

GANG INFORMATION

Traits of Gang Members

The Male Gang Member

Who: Gang members may be of any ethnic group.

What: Young men form gangs to acquire companionship, gain peer respect, act out biases and express cultural identity.

Where: It is becoming a common occurrence in both rural and urban communities across Canada to see evidence of gang activity.

When: Susceptibility to gang influence is possible from the early age of eight on into 20's.

How:

- Initiation into gang: Most youths who want to be gang members must first endure a test or a ritual of initiation.
- *Jumpin'in* is a common form of initiation that consists of a series of beatings over a set period of time by a certain number of members to see if the initiates are tough enough to join the gang.
- Other forms of initiation may include robbery, shoplifting, rape, burglary, a drive-by shooting, stealing a gun, assaulting a rival, or self-mutilation.

Quitting the gang: Two of the very few options available for successfully leaving a gang are being "beaten down" or "jumped out." These are similar to the *jumpin'in* initiation rite, except the beatings are often so severe that severe injury results. If a member chooses to leave the gang without being beaten down or jumped out, his former friends (gang members) may resort to extreme violence. When a member manages to get out of a gang with dignity, he definitely loses the gang's protection but does not lose his former enemies.

Why: The excitement of gang activity, which often involves violence, danger, and outward expressions of cultural biases, coupled with the acceptance given by fellow gang members, provide the social support and community involvement that are often lacking in the lives of young male gang members.

The Female Gang Member

Who: Young women of any ethnic background may belong to a gang. In the past, a female's role in a male gang was primarily as a:

- Girlfriend
- Drug-trafficker
- Go-between

What: Many male gangs allow females to join their ranks, but others are exclusively female.

- These all-female gangs formed in reaction to the sexism and gender inequality found in male-dominated gangs.
- Frustrated by the absence of equal rights and dissatisfied with risking their lives without voice or influence, girls form their own groups.

Where: female gangs have formed in Alberta at different times. When: interest in gang membership can begin as early as eight years old.

How: Initiation into a gang: some initiations rites are the same as for male gangs, such as shoplifting, robbery, or beatings. Other requirements may involve sexual acts.

Quitting the gang: Similar to the rules of a male gang, a ritual must be endured to leave.

Why: While males join gangs for the excitement and acceptance of the gang, girls are induced by gang membership as a way to:

- Cure loneliness and secure warmth and affection.
- Satisfy the need to belong to a group, fulfilled in part by the dress codes and traditions imposed by gang membership as a sign of solidarity.
- To express anger and frustration encountered daily in a life, exacerbated by poverty, joblessness and devoid of hope.
- Excitement and thrill.

Possible Traits of Gang Members

1. **Looking for a surrogate family.** Young people join gangs to receive the attention, affirmation, and protection they may feel they are lacking at home.
2. **Breakdown of traditional family units.** Many youngsters do not have a positive adult role model. Many see domestic violence and alcohol and other drug use in the home. Lack of parental involvement and the absence of rules and family rituals allow older gang members to be viewed as authority figures by young teens and children.
3. **Identity or recognition problems.** Because of low self-worth and self-esteem, some youth join gangs seeking the status they lack due to unemployment or academic failure at school. If young people do not see themselves as intelligent, leaders, or star athletes, they join other groups where they feel they can excel.
4. **Gang family history.** Many street gang members carry on a family tradition established by siblings, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, or cousins who they see as role models.
5. **Lack of alternatives.** Few job opportunities, no positive recreational choices, or lack of effective responses to peer pressure can create a climate favoring gang membership.
6. **Few recreational opportunities.** Many teens and youngsters do not have any interests outside of school. Joining a gang provides friends with whom they can share their free time.
7. **Need for money.** The monetary allure of gang membership is difficult to counteract. Gang members share profits from drug trafficking and other illegal activities. To a teen, money translates into social status.
8. **Poverty.** Many people are without jobs or a source of income. Becoming a gang member can provide a teen with an opportunity to make large amounts money quickly, because many gangs are involved in the illegal sale of drugs and firearms.
9. **Lack of educational opportunities.** Many kids feel that time spent in school is wasted. Joining a gang becomes an alternative to studying or attending school.
10. **Use of intimidation and violence.** To coerce others to join their gang, members may recruit through scare tactics. People are then forced into membership to protect themselves or their families from the local gang or the local gang's rivals.
11. **Need for survival.** Gang membership could also be viewed as a safe haven to a child living in a gang-infested community.