

# Youth Gangs

## What is a youth gang?

There is no single, accepted definition. State and local jurisdictions tend to develop their own. Nevertheless, **a youth gang is commonly thought of as a self-formed association of peers having the following characteristics: a common name and recognizable symbols, identifiable leadership, a possible geographic territory, a regular meeting pattern, and collective actions to carry out criminal activities.**

## Is the youth gang problem growing In Salt Lake County?

Salt Lake County has seen rapid proliferation of youth joining gangs from years past. Many of the juveniles who become involved in gangs today are second and third generation gang members and are often coached by parents, older siblings, and/ or other relatives. Other influences are music ( ie. Juggalo's, Slug, Maggot) ICP, Cotton Mouth Kings, Dark Lotus.

## Why is the gang lifestyle so attractive to young children?

There are several different factors that make gang life attractive to these kids. Gang life makes these kids feel like they belong to "something", it also offers a sense of security and status, however it doesn't stop there, they feel that gang involvement will give them POWER, ATTENTION, MONEY, DRUGS, SEX. Family and peer pressure are not the only influences making gang life so attractive, music videos, video games, and cinema are also glamorizing and need to take on some blame. Kids see these "role models" and the lifestyles they live and want those same things for themselves. This leads them to believe the gang life will make it happen.

There are several indicators you can look for to determine whether or not a child is involved in with gangs. The best way to find out is to simply just ask, self admission is always the best indicator. Other ways to find out are; clothing (color preference), tattoos, graffiti ( on personal notebooks, and on items in their rooms), hand signs, posturing or behaviors, and their FRIENDS. Confronting them and asking them questions is the best way to get answers you are looking for. If the juvenile thinks you already know about what they are involved in, the less likely to lie to you. Downplaying their involvement is common for someone close to you, "it's no big deal", "I'm not in the gang, I just hang out with friends, some are in a gang". Membership or association with a street gang can have serious consequences, ,many of these kids don't know what they are really getting themselves into until its too late.

Lack of family involvement or Denial remains the number one contributor to our growing gang problem in the Salt Lake Valley, ignoring the issues will not simply make them disappear. Currently the Metro Gang Unit had over 200 Documented juvenile gang members/ associates. There are far many more members, just undocumented as of yet. There are ways we can help kids make better choices, the best way is to get involved with the youth. Ask questions, and expect a lot of answers, know where your kids are and what they are doing. Know friends, associates, be firm but fair with them, and discuss your rules with the youth.

The Metro Gang Unit has a resource guide that can give you ideas and who you can call for assistance if needed. You can also utilize churches, schools, and your local law enforcement. The internet is a great source in educating yourself about gangs and there have been many great books written on various gang topics. Our Future, lets help build a strong one!