



Working in the Community to Prevent and Reduce Bullying

One of the worst effects of gang membership is the exposure to violence. Consequences of gang membership may include exposure to drugs and alcohol, age-inappropriate sexual behavior, difficulty finding a job because of lack of education and work skills, removal from one's family, imprisonment, and even death.

Impact on violence

When children grow up in safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments, they learn empathy, impulse control, anger management and problem-solving— all skills that protect against violence. Children living in a persistently threatening environment are more likely to respond violently (fight) or run away (flight) than children who grow up in safe, stable, and nurturing environments. Fight-or-flight responses are survival skills that people are born with and often override other skills that enable non-violent conflict resolution, such as impulse control, empathy, anger management, and problem-solving skills.

Some children may choose to join gangs for:

- A sense of connection or to define a new sense of who they are
- Protection for themselves and their family
- Access to make money

Or due to:

- Exposure from growing up in an area with heavy gang activity
- A history of gang involvement in the family (family members who are current or former gang members)
- A history of violence in the home
- Too little adult supervision
- Unstructured free time, particularly during after-school hours and on the weekends
- A lack of positive roles models and exposure to media (television, movies, music) that glorifies gang violence
- Low self-esteem
- A sense of hopelessness about the future because of limited educational or financial opportunity
- Underlying mental-health issues or behavioral disorders, such as oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

The relationship between gang culture and bullying

The long-term effects of bullying are well documented. Research has shown that youth who experience bullying report more severe anxiety and depression symptoms than others. Experiencing bullying is linked to social anxiety, which often lasts into adulthood and increases the risk of developing personality disorders. Depression might lead to suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. Another severe consequence can be post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). If someone is struggling with anxiety, depression, or PTSD and has a history of being bullied, there may be a link between bullying and gang culture.

Support youth and prevent violence

Promote family environments that support healthy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Early childhood home visitation• Parenting skill and family relationship programs
Provide quality education early in life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preschool enrichment with family engagement
Strengthen youth’s skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Universal school-based programs
Connect youth to caring adults and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mentoring programs/After-school programs
Create protective community environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Modify the physical and social environment• Reduce exposure to community-level risks• Street outrexach and community norm change
Intervene to lessen harms and prevent future risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Treatment to lessen the harms of violence exposures• Treatment to prevent problem behavior and further involvement in violence• Hospital-community partnerships

Resources

[Youth Violence Resources | CDC](#)

[A Comprehensive Technical Package for the Prevention of Youth Violence and Associated Risk Behaviors | CDC](#)