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# CRIME PREVENTION BULLETIN

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## Taylor Police Offer Gang Awareness Tips for Parents

Today many parents hear the word “gang” and fear their child may end up a member of such a group. Other citizens may fear their neighborhoods becoming victim to gang activity whether it be isolated or widespread.

Chief of Police Dale Tamsen says that gang activity in the City of Taylor is often sporadic and appears to be declining.

“Fortunately, Taylor hasn’t experienced any major gang problems,” Tamsen said. “We sometimes encounter incidents of graffiti, but not the type of violence usually associated with major gang situations.”

Research shows that parents play a pivotal role in keeping teens out of gangs. Negative influences within the family—including domestic violence, child abuse, harsh or inconsistent parenting practices, and/or drug/alcohol abuse by family members—can increase the risk that a youth will join a gang. Also, a large majority of gang members are from single-parent homes. Keep in mind, however, that very few young



people from single parent homes actually end up involved with gangs.

Parents can protect their children by monitoring their activities and using positive mentoring and discipline techniques.

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the early adolescent years (12-14 years of age) are a crucial time when youths are exposed to gangs and may consider joining a gang. Behaviors parents can look for as indicators their teen may be involved in a gang include:

*(continued on Page 2)*

### Inside this issue:

Gang Identifiers	2
Graffiti	3
Gangs on the Internet	4
Resources	4

## Talk to Your Children Early to Keep Them From Joining Gangs

Parents need to send the message early that they disapprove of gangs.

### Tell them NOT to:

- Mix with gangs or hang out where there are gangs.
- Attend any event sponsored by gangs.
- Use any gang hand signs.
- Wear clothing that may have meaning to gangs.

### Parents should also:

- Know your children’s friends and their parents.
- Talk to your kids about dealing with peer pressure.
- Set limits with your children about what is expected.
- Make time for your family to play, eat meals together, take trips (even to local parks or activities), keep family traditions, and have

family meetings to talk about plans, feelings and complaints.

Many gang members say they joined a gang because it gave them support, caring and a sense of order—things most parents try to give their kids. Odds are, the better you meet these needs, the less need your children will see for gangs.

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## Look for Common Gang Identifiers/Symbols

Gang members may use a style of dress to identify with a gang. This might include clothing or bandanas worn only in certain colors that are representative of a gang.

Other clothing that might be worn by gang members could include pants worn below the waist; gang-themed t-shirts with prison scenes, graffiti, or slogans, two- or three-toned bead necklaces; sports clothing of certain teams; or colored fabric belts, occasionally with a metal buckle that includes the initial or initials of a gang.

Gang trends change and are different from one place to another, so clothing alone may not be enough to show a child's affiliation with a gang.

**Colors:** Many gangs use one or more colors as a symbol to represent their gang. These colors may be worn on shirts, bandanas, multicolored beads, and other items.

**Symbols and Numbers:** Some have special meaning within the gang. A few common symbols from large gangs in the United States are stars, pitchforks, three dots in a triangle, and numbers.

**Sports Items:** Letters, colors, or symbols may have a meaning in local street-gang culture, such as Kansas City Royals (KC = Kill Crips). Sport items may be purchased in a

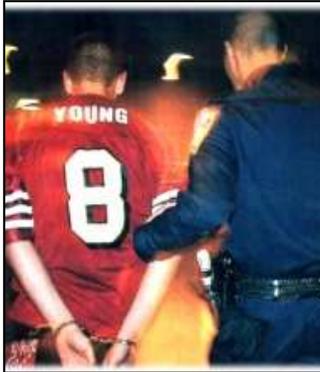
nontraditional color to correspond with the gang's colors or may be altered with graffiti or extra symbols or writing.

**Tattoos:** Tattoos are used to show a person's loyalty to the gang. They include name, initials, or gang symbols and may be found on the hands, neck, face, chest or arms.

**Hand Signs:** Some gangs use specific hand gestures to communicate their affiliation with the gang and issue threats to rival gangs.

**Gang-influenced music and movies:** "Gangsta/gangster" rap is a style of rap music featuring violent lyrics that glorify street-gang culture. Teens may show an interest in gangs through fascination with music and movies that portray street-gang culture.

**Graffiti:** Teens involved in graffiti may be in possession of spray paints, felt-tip markers, or sketchbooks with graffiti works in progress and may have paint on their clothing, backpacks, or other items. Examples of gang-related graffiti signs include drawings of crowns, stars, hearts, and pitchforks. It can also include artistic drawings of a gang's name and items written in hand to read lettering.



## Taylor Police Offer Gang Awareness Tips for Parents

*Continued from Page 1*

- Withdrawing from family.
- Poor school attendance, performance, or behavior.
- Staying out late without reason.
- Unusual secrecy.
- Confrontational/disrespectful behavior.
- Sudden negative opinions about police, school officials and teachers.
- Altered attitude about school, church, or other activities.
- Unusual interest in only one or two colors of clothing or a particular logo.
- Interest in gang-influenced music, videos and movies.
- Use of hand signals with friends.
- Peculiar drawings or symbols on schoolbooks, clothing, notebooks or even walls.
- Drastic changes in hair or dress styles and/or having a group of friends who have the same hair or dress style.
- Withdrawal from friends and going with an entirely new group of friends.
- Secretiveness about activities with friends.
- Out of control behavior.
- Use of new, unfamiliar slang.
- Suspected drug use, such as alcohol, inhalants, and narcotics.
- The presence of firearms, ammunition, or other weapons.
- Non-accidental physical injuries, such as being beaten or injuries to hands and knuckles from fighting.
- Unexplained cash or goods, such as clothing or jewelry that they shouldn't have.
- Using a nickname or attaching a prefix or "pet" name to their own name.

## Preventing and Combating Gang Graffiti

Graffiti is gang advertisement—"a news-letter for the streets." It is painted on walls of public buildings, overpasses and private properties. Gangs use it to make public announcements about their presence, their members and their agenda for future criminal activity.

### Materials Used in Graffiti

Items used to apply graffiti include spray paint, grease pencils, felt-tipped markers, water-based paint, stickers, shoe polish and even crayons. These are items parents can look for as indicators their child may be engaging in gang activity.

### Why Does Graffiti Exist?

- Gangs use graffiti to intimidate other gangs or residents.
- It advertises a gang's name, its territory, its member's names, and names of gangs it is warring against.
- Graffiti is NOT artistic expression. It is not only malicious destruction of property, with criminal penalties, but contributes to violence and other crime.

### Graffiti Affects Neighborhoods

Graffiti leads to psychological and physical declines of neighborhoods. If it's not removed, gang members will take this as a sign of low neighborhood pride and assume they can control the area. With graffiti, there will be an increase in gang crime and a decline in property values.

### Removal of Graffiti

Graffiti should be removed as quickly as possible after its discovery. There is a direct correlation between length of time

prior to removal and rate of reoccurrence. Before graffiti is removed, at least two color photographs should be taken of it. If a trail of photographic evidence can be tied to a vandal who has been caught, it may escalate the crime from a misdemeanor to a felony. Taylor Police recommend that graffiti on private property be removed during early daylight hours by at least two people.

### Graffiti Prevention Tips

- For exposed concrete walls, consider growing vines or ivy to cover the wall.
- Use dark paint on walled surfaces; graffiti does not show up well against a dark background.
- Plant prickly or spiny shrubs adjacent to walls to make it difficult for vandals to get close to the wall.
- Use graffiti-resistant coatings on exterior surfaces.

### Graffiti Abatement Programs (GAP)

Some communities use these to combat serious graffiti problems, they include:

- Using volunteers to remove graffiti on public and private property and seeking donations from businesses for supplies.
- Encouraging Neighborhood Watch teams to report and remove graffiti.
- Provide advice of graffiti removal.
- Provide power washers for removal.
- Get support of local businesses.
- Passing ordinances that hold parents responsible for minors caught vandalizing.
- Passing ordinances requiring graffiti be removed from private property quickly. If passed, owners who don't could be fined.

*"Graffiti leads to psychological and physical declines of neighborhoods. If it's not removed, gang members will take this as a sign of low neighborhood pride and assume they can control the area."*

### Graffiti Removal Tips: *Removing it Quickly is Key to Success*



- The sooner graffiti is removed, the easier it is to clean. Smooth, hard surfaces are the easiest to clean and rough, porous surfaces are the most difficult.
- For pens on painted wood or metal surfaces, use denatured alcohol or Safety Two.
- For spray paint on painted wood, concrete or metal surfaces, use denatured alcohol or repaint.
- For pens or spray paint on unpainted concrete, stucco or aggregate, use Safety Two, then water under pressure with a wire brush.
- For pens or spray paint on glass or plastic, use a window scraper, then denatured alcohol.
- When using chemicals to remove graffiti, be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions and wear proper protective equipment. Some removers may damage some painted surfaces.
- When painting over graffiti, attempt to match the background color, if possible. An alternative is to paint a large section of the wall.



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## Taylor Police Department

The Taylor Police Department officially started in 1949 with just two officers to serve the city's population at the time of 18,848 residents. During 1962, several more officers were added and a number of divisions and bureaus were created. In 1988 the current Police Station was built. Today, TPD has nearly 100 officers to serve 65,800 residents. Units the department has include Patrol Operations, K-9 Units, Investigations, Youth Services, Traffic, and Special Operations. Officers are also assigned to narcotics and County, State and Federal task forces.

The department's Mission, in part, is "dedicated to upholding a professional and ethical police standard while providing a safe and secure environment for all persons living in, working in or visiting the City of Taylor."

## Web Savvy Gangs Recruit Members Using The Internet

Social networking websites are popular among teens. These sites encourage and allow people to exchange information about themselves, and use blogs, chat rooms, email, or instant messaging to communicate. But while they can increase a person's circle of friends they also can increase exposure to unsavory predators.

One of the biggest things parents can do to see if their children may be involved in gangs is to monitor MySpace, MiGente and Bebo websites. The on-line websites have become a major source of recruiting for gang members and can be an important resource for parents.

Gang members might use online banter to befriend individuals and invite them to parties, where recruitment then takes place.

Taylor Police have found pages on MySpace depicting students in gang-associated clothing, flashing hand signs, and using drugs. Some sites are believed to be the work of gangster wannabes, but others may be from serious gang members.

Gang-related graffiti has shown up on home pages set up for some youth on Bebo.com. Users sometimes even arrange fights online.

Just as being on the streets has given police the ability to read the hieroglyphics of wall graffiti, time on the Web helps them understand Web clues. Gang identifiers, such as tattoos, graffiti tags, colors and clothing often are embedded in each site.

There appears to be a tendency for some gang members to brag about their exploits on Web pages like MySpace.com. In some cases, this has helped investigators make arrests.

Parents need to learn the technology so they can keep up with their kids. Be sure to use privacy settings to restrict who can access and post on your child's website.

If you're concerned your child is engaging in risky online behavior, you can search the blog site they visit to see what information they're posting. Try searching by their name, nickname, school, hobbies, grade, or area where you live.

### Resources:

For more information you can access the following web sites:

[www.gangprevention.org](http://www.gangprevention.org)  
[www.iir.com/nygc](http://www.iir.com/nygc)  
[www.OnGuardOnline.gov](http://www.OnGuardOnline.gov)  
[www.getnetwise.org](http://www.getnetwise.org)  
[www.iKeepSafe.org](http://www.iKeepSafe.org)  
[www.i-safe.org](http://www.i-safe.org)  
[www.staysafeonline.org](http://www.staysafeonline.org)  
[www.staysafe.org](http://www.staysafe.org)



*Information for this newsletter was obtained from the American Crime Prevention Institute and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.*