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# Child Safety Curriculum Standards

A stylized, high-contrast graphic of the American flag. The top portion is a solid black shape with a white outline, resembling the top of a helmet or a protective shield. Below this, the flag's stripes are represented by thick, wavy black and white bands. The bottom-left corner features a field of white stars on a black background.

**NATIONAL  
SCHOOL  
SAFETY  
CENTER**

A Partnership of  
Pepperdine University  
and the United States  
Departments of Justice  
and Education

**CHILD SAFETY CURRICULUM STANDARDS**

**BY THE NATIONAL SCHOOL SAFETY CENTER**

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## GANGS

By Lilia "Lulu" Lopez  
and  
Ronald W. Garrison

### STANDARDS SUMMARY

K - 1  
2 - 3  
4 - 6

- \* Students need to understand that our behavior is reflected by our feelings and attitudes.
- \* Students need to increase their feelings of self-esteem.
- \* Students need to practice relaxation.
- \* Students need to know how to set goals and practice achieving them.
- \* Students need to know and be able to use good communication skills.
- \* Students need to develop positive relationships and a positive support group.
- \* Students need to learn good leadership skills.
- \* Students need to understand the dangers of being involved in gangs.

7 - 8  
9 - 12

All of the above, plus:

- \* Students need to understand the consequences of gang membership.
- \* Students need to learn socially responsible rites and rituals to replace the myths that perpetuate gang membership.
- \* Students need to possess communication skills that will help them resist the peer pressure to join gangs.
- \* Students need to know non-violent alternatives to interpersonal conflict.

Teenagers and younger children are attracted to gangs for many reasons. Prestige is one of the most powerful incentives to join. Gang members often are seen by younger children as dynamic, purposeful and more in control of their neighborhoods than many parents, teachers and other adults who might otherwise serve as counter-attractive role models.

Young people also are socially attracted to gangs for reasons of ritual and belonging. Without significant adults and pro-social rituals like those found in the recitation of the Boy Scout oath, gangs will continue to be attractive to alienated youth. ARCO Corporation's president, Robert Wycoff, recently met with gang members while being principal for a day at Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles. Asking why they joined gangs, Wycoff found that protection and friendship were primary motivations. Responding to a further question about what it would take to lure them away from the streets, gang members answered extracurricular activities, special Saturday classes, sports, dances and--most of all--jobs.

Other reasons why young people are attracted to gangs may include low self-esteem, dysfunctional families, lack of adult supervision and guidance, economic and social stress, lack of personal and social responsibility, frustration, being a victim to other peoples' thinking, alienation, lack of alternatives, negative peer pressure, academic failure, fear and lack of coping skills. (The dysfunctional family is described here as one that includes hopelessness; substance abuse; child abuse, including

some lessons about self before going into the details of gang awareness and resistance. At a minimum, a balanced curriculum should include sections as follows:

**STANDARD:** Students need to understand that our behavior is reflected by our feelings and attitudes.

If we have an attitude that we are worthy, we tend to avoid behavior that harms ourselves and others. Students need to practice getting in touch with their feelings.

**STRATEGIES:**

1.) Ask students to talk about what makes them happy, sad, angry or upset.

2.) Ask students to close their eyes and imagine that they are happy, sad, angry and so on. Have them notice the physical feelings that accompany these emotions.

**STANDARD:** Students must increase their self-esteem.

Students choosing alternatives to gangs must believe in themselves and seek positive goals.

**STRATEGIES:**

1.) Lead a class discussion in which students compare similarities between themselves and others, then discuss positive qualities each student brings to the class.

STRATEGIES:

1.) Divide the class into buddy teams, with each buddy helping the other to set individual goals.

2.) Explain to students that they need to write down their goals and that each goal is to fit the SMART formula: that is, it is Specific, Measureable, Attainable, involves Risk (growth), and has a Time line or deadline for completion.

3.) Have students establish weekly goals, check with buddies for support along the way, and make new goals when the old ones are achieved.

STANDARD: Students should know and be able to use good communication skills through cooperative learning opportunities and presentations.

All people have a point of view, and communication skills are needed in order to share each other's viewpoint. Such skills also are needed to resolve conflicts using a non-violent approach.

STRATEGIES:

1.) Teach students the differences between verbal and non-verbal communication.

2.) Teach and practice active listening (paraphrasing).

3.) Teach students how to negotiate and create win-win situations (no one loses in order for someone else to win).

4.) Demonstrate "I" messages.

5.) Teach presentation skills.

4.) Teach students to lead in positive ways.

STANDARD: Students need to understand the dangers of being involved in gangs.

Gangs are attractive to many students who do not understand how dangerous such involvement can be--to themselves and to their families. They need to understand the consequences of their behavior.

STRATEGIES:

1.) Explain why it is bad to join gangs (once in, it's hard to get out.)

2.) Spend a little time explaining symbols (graffiti), dress and terminology, being careful not to glorify gang members as heroes.

3.) Teach about the dangers of possible drug involvement as an outgrowth of gang activities.

7 - 8  
9 - 12

All of the above, plus:

STANDARD: Students need to understand the consequences of gang membership.

Teens who live in neighborhoods where gangs are active are more likely to be involved in a gang culture. But all teens share a fascination for the gang outlaw image and the false sense of romance and adventure perpetuated by that image. Teens need to recognize that making a decision to join a gang involves not

involved in instant gratification. Does society "owe" its citizens a standard of living, or is it the responsibility of the individual to achieve his or her own standard of living?

Facilitate a class debate on what people mean when they talk about "Quality of Life."

5.) Teach future-oriented decision-making skills by first reviewing the grammar of future tense in language. Then role play a series of real positive and negative decisions made by students during the past year that made a difference in their lives today. Finally, create a class poster of positive future tense decision-making terms students can apply to their daily lives.

6.) Discuss the nature and reality of gang membership. Help students understand the negative implications. For example, when a person joins a gang, his/her house is labeled a gang hangout, mother becomes a gang mom, and 6-year-old sister becomes a junior wannabe. Develop a class collection of periodical clips that report on gang violence and victimization.

7.) Assign cooperative learning groups to research and discuss the lives of famous outlaws, such as Al Capone, Bonnie and Clyde, or Jesse James. Then use role playing to have students improvise a class presentation on the daily personal fears of these characters, including going to jail, losing close friends, and being killed by rivals.

8.) Explore with students the relationship between drugs and gangs. Teach that the territory gangs control today will change tomorrow. Gangsters controlling drugs this morning will be

## STRATEGIES:

1.) Define mythology and study classical examples found in European, African and American cultures. Emphasize the importance of mythology in explaining realities that are confusing or not fully understood. Explain that in times of great stress, individuals and societies increasingly rely on mythology to make sense of their changing world.

2.) Define rites and rituals as the reinforcing tools of mythology. Study how the use of costume, music and dance assisted the presentation of rites and rituals and how they have an effect on gang membership today. For example, listen to classroom-appropriate selections from rap groups and discuss the positive (pride, self-esteem) and negative (racism, sexism) messages of the lyrics.

3.) From cooperative learning groups, develop class presentations on mythologies, rites and rituals that gangs might use on members. Include the physical rituals of dress and hair styles, graffiti, body and verbal language, and initiation. Discuss the nature of "codes of conduct," including rules for combat, honor codes and membership regulations. How are these codes different from the rights and responsibilities found in law-abiding groups?

4.) Challenge students to create positive mythologies that have the potential to compete with those used by gangs. For example, invite the class to organize thematic festivals and celebrations using pro-social rites and rituals to recognize individual student or group achievement for service to the school.

5,000 in New York City, 15,000 in Chicago and 3,500 gangsters in Miami during 1989.

STRATEGIES:

1.) Stimulate, through classroom discussion and role playing, everyday encounters with peer pressure. These exercises should be sequential, moving from innocent to life-threatening. They also should offer skills in refusing offers to join gangs.

2.) Using a class brainstorming session, give students the opportunity to describe strategies they would use to refuse an offer to join a gang. Reproduce this session for students to keep in their school binder for ready reference.

3.) In a lesson using demographic data on the evolving family, describe the relationship between the desire for family and the motivation to join a gang. Offer students positive family substitutes, including extended families, involvement in neighborhood groups or agencies, sports teams, religious and recreational programs, and community service.

STANDARD: Students need to know non-violent alternatives to interpersonal conflict.

Children in contemporary America are increasingly exposed to interpersonal violence that has become the standard conflict-resolution tool. According to a September 3, 1989, article in the Los Angeles Times Magazine, 90 percent of the children taken to UCLA's psychiatric clinic have witnessed some act of violence. Because they may not see non-violent alternatives to conflict

## RESOURCES

### Publications

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### Audio-visual

Gangs: A Matter of Choice! (1990), which is available in English and Spanish, is a videotape aimed at school-age children and their parents and teachers. It addresses the reasons young people join gangs, the realities of gang life, the effects of gang membership on the family, the early warning signs of gang involvement, and alternatives to gang membership.

L.A. Gangs: On the Move (1989) is a videotape aimed at school administrators and staff. It offers an overview of the violent gang philosophy and shows how to identify gang members and interpret gang communications, such as hand signs and graffiti.

The Paramount Plan: Alternatives to Gang Membership  
Human Services Department  
City of Paramount  
16400 Colorado Ave.  
Paramount, CA 90723  
213/220-2140

The highly regarded Paramount Plan stresses disapproval of gang membership while working to eliminate the future gang membership base and to diminish gang influence. The bilingual city staff sponsors neighborhood meetings and provides anti-gang curricula and posters on request. Community meetings are led by bilingual leaders and are held in neighborhoods identified as "under gang influence." They are aimed at parental and preteen awareness.

A fifth-grade anti-gang curriculum was introduced in the Paramount Unified School District in 1982 that emphasized constructive activities available in the neighborhood.

Vietnamese Community of Orange County, Inc.  
3701 W. McFadden Ave., Suite M  
Santa Ana, CA 92704  
714/775-2637

This non-profit organization oversees five programs to assist the Vietnamese community in family relations and related issues. Their Youth Counseling and Crime Prevention Program works in conjunction with prosecutors, educators, probation officers and law enforcement officers to prevent young Vietnamese youth from joining gangs.

Say Yes, Incorporated  
3840 Crenshaw Blvd., Suite 217  
Los Angeles, CA 90008  
213/295-5551

This program offers crisis intervention, field monitoring and workshops for school staffs. The workshops teach staff members about the gangs operating in the neighborhood and describe gang characteristics and problems.

Senior Tutors for Youth in Detention  
3640 Grand Avenue  
Oakland, CA 94610  
415/839-1039

Every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, the boys and girls in detention facilities and group homes in Contra Costa County line up to await their visitors: not parents, but retirees from the Rossmore retirement community in Walnut Creek, an hour's bus ride away. The seniors, one of whom is 91 years old, tutor the boys for two hours in written and verbal skills, vocational opportunities and mock job interviews, parenting skills, and

Centro de la Comunidad Unida  
Delinquency Prevention/Gang Intervention Program  
1028 S. 9th St.  
Milwaukee, WI 53204  
414/384-3100

Centro de la Comunidad Unida offers high-risk Hispanic young people alternatives to antisocial behavior through education, employment and recreation. The staff works to assist youth who are having trouble in school or in the community. In addition, they offer individual, family and group counseling, as well as referral and follow-up, gang mediation, and job placement.

C.V.E. (Center for Urban Expression)  
The Dorchester Youth Collaborative  
1514A Dorchester Ave.  
Dorchester, MA 02122  
617/288-1748

C.V.E. is an after-school center for children ages 8-18. Their main focus is on peer leadership training. Children are allowed to express themselves in various areas of talent: art, dance, music, public speaking, etc. They are then further trained in these areas and sent out into the community. Gatherings, such as community get-togethers, are arranged and children are trained to give talks on or sing about gang violence, AIDS, etc. Their goal is to get the attention of their peers through the talent that is displayed to influence them to be leaders and stay off drugs, get an education, etc.

Andrew Glover Youth Program  
100 Centre St.  
Manhattan Criminal Court, Room 1541  
New York, NY 10013  
212/349-6381

A privately funded organization, the Andrew Glover Youth Program works to protect neighborhoods in New York's Lower East Side from crime. Another objective is to steer youth away from negative and illegal activities. The program serves a large number of young people by working with police, courts, youth services and social services to provide counseling, gang mediation, family counseling and housing assistance. Youth workers are in contact with kids where they spend most of their time: on the streets. The youth workers also live in the community and are available for assistance 24 hours a day.