Safeguarding Update Issue 3

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Gangs and Young People

www.childline.org.uk

Southampton Safeguarding Partnership

NSPCC HELPLINE 0808 800 5000 help@nspcc.org.uk

If you have concerns about a child or wish to receive some form of support, please come and talk to a member of the safeguarding team.

Gangs and Young People

This Safeguarding Update aims to give parents/carers information on how to identify and respond if they feel that their children may be affected by gangs.



What is a Gang?

Being in a gang can make children feel part of something where they belong. But some gangs take part in criminal activity and often try to target children to become involved. Being part of a gang like this can cause significant harm to a child as they might be abused, exploited or put into dangerous situations where they are encouraged to engage in illegal activity. Once children become involved in a gang, it can be very difficult to leave. Children may join gangs because they feel bored and may be looking for excitement or feel attracted to the status and power it can give them. Gang membership can also make a child feel protected or like they belong. Once involved with, or on the edges of gangs, children might become victims of violence, or they might feel pressured into doing things like stealing or carrying drugs or weapons.

Reasons why young people may join a gang:

- Respect and status
- To gain friends
- A sense of belonging
- Excitement
- To find a substitute family
- Power
- Protection
- Money
- Peer pressure

If your child is already involved

If your child is already involved in a gang, they may not want to talk about it or they may be scared. It is important that they know you want to listen and support them. Try to show them they have a choice.

Stay calm. Ask questions but listen too. Don't be afraid of confrontation. Try to understand the situation from their point of view and why they have joined the gang. Ask them what you can do to help. Try to agree what they should do next. Work with them to find solutions and choices. Seek help from local community organisations.

Signs to look out for:

Gangs often leave signs of their presence, and your child might adopt some of these signs; either as a member or as an associate of a gang. Any sudden changes in your child's lifestyle should be discussed.

Signs may include:

- Specific dress style
- Poor behaviour
- Having more than 1 mobile phone
- Unexplained expensive gifts
- Talking differently – new slang or language with an aggressive tone
- Poor school results or skipping school
- Carrying weapons
- Unexplained injuries or sums of money/possessions
- Staying out unusually late
- Graffiti style tags on possessions

Some places to get help:

Neighbourhood Police – www.police.uk
Crimestoppers – www.crimestoppers-uk.org
Family Lives – www.familylives.org.uk

What does the law say?

Being in a gang isn't against the law. But being involved with illegal activities (that some gangs do) could be an offence. If an offender was part of a group or a gang, this may lead to a longer sentence.

If your child's actions lead to a crime, they could be charged with the same offence as the main offender. For example, if they provided support or encouragement to a fellow gang member who committed a robbery or injured someone, they too could be charged with the same offence; this is called joint enterprise – we teach the children this in the upper part of the school.

They could go to prison or end up with a criminal record if they are involved with: gun and knife crime, violence or harassment, turf wars or postcode wars, county lines (moving drugs to be sold in different parts of the country for a gang), carrying, using or selling drugs, theft or other illegal activities, inappropriate sexual behaviour.

Having a criminal record means that it would be difficult to be:

- Accepted in a university, college, or higher education
- Able to get a job, apprenticeship or do work experience
- Allowed to travel to some countries, like Australia or the USA