

The California Department of Justice estimates there are as many as **300,000** gang members in California alone. (2002) Conservative estimates are that there are over 23,000 youth gangs with almost 665,000 members in the U.S. (National Institute of Justice, 1998). Although there is no nationally accepted definition of what a gang is, California Penal Code 186.22 defines street gangs as “a group of three or more individuals having a common name or common identifying sign or symbol, and whose members individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal activity.”

Very Brief time line – defining moments

1968 - “Robert Salas,” an original Mexican Mafia member is roommate with Hector Padilla, a Mexican national in Northern California in San Quentin Prison. While Salas and Padilla are out of their cell, “Pieface,” another Mexican Mafia member sneaks in the cell and steals a pair of Florsheim shoes that belong to Padilla. Pieface goes back to his cell only to find that the shoes are too small. He gives the stolen shoes to Salas as a gift. Salas accepts the shoes and puts them on. Salas walks back into his cell only to find Padilla looking for his shoes. Padilla sees Salas wearing his shoes and accuses Salas of stealing them. Salas and Padilla argue and begin fighting. Padilla is stabbed numerous times during the argument and dies. This murder starts the “Shoe Wars,” solidifying the rivalry between the Mexicans from the South and the North.

1980 - The traditional ways of Mexican street gangs are abandoned or mutated. Hispanic gang members have now begun to commit crimes in their own neighborhoods.

Tagger Crews develop as an alternative to gang membership.

1988 - By the end of the year there are approximately 450 gangs in Los Angeles with an estimated 5,000 members.

1990 - By early 1990’s gang violence escalates to another all-time high. Guns become the first weapon of choice for gang members.

1994 - Methamphetamine starts to become the drug of choice for Hispanic gangs.

1996 - Every state in the U.S. reports the presence of street gangs. There is an expanding gang sub-culture in rural America. African-American and Hispanic gangs are emulated the most among all groups.

2000 - Female associates and members are becoming more actively involved in drug operations as mules by carrying weapons and drugs for male gang members.

Generic “Sureño” and “Norteño” gangs are well established in many states.

Initiation

The traditional initiation for males in Hispanic/Latino gangs is a “jump-in”. A jump-in occurs when a group of gang members beat the new member in (with his consent). The new member wanting to be initiated into the gang is “jumped” by the other members. Usually the gang members who participate in the jump-in are considered “O.G.’s”. The O.G.’s determine the duration of the jump-in and how many gang members will participate. Although the “jump-in” is the most common form of initiation, there are several other ways to be initiated into a gang. Some other forms of initiation include:

- **Walk in** - You walk in and “put in work” by yourself.
- **Sponsored** - Another gang member sponsors you in (usually an O.G.)
- **Heredity** - Family is involved in gang (automatic in)
- **Sexed-in** - This form applies to females and is defined as having sex with a number of the O.G.’s. (Please refer to the "Female Gangs" section on pg. 56 for more information)
- **Crime in** - A crime is committed to prove loyalty to the gang

In the early 1980’s gang members continued wearing their khaki pants and Pendleton shirts. A few changes were made to their style, one being their shoes. No longer were they wearing Stacey Adams shoes as they did in the 1940’s. Nike™ tennis shoes became very popular, specifically the black and white style known as “Cortez” shoes. Another change in the attire included bandanas. In the 1980’s bandanas were no longer used on the forehead. Bandanas were folded and ironed, then tucked into a pocket to display one’s gang affiliation. They were now used for purposes of intimidation and confrontation. Also, black sunglasses were introduced, commonly known as “shades” or “loks”. The shades were used to represent a hard look and to not let others know in which direction the gang member was looking, or if he/she was under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.

During the late 1990’s and early 2000, gang members’ attire changed dramatically. Today young gang members do not limit themselves to a particular style of clothing. They now wear denim and khaki pants. They wear button shirts, t-shirts and sweaters. All types of tennis shoes are worn instead of leather shoes (Filas™, Reebok™, Sketchers™, etc). Many continue to wear the bandanas placing them in the back pants pocket,

leaving a piece sticking out so that others can notice the color. This continues to be a simple way to represent a gang. Sports jerseys are especially popular among many gang members as well.

The style of dress worn by Hispanic/Latino gang members has changed throughout the years. They have created new dress styles and altered some that have been around for several years. What has not changed are the heavily ironed clothes, creased pants, oversized shirts, spotless shoes, clean haircuts and the pride they take in their “cholo” look.

Gang members communicate with each other as well as other gangs by using hand signs. Hand signs consist of rapid movement of the hands. Gang members are able to spell out letters and numbers using their hands as a way to challenge rival gangs.

SYMBOLS MEANING

XIII - Thirteen (Mexican Mafia) “M” 13 th letter in the Alphabet – Mexican Mafia Sureños - Southerners Mara Salvatrucha (MS) El Salvador Color - BLUE Eastside (ES) Blue Pit Bulls – New trend	XIV - Fourteen (Nuestra Familia) (NF) RAZA “N” – 14 th Letter in the Alphabet – Nuestra Familia Norteños - Northerners Color - RED Westside (WS) Northside Santa Cruz Red Pit Bulls – New trend
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- RIP - Rest In Peace
- 187 - CA Penal code for homicide
- Area Codes i.e. 510- Oakland, 313- L.A.
- C/S Con Safos (Back to you)
- R- Rifa (Rules)
- P/V - Por Vida/For Life
- X (cross out over a rival’s moniker) Shows disrespect to rival gang members

Colors - Red and White NAZI Low Riders SKINHEADS HELLS ANGELS ‘81’ Death Skull on jacket

GET INVOLVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY

A strong, united community will force gangs to move or disperse.

- Get to know your neighbors
- Form support groups and/or join neighborhood watch groups
- Discourage gangs from “kickin’it” in your neighborhoods
- Have graffiti removed as soon as possible
- Teach your children civic pride
- Attend community functions

WHY KIDS JOIN GANGS

Youth will join a gang for various reasons. The overwhelming reason for kids to join is to meet a need that is not being fulfilled by their family, school, or environment. The following are some of the reasons why youth decide to become involved with gangs.

- Attention
- Desire for friendship and a sense of belonging
- Nowhere else to turn
- Peer pressure
- Low self-esteem
- Respect/desire to be recognized
- Fear/need for protection
- Sense of power
- Love
- Victim of poverty or inequality
- Family tradition
- Excitement
- Access to drugs, guns, sex, and money
- To feel superior
- Family problems/lack of positive communication
- Inadequate adult supervision
- Fad/media glamorizing gangster life

WARNING SIGNS

Defiant behavior- Most youth express defiant behavior from time to time. Gang involved youth are extremely defiant of authority figures and will at times challenge authority or make threats against authority figures.

Change in dress- Many gang members use colored clothing, sports team logos on clothing, a certain style of clothing, or clothing accessories to denote gang membership. If the youth in question begins dressing in only one certain style or color, parents and teachers should begin to take notice and ask why the youth is dressing differently. A child that likes a certain sports team and dresses with that team's logo is exhibiting normal behavior. However, if the child does not follow sports and still dresses in a sports team logo, further inspection is warranted.

New friends- The child may begin to associate with a new group of friends, and if these friends all dress in similar styles or colors, parents and teachers should begin to discuss why the child is associating with this new group of friends. If the new group of friends consists of gang members, then the chances for the child to be involved with a gang increase significantly. Parents should not allow their child to associate with this group.

Tough image- Gang involved youth believe that a very tough, mean, or aggressive image is very important. Children that are becoming gang members will begin to act very tough, often times using profanity and using a defiant posture whenever they are confronted.

Starts using nickname- In the world of gangs, you are not anyone until you have earned a nickname. Gang members refer to each other by nickname. In some gangs, youth do not know the real names of members just their street names or nicknames. Parents and teachers should be aware of the different types of gang nicknames and should not allow children to use nicknames that are associated with gangs or violence, such as "Sniper, L'il Killa, C-Dog, Flaco" etc.

Secrecy- Many gang involved youth possess gang-related paraphernalia, pictures, samples of graffiti, etc. These youth may hide gang paraphernalia, drugs or weapons in the house. They may not want parents to see graffiti written on clothing, backpacks, furniture or the walls of the bedroom. They may try to get a lock on the bedroom door or threaten parents if they try to get into the bedroom.

Money- Some youth get involved in gangs to make money illegally. Crimes may include armed robbery, selling drugs, being a lookout for drug dealers, auto theft/burglary, etc. Parents should be concerned over unexplained money or material good such as jewelry, radio, televisions, computer games etc.

Excessive sleeping- Research indicates that teenagers naturally need more sleep than adults do. However, gang members like to hang out at night. In addition, gangs may commit crimes such as drive-by shootings or graffiti late at night. Thus, gang members are often up until early in the morning and may sleep until noon or beyond. Excessive sleeping may also indicate alcohol or other drug use.

Cuts and bruises- Gang members tend to get into more physical confrontations than positive groups such as the Boy Scouts. Fights may occur between gang members in the same gang, or with rival gangs, or even with individuals that are not part of the gang world. Be aware of unexplained cuts and bruises, especially on the knuckles and hands (from hitting objects or people).

Tattoos- Gang member use tattoos to demonstrate what gang they belong to. Younger gang members may use a pen or magic marker to draw the gang's name or initials on their body. They may also draw their gang nickname and use other gang slogans for their tattoos. Older individuals may "carve" or "brand" gang-related symbols or words into their skin. Eventually this behavior will lead to the individual getting a permanent tattoo. A youth that proudly displays a fake or real gang tattoo is demonstrating that they are currently involved in a gang.

Graffiti- Like tattoos, graffiti can be the name of a gang, initials, numbers or symbols that are associated with the gang. Graffiti is not just written on the walls of buildings but can be found on books, notebooks, backpacks, clothing and furniture. Graffiti is used to mark gang territory or demonstrates involvement in gangs. Youth that are involved with gangs will generally have graffiti written on personal possessions.

Practicing behaviors- Just as youth that are interested in sports will practice that sport, youth interested in gangs will practice gang-related behaviors. They will usually practice graffiti writing on paper or notebooks. Some parents have reported finding their son or daughter staring into a mirror. These youth are practicing a tough and menacing stare often referred to as "mad-dogging." Youth just beginning gang involvement will spend hours practicing the hand signs of the gang.

Alcohol/drug abuse- Gang members have easy access to alcohol and drugs. Some gang members get involved with gangs just to party.

Generally, one indicator, by itself, does not mean that the youth in question is involved in a gang. However, some warning signs may signal a greater interest in the gang lifestyle such as practicing gang hand signs and graffiti. Warning signs should be taken as a collective, but if the youth has gang graffiti in their possession, has a gang type of a tattoo, or using a gang type of nickname, this would indicate that the youth is fully-involved with gangs.