinks.htm#CAYG](http://www.iir.com/nygc/PublicationLinks.htm#CAYG)

# Gang Program Resources (cont.)

■ G.R.E.A.T Programs  
[www.great-online.org](http://www.great-online.org)

■ Latin American Youth Center  
[www.layc-dc.org](http://www.layc-dc.org)

■ National Crime Prevention Council:  
Teens, Crime, and the Community  
[www.ncpc.org/tcc](http://www.ncpc.org/tcc)

■ National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center  
[www.safeyou.org](http://www.safeyou.org)

■ National Youth Gang Center  
[www.irr.com/nygc](http://www.irr.com/nygc)

Special Thanks  
to

Fairfax County, VA  
Police Department

for much of the material in this  
presentation

# National Crime Prevention Council

1000 Connecticut Avenue, NW

Thirteenth Floor

Washington, DC 20036

202-466-6272

202-296-1356 (fax)

[www.ncpc.org](http://www.ncpc.org)

*Used with permission from the Bureau of Justice Assistance  
September 2006*



# Presenter Contact Information