

MODULE #3: Gang Violence

Objectives:

- To help students realize the connection between bullying and gang membership.
- To identify the common personality traits of a gang member.
- To understand why youth join gangs and its negative effects.
- To help students find solutions for preventing a youth from joining a gang.
- To instill self-responsibility among participants and ask them to pledge to do their best to avoid gang violence.

Context



Gang violence continues to be a persistent problem affecting thousands of families and communities; thus, requiring the involvement of a number of stakeholders such as law enforcement, community leaders, public policy advisers, schools, the justice system, etc. In an effort to tackle this problem, several interventions have been developed. One example is to focus on gang prevention and engage in promoting other alternatives such as community involvement in order to avoid youth from joining gangs.

Handouts & Resources Needed:

Handout 3.2: Characteristics of a Gang Member

Handout 3.2A: Why Youth Join Gangs

Handout 3.3: Avoiding a Gang

Pens/pencils

Sheet of paper – one for each participant

Journals – one per student

Activity #1: Icebreaker: Superlatives (10 min)

Procedure:

- Explain that for this icebreaker, students are going to be given a name of another student in the class. In these pairs, each student must assign the student that they receive an “award.” (For example: funniest in class, smartest, most likely to succeed, etc.)
- The students share their awards with the class. Explain to the class that it is important to realize that everyone in the class is special and has a talent. This will create reasons for why they should not join a gang.

Activity #2: Guided Discussion I: Characteristics of a Gang Member (20 min)

Procedure:

- Icebreaker
- Tell the class that the next step up from bullying is gang membership. Both the bully and the victim have an increased likelihood of joining a gang than those who avoid bullying situations. A bully will wish to seek a place where he can better use his skills for harassing others. The victim will eventually seek protection from bullies in inappropriate places. Especially with the increase in gang membership in recent years, the temptation to join a gang is growing greatly. The process of avoiding gang involvement must start at a young age.
- Before youth can learn to prevent gang violence from occurring to them, it is imperative that the students understand the typical characteristics of a gang member. Ask them to take a guess at what they think are the basic characteristics of a gang member. Ask them if they know of any gang name. Write all of these on the board and go over them. Make it clear that there are often instances when a youth may not hold these characteristics, but are still gang involved. For this reason, tell the students that it is always important to be careful with the friends that they choose to be around.
- Pass out Handout 3.2: Characteristics of a Gang Member. Point out to the class how the document is broken up into two categories, Personality Traits of a Gang Member and Signs of Belonging to a Gang. Each category is broken into lists, both important in determining whether a youth has joined a gang. Being able to identify gang members in their community is a good first step in learning how to avoid those individuals.
- Explain to the class that in order to solve the long-term problem of keeping youth out of a gang, it is important to understand why youth will join one in the first place. Divide the students into groups and pass out Handout 3.2A: Why Youth Join Gangs. This document outlines the needs that are fulfilled for youth by a gang. These are viewed as advantages that youth wish to utilize by joining. By using this document, it will be easier to address the problem with the students. Have a volunteer read out the list. Explain to them that most of the things on the list do not solve any problems in the youth's life. They create the illusion that a problem is being solved when, in reality, it is creating more problems that can destroy a life. Discuss: What are the signs? Why do youth join gangs? How do youth avoid gangs?
- Along with determining what the signs of a common gang member are, it is also important for students to be aware of the warning signs of gang

presence within their community. The most common warning sign is graffiti. These will often be on sides of buildings, promoting a particular gang sign. Another large indicator is seeing large congregations of youth on street corners, especially in the middle of the night. If these signs are visible in your community, it is important for students to tell their parents so that they can voice their concerns to the authorities.

Activity #3: Guided Discussion II: Solutions to Gang Violence (30 min)

Procedure:

- Icebreaker
- Tell the class that there are many consequences for joining a gang. Have the students brainstorm what some of the negative effects of joining a gang may be. When they are finished, emphasize that there is always an increase in violent activities as well as larger disregard to authority, especially parental authority. This has negative effects on a youth's ambition to succeed in school. A gang can prevent a youth from wanting to go to school, which can prevent the youth from becoming successful.
- Gang affiliation almost always leads to doing serious crimes. Because of the likelihood of committing crimes, there is a greater chance that the youth will be arrested. The Juvenile Justice System has a history of severely punishing minorities as well as youth associated with gangs.
- The best way to avoid youth membership in a gang is for them to understand these negative consequences. Encourage youth not to become frustrated if something in their life is going wrong. They do not need to enter a gang to find solutions. There is always someone to talk to about problems, whether they are parents, teachers, or other responsible adults.
- Pass out Handout 3.3: Avoiding Gangs. This handout is meant to instruct students on how to prevent themselves from joining a gang as well as how to leave a gang if they are already associated with one. Make it clear that this process of leaving a gang is tricky and gradual. Many things need to be accomplished in order to change the youth's mindset, but the parents should still have the attitude that it can be accomplished.
- Tell the students that it is also essential to play a part in the community effort to get rid of gangs in the neighborhood. Keeping a lookout for dangerous activities in the neighborhood is important for keeping everyone safe. When an act of violence occurs in the neighborhood, it is important to have a discussion with a parent so that the situation can be made clear. By pointing out dangerous spots in the neighborhood to

adults, the community can begin to come together to try to solve the problem.

- Have the students brainstorm ideas that the community as a whole can do to stop gang violence in their neighborhood. Examples of solutions can include neighborhood watch programs and petitioning to the local police department to establish a gang combat unit, if one does not already exist.

Activity #4: Guided Exercise: Pledge not to Join a Gang (20 min)

Procedure:

- Icebreaker
- Separate the students into groups of 3 or 4.
- Have each group come up with a name, symbol, and motto.
- Tell them to create their own pledge on what they are going to do to prevent themselves from joining a gang.
- Have a member from each group read their pledges to the class and talk about them.
- All the members of each group sign the pledges.

Activity #5: Debriefing (5 min)

Procedure:

- Summarize the main points of the seminar.
- Ask the class if they have any questions.
- Ask various students to name one important thing that they learned in the seminar.

Activity #6: Evaluation (20 min)

Students should be asked to complete the evaluation for this unit.

Handouts:

6.1 Evaluation Form-Student

6.1A Evaluation Form-Facilitator

Characteristics of a Gang Member

Character traits:

- Behavior problems
- Low self-esteem
- Need for glorification
- Rejection of standards
- Hate for authority
- Always angry
- Short tempered

Other Major Signs of Belonging to a Street Gang

These signs must be considered together to be deemed meaningful. Individually, a sign could just mean a normal phase of being a teenager.

The youth:

- Seems to dress according to a specific dress code (specific clothing)
- Wears clothing or owns items that could not normally afford to buy
- Has less interest in school
- Has lost interest in former friends and activities
- Has new, older friends identified by nicknames, whom the parent has never met
- Consumes alcohol and drugs
- Goes to street gang Internet chat sites
- Uses hateful or racist language
- Has been the victim of crime or fears being victimized
- Has had problems with the police
- Owns a weapon
- Tattoos

Why Youth Join Gangs

In order to avoid gangs, it is important to understand why youth seek membership. If these factors are understood, it will be easier to see why the life of gangs is not a safe way to life.

NEEDS FULFILLED BY JOINING A GANG

Often youth approach street gangs to become members or are recruited by the gangs. Belonging to a gang is attractive for more vulnerable youth because the gang fulfills their needs. Gangs appear to offer youth the following sources of satisfaction:

- A place to belong
- A family
- Physical protection
- Social support
- Sense of unity
- An opportunity to develop self esteem
- Validation
- Money
- Power
- Status

Avoiding a Gang

How to Avoid Joining a Gang:

- Learn to think independently
- Have a good relationship with parents
- Take part in positive activities after school
- Do these positive activities with close friends
- Listen to parent or teacher if they disapprove of something you are doing.
- Do activities that calm you down when you are frustrated with life.
- Avoid movies, TV shows, and video games that glorify drugs, sex, gangs, and violence to youth.

How to Get out of a Gang:

- The most important thing is to realize that you are not alone.
- Seek out a trusted adult who can encourage and help you through the process.
- Stop all forms of communication with gang members.
- Form strong friendships with other youth who are not associated with a gang.
- Advise law enforcement if at any point you do not feel safe
 - Ex-gang members may harass you for dropping out.

Handout 6.1 Evaluation Form-Student

EVALUATION

1. Indicate three new things you learned about ASPIRA?
2. How will you use this new knowledge in the future?
3. Were the handouts useful? What would you change about the handouts?
4. How could these workshops have been improved?

Handout 6.1A Evaluation Form for Facilitator

1. Did the workshops run smoothly? Why?
2. What aspects of the workshops did not work? What would you change?
3. Was it easy to understand?
4. How would you make it more culturally relevant?
5. What visuals would you add?
6. How would you make it more hands-on for youth?

