

## 67

# Staying Away From Gangs

**HEALTH GOAL**

- I will stay away from gangs.

A group of people involved in violent and illegal activities is a **gang**. Some gangs consist of a few neighborhood teens. Others have thousands of members who cooperate in highly organized illegal activities. Gang violence is an increasing problem. Gangs exist in big cities as well as smaller cities, suburbs, and rural areas. This lesson will give you facts about gangs. You will learn how to recognize gang members. You will learn why it is risky to belong to a gang and how you can protect yourself from gangs.

## What You'll Learn

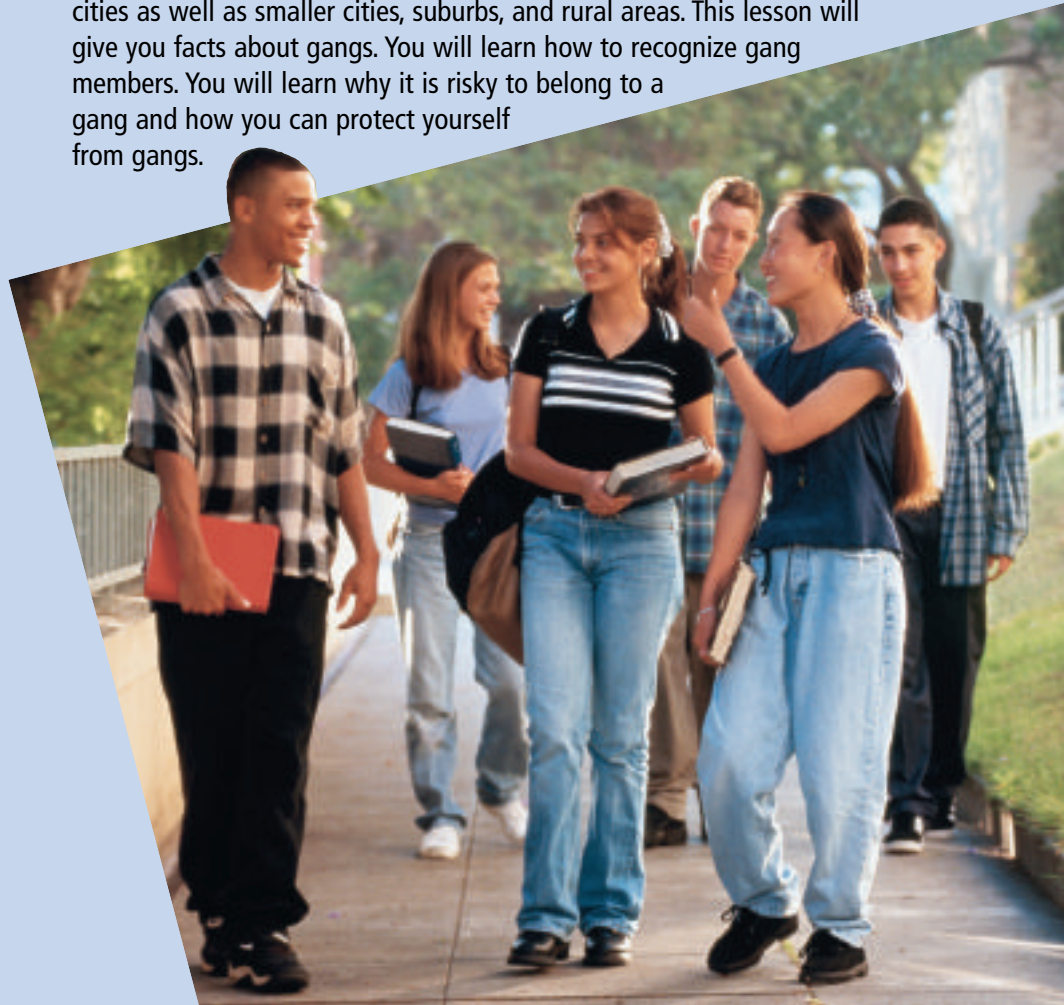
1. Discuss characteristics of gang members. (p. 699)
2. Identify different roles of gang members. (p. 699)
3. Discuss reasons why it is risky to belong to a gang. (p. 700)
4. Explain how a gang can cause conflict in schools, families, and communities. (p. 700)
5. Analyze why teens join gangs. (p. 701)
6. Analyze and apply strategies to avoid gangs. (p. 702)
7. Explain how a teen who belongs to a gang can leave the gang. (p. 702)
8. Discuss reasons why some teens have become anti-gang gang members. (p. 702)

## Why It's Important

Gang involvement can lead to drug abuse, jail, unplanned pregnancy, violence, injury, and death. Knowing how to recognize gang members and how to stay away from them will help you avoid dangerous situations.

## Key Terms

- gang
- hard-core gang member
- regular gang member
- wanna-be
- could-be
- prestige crime
- jumping-in
- anti-gang gang



## What Would You Do?

**Writing About Gangs** Suppose one classmate is pressuring you to join a gang and another classmate is asking you to join an anti-gang group. Both classmates tell you that his or her group will give you a sense of belonging and that you can leave if you do not like the group. After you read the information about gangs on page 699, write your responses to your classmates in your health journal.



Health TEKS covered by Lesson 67: 5D, 7A, 7E, 7J, 9A, 9B, 15A, 16A, 16D

# Recognizing Gangs

**Y**ou may have an idea of what gang members are like. For example, you may think that gang members only live in large cities and are from low income areas. This is not necessarily true. Gang members live in big cities, small cities, suburban, and rural areas, and come from families who have different income levels. However, most gang members have some common characteristics of which you should be aware.

## How to Recognize Gangs

**Gang members band together as a group.** Gang members hang out only with other gang members.

**Gang members play specific roles.** Gangs have clear structures. A **hard-core gang member** is a senior gang member who has the most influence. There usually are several hard-core gang members who are leaders and tell others what to do. A **regular gang member** is a gang member who belongs to the gang and obeys the hard-core gang members. A **wanna-be** is a child or teen who is not a gang member, but may wear gang clothing and engage in violent or criminal behavior because he or she wants to be a gang member. A **could-be** is a child or teen who is interested in belonging to a gang. A could-be often is a younger friend or family member of gang members.

**Gang members follow specific rules.** Gangs have strict rules for the behavior of gang members. These rules are set by the hard-core gang members. There are harsh consequences for gang members who break the rules.

**Gang members operate within a territory and refer to this territory as their "turf."** They may draw graffiti on buildings to let others know it is their turf. Gang members may injure and kill people, including members of other gangs, who trespass on their turf.

**Gang members identify themselves with certain colors, types of clothing or tattoos.** They may choose one specific color to wear or one particular item of clothing to wear, such as colored shoelaces. Gang members may get tattoos to identify themselves as members of the gang for life.

**Gang members have their own vocabulary, logos, and signals.** Gang members invent code words and ways to identify themselves as members of the gang, such as hand signals and handshakes, and graffiti, also called "tagging."

**Gang members identify themselves by nicknames.** When people join gangs they are given a nickname, or street name, to disguise the gang member when he or she is involved in illegal activity.

### Did You Know?

#### Gangs in the U.S.

Researchers estimate that in the year 2000 there were more than 24,500 active gangs and 772,500 gang members in the U.S..



# Why Gangs Are Risky

**B**elonging to a gang is risky. Belonging to a gang often means that a gang member will have enemies. Rivalry exists among gangs. Gang rivalry results in fighting, homicide, and other acts of violence. Gang members have sought revenge against rival gang members for insults, “trespassing” on gang turf, and personal disputes.

## Why It Is Risky to Belong to a Gang

### Make the Connection

**Injuries** For more information on reducing weapon injuries, see page 705 in Lesson 68.

**Revenge** If gang members feel they have been insulted or cheated they may seek revenge. Revenge might include an assault or a drive-by shooting. Family members of gang members are at risk as well, since gang members often retaliate against the family members of rival gang members. Gang members often carry weapons to protect themselves from rival gangs. Gang members can be involved in illegal weapon sales as well as drug trafficking and drug use. These activities can lead to violence.

**Crimes** Gang members might commit crimes to gain respect from other gang members. A *prestige crime* is a crime committed to gain status from other gang members in the gang. A gang member might assault another gang member, participate in a drive-by shooting, or steal in an effort to establish a tough reputation.

**Violence** Gang members also participate in violence against their own gang members. Gang members who do not follow orders are beaten.

**Initiation** Teens who want to join a gang must participate in violent behaviors before they are admitted. These teens must go through an initiation period to prove they are “worthy” of gang membership. During the initiation period, they are subject to

any gang member’s demand at any time. Teens who are going through initiation often commit the most serious crimes so that the gang members do not have to do the “dirty work” themselves. These crimes can include murder, drug trafficking, weapons dealing, robbery, beating up other people, drive-by shootings, or beating up or killing rival gang members.

Initiation also may involve jumping-in. *Jumping-in* is an initiation rite in which a potential gang member is beaten by gang members. The potential gang member might have to fight all of the gang members either one by one or all at once, and this can continue for hours or even days. Teens have been severely injured and even died from jumping-in. Initiation for females might involve being “sexed-in.” This means they are raped by one or more male gang members. This puts them at risk for unplanned pregnancy, infection with HIV and other STDs, and emotional trauma.

Sometimes teens might believe they are being initiated into a gang when they are actually just being used by gang members. Gang members demand that the teen participate in criminal or sexual activities, but then they refuse the teen membership into the gang.

### Mini-Review

1. Why is initiation into a gang risky?
2. What roles do gang members play?

# Why Teens Join Gangs

There are many reasons teens give for joining gangs. Teens might think gangs will provide something that they are lacking in their lives, or that gangs will provide a way to escape other problems. It is important to know the truth about these misconceptions.

## Myths About Gangs

**I feel left out and the gang will help me feel like I belong.** Gangs may appear to be close-knit groups that offer a teen security and excitement. Teens who are gang members are considered property of the gang. Gang leaders believe they own their members and can use them to do whatever they want. Gang members who break a rule might be injured or killed.

**I can escape family problems by being in a gang.** Many gang members have been raised in homes with unstable families. They have been raised in families in which there is physical abuse, sexual abuse, drug abuse, and neglect. Teens who think about joining a gang believe they will be escaping the abuse. They believe that unlike their family members, gang members will care for them and pay attention to them. However, these same abusive behaviors exist among gang members. Gang leaders abuse gang members. Fighting, drug abuse, and rape are common among gang members.

**I can get money for the things I want by being involved in gang activities.** Teens may be attracted to gangs by the opportunity to earn money to help their families, but gang members make their money from drug trafficking, stealing, and other illegal

activities. Gang members are more likely to get a criminal record from these activities than to make money. A person who has a criminal record often has more difficulty finding a job. Gang members also are at high risk of dropping out of school.

**I get protection from gang members.** Gang members might offer to protect a member from others. However, once a teen is a member of a gang, the risk of harm and threats from others is greatly increased. Teens are often harmed when they are initiated into gangs. Gang members frequently assault the new member. Gang members are constantly at risk of being harmed by rival gangs. Involvement in drug trafficking and criminal activity also increases the risk of being harmed.

Teens who join gangs often feel that they don't "fit in" with their peers.



# Protecting Yourself



It is risky to belong to a gang. Tell a parent, guardian, or responsible adult if you are pressured to join a gang. If a teen is involved in a gang, he or she may think there is no way out. However, teens who are involved in gangs can leave.

## How a Gang Member Can Leave a Gang

Young teens who join gangs often are not aware of what being in a gang involves. Being in a gang is often not what they had hoped. It can be risky, stressful, and, at times, boring. Leaving a gang isn't easy. Gang members might harm the teens or their family members. Some gangs allow members to leave if they survive a severe beating, or "jumping-out," but many do not survive. Other gangs do not allow gang members to leave under any circumstances.

Many teens have successfully left gangs and started lives without gangs, violence, and fear. Law enforcement officers have helped protect many gang members who

wanted to leave their gangs. Many communities have gang counselors who help gang members leave gangs. Teens who want to leave a gang might move to another neighborhood, community, or state to be safe. The best way to avoid having to leave a gang is not to join one in the first place.

**Safety in numbers** Some teens who live in communities in which there are gangs have formed anti-gang gangs. An **anti-gang gang** is a group of teens who stick together to avoid pressure and to protect themselves from gang members. The goal of anti-gang gangs is for teens to continue with daily activities without being pressured or threatened by gang members. Anti-gang gangs walk together as a group to and from school and after-school activities. An adult might accompany them for additional protection.

These teens recognize that gang members are less likely to pressure them to join a gang when they are in a group. They do not hang around gang members, participate in gang activities, or wear clothing or take other actions to identify themselves as a group. Anti-gang gangs are informal, and any teen who wants to avoid gangs can become involved.

### Make the Connection

**Resisting Gangs** For more information on resistance skills, see page 47 in Lesson 5.

## How to Protect Yourself From Gangs

Avoiding gangs and gang members will help protect you from violence.

- Stay away from gang members.
- Avoid gang turf and places where gang activity takes place as much as possible.
- Be aware of gang colors in your community and in nearby communities.
- Do not stay out late at night.
- Do not listen to music that supports gang activities.
- Do not write graffiti.
- Spend time with family members and mentors.
- Obey laws and respect authority.
- Avoid alcohol and other drugs.

anti-gang gang  
could-be  
gang  
hard-core gang  
member  
jumping-in  
prestige crime  
regular gang  
member  
wannabe

## Key Terms Review

Explain the relationship between the pairs of lesson Key Terms below. Do not write in this book.

1. anti-gang gang–gang
2. hard-core gang member–regular gang member
3. could-be–wannabe
4. jumping-in–prestige crime

## Recalling the Facts

5. What roles do members play in a gang?
6. Why is it risky to belong to a gang?
7. How can a gang cause conflict in schools, families, and communities?
8. How does initiation into a gang increase a teen’s risk for injury or death?
9. Describe one myth about why teens join gangs. Why is the myth false?
10. How might a teen who belongs to a gang leave the gang?
11. Why do some teens become anti-gang gang members?
12. How can you recognize a gang member?
13. Why do gang members commit prestige crimes?
14. Why does the risk of violence increase when a teen joins a gang?
15. Why might teens think they will be safe when they join a gang?
16. What is the best way to avoid having to leave a gang?
17. How are family members at risk if a teen joins a gang?
18. How does joining a gang increase the risk of unplanned pregnancy and STD infection for females?

## Critical Thinking

19. Why is it dangerous to be friends with a member of a gang even if you are not a member?
20. Why is it dangerous to “try out” or associate with a gang by becoming a wannabe or could-be?
21. How can joining a gang increase a person’s risk for poverty?
22. Why is it important to know gang colors and symbols in your community?

## Real-Life Applications

23. Why do you think gangs exist in cities, suburbs, and rural areas?
24. Analyze and apply strategies for avoiding gangs.
25. Why do you think teens who are being initiated into gangs often commit the most serious crimes?
26. Why do you think gangs require teens who want to join to participate in “jumping-in”?

## Activities

### Responsible Decision Making

27. **Write** Your younger brother tells you he made money after school. A gang member paid him to keep an eye out for police in your neighborhood. What should you do? Write a response to this situation. Refer to the Responsible Decision-Making Model on page 61 to review the steps involved in making responsible decisions.

### Sharpen Your Life Skills

28. **Advocate for Health** Work with other students to design a poster titled “50 Things to Do Besides Joining a Gang.” Target the poster toward children. Obtain permission from a parent or guardian and ask a principal of a middle school or elementary school for permission to hang the poster where children will see it.

