



# *REDUCING* **GANGS** *IN VIRGINIA*

**Your Friends.  
Your Choice.**

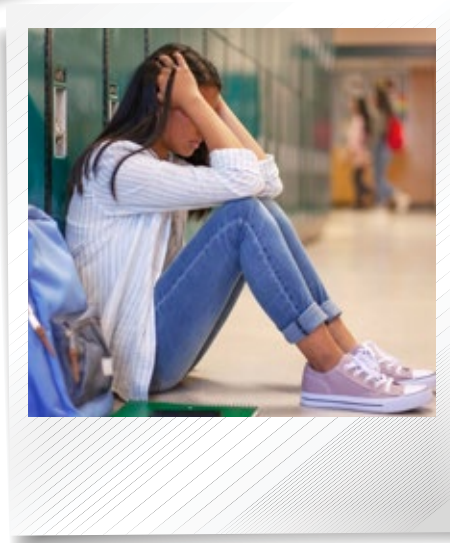


## **Middle School**

A Program of Virginia Rules  
Office of the Attorney General  
Commonwealth of Virginia



# **Your Friends. Your Choice.**





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**Answer key for Instructors  
is available at  
<https://virginiarules.org>**

**2023 UPDATE**







**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA**  
*Office of the Attorney General*

**Jason S. Miyares**  
Attorney General

202 North Ninth Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23219  
804-786-2071  
FAX 804-786-1991  
Virginia Relay Services  
800-828-1120

Dear Students,

It is an exciting time to grow up in Virginia. You have more information and more opportunities at your fingertips than your parents and grandparents ever could have imagined. Unfortunately, there are also people out there trying to put you on the wrong path by getting you involved in drugs, gangs, or other crimes. The choices you make right now will either open doors or limit your opportunities. Luckily, you do not have to make these decisions alone.

As a father of three daughters, and as someone who has worked in the field of law for many years, I understand that Virginia has a responsibility to help you reach your full potential. That is why I'm excited to share this course and workbook with you. "Reducing Gangs in Virginia: Your Friends, Your Choice" will give you the tools you need to say no to gangs, drugs, and other things that will hold you back.

Throughout this course you are going to learn how to identify gangs and other illegal activities, ways to say no to gangs, and skills for making decisions that will help you succeed in school and in life. Remember, you have a lot of adults in your life that want to help you. Don't be afraid to ask a teacher, police officer, mentor, or another trusted adult if you ever need help making a decision or getting out of a tough situation, and use the skills you learn in this course to steer clear of gangs and drugs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jason Miyares".

Jason Miyares  
Attorney General





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# Lesson One

## Your Friends, Your Choices: Choosing Friends

### Marcus Moves In

Marcus has just moved to Virginia from California. He is entering the seventh grade at Harbor Middle School where he feels he does not fit in. Marcus often says that kids in Virginia are just not into the real deal.

Marcus speaks often about his close friends in Los Angeles. He describes them as being extremely loyal and says they would defend their “turf” against anyone who tried to gain power in their area. Marcus talks about his former friends dressing in blue and using hand signs to communicate. He wants to start a group of friends like that in his new school.

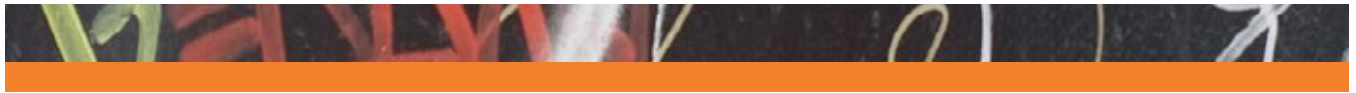
Antonio has grown to like Marcus and would like to hang out with him. Antonio believes that he can get others to join Marcus’s group. Marcus is excited and tells Antonio to get all the kids interested to meet at the park after school.

When the kids get to the park, Marcus tells them that he would like to start a group called the “Harbor Boys.” The group would dress in blue and use hand signs to communicate in school. Marcus also tells them that in order to become a member, each person would have to beat up a person that Marcus chooses. Marcus has decided to write a “hit list” for the group. The kids are excited and start to make plans.

During the first month, twelve kids have joined the group. They have assaulted and battered several other kids in the school. The group continues to grow, and Marcus and Antonio are still recruiting members.







# Lesson One

## Your Friends, Your Choices: Choosing Friends

### Review Exercise

**Answer each question and be prepared to discuss your answers.**

1. Why is Marcus having problems fitting in at his new school? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Why does Marcus miss his friends in California? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you believe that Marcus was in a gang in California? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
4. Was Marcus trying to start a gang in his new school? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
5. When should his new friends begin to question Marcus? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Is Antonio wrong to want to hang out with Marcus? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
7. Is Marcus trying to get the other kids to commit a crime? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. In this story, who is the leader and who are the followers? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_





# Lesson One

## Your Friends, Your Choices: Choosing Friends

### What Does Virginia Law Say about Gangs?

#### **Code of Virginia § 18.2-46.1 – Definition of a Criminal Street Gang**

Any group, organization, or association of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, which

- (1) has as one of their primary objectives to commit criminal activities
- (2) has an identifiable name, sign or symbol
- (3) whose members individually or collectively have engaged in one or more specified criminal acts, at least one of which is an act of violence

#### **Code of Virginia § 18.2-46.2 – makes it a Class 3 or 4 felony for a person to commit certain criminal acts on behalf of a gang**

Examples: robbery, assault, arson, trespassing, damage to property, and gang recruitment.

#### **Code of Virginia § 18.2-46.3 – Recruitment of Juveniles for Criminal Street Gang; Penalty**

- (1) Any person age 18 years or older, who solicits, invites, recruits, encourages or otherwise causes or attempts to cause a juvenile to actively participate in or become a member of a criminal street gang shall be guilty of a **Class 6 felony**. If this violation happens in a gang-free zone, such as a school, bus or community center, it becomes a **Class 5 felony**.
- (2) Any person who, regardless of age, solicits, invites, recruits, encourages or otherwise causes or attempts to cause another to actively participate in or become a member of a criminal street gang shall be guilty of a **Class 1 misdemeanor**.
- (3) Any person who uses threats or force against a person or their family to recruit that person into a gang, force them to remain in the gang, or to submit to a demand by a gang to commit a felony shall be guilty of a **Class 6 felony**. If this violation happens in a gang-free zone, such as a school, bus or community center, it becomes a **Class 5 felony** and if the offense is committed against a juvenile, it becomes a **Class 4 felony**.

A **gang-free school zone** includes school property (including colleges/universities), public property within 1,000 feet of school property, school buses, and public/community centers (including public recreation centers).

#### **Code of Virginia §18.2-55.1 – Hazing of Youth Gang Members**

Anyone who causes bodily injury by hazing any member or person seeking to become a member of a youth gang or street gang shall be guilty of a **Class 1 misdemeanor**.

**Code of Virginia § 16.1-260 (G)** – requires that the school superintendent division be notified when a juvenile commits a violation of any gang statute, whether on or off school property





# Lesson One

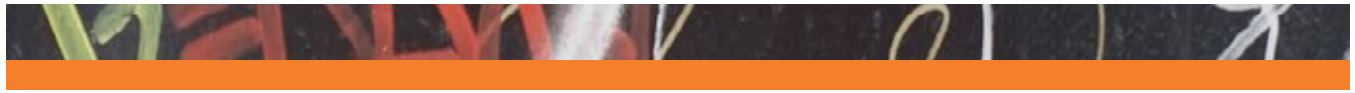
## Your Friends, Your Choices: Choosing Friends

### 1.1 Just The Facts

**Check true or false.**

- |  |            |             |
|--|------------|-------------|
| 1. Street gangs are dangerous.   | _____ True | _____ False |
| 2. People who recruit gang members are breaking the law.                                   | _____ True | _____ False |
| 3. Committing certain crimes with a gang could result in being charged with a felony.      | _____ True | _____ False |
| 4. It is a felony to threaten a person who wants to join or leave a gang.                  | _____ True | _____ False |
| 5. In Virginia, gang initiation, intimidation, and activity are against the law.           | _____ True | _____ False |
| 6. Your school division will be notified when you commit gang-related offenses.            | _____ True | _____ False |
| 7. Gangs are a great way to meet friends.  | _____ True | _____ False |
| 8. An adult who encourages youth to join a gang has committed a felony.                    | _____ True | _____ False |
| 9. It is a separate crime to participate in hazing while in a gang.                        | _____ True | _____ False |
| 10. You could be charged with a crime for looking, acting, or behaving like a gang member. | _____ True | _____ False |





# Lesson One

## Your Friends, Your Choices: Choosing Friends

### 1.2 Peer Pressure Or Choice?

**Complete each sentence.**

1. The best way to resist peer pressure is  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
2. One thing that is important when choosing a friend is  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
3. The best way to fit in with others my age is to  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
4. When I am with my friends our favorite activity is  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
5. To prove they are loyal, my friends must  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
6. My friends respond to negative pressure by  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
7. If I disagree with my friends, we settle our differences by  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
8. If someone encourages me to do something wrong, I would  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
9. When I see someone who is making a bad decision, I  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
10. The best way to be a leader in my school is to  
\_\_\_\_\_ .



# Lesson Two

## With Friends Like These, Who Needs Enemies?

### Justin Joins a Gang

This is the big day! After trying for several months to join a local gang, Justin will finally get his chance. After school today, Justin has his formal initiation where he will officially become a member of the “Southside Crew.” Justin is pretty nervous about initiation because he knows twelve members of the gang will take turns hitting and kicking him until someone tells them to stop. The gang calls this the official “beat down” of a new member.

Steven and Justin have been friends since first grade. Now that they are in middle school, Steven has seen a big change in Justin. He knows Justin is going to join a gang and does not agree with that decision. Steven has asked Justin not to join the gang and has told Justin that he is thinking of telling his parents. Justin is angry with Steven and has threatened to kill Steven if he interferes with his plans to join the gang.



## 2.1 What Do You Think?

***Discuss the following questions.***

- 1 What should Steven do?
- 2 Will Justin break additional laws by being in a gang if he commits a crime?
- 3 Is the “beating down” illegal if everyone agrees to it?
- 4 Did Justin break the law when he threatened Steven?





## Lesson Three

### Ten Important Facts about Street Gangs

1. Street gangs recruit members as early as elementary school.
2. Street gangs may be composed of any gender including male and female members.
3. Street gangs are a mix of different races and cultures.
4. Street gang members must prove themselves to their gangs.
5. Street gang members are typically involved in activities that break the law.
6. Street gang members accept violence as a method of operation.
7. Street gang members are often arrested for their crimes.
8. Street gang members are feared and not respected by their peers.
9. Street gang members are followers, not leaders.
10. Street gang members who commit certain crimes on behalf of a gang are committing a felony.







# Lesson Three

## Why People Join Street Gangs

The choice to join a street gang is an **individual choice** and not a group choice.

**Here are typical reasons why people join gangs:**

- They are looking for excitement.
- They do not feel good about themselves.
- They have problems at home.
- They do not feel loved or accepted.
- They choose the wrong friends.
- They think they can make money in gangs.
- They use alcohol and other drugs.
- They like committing violence against people.
- They do not have goals.
- They want to be cool.

### 3.1 Why do you think people join street gangs?

**List three reasons.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Gangs and Crime

Most street gang members are involved in activities that are crimes in the community. Several examples are:

- Using drugs and dealing drugs
- Theft and dealing in stolen property
- Assault and battery and serious injury to other people
- Threats and intimidation of others
- Destroying public and private property

**ALL OF THE ABOVE ARE AGAINST THE LAW!**



# Lesson Four

## Resisting Gangs in Your School and Community

**Here are ten ways to resist gangs in your school and community:**

1. Choose the right friends.
2. Say no to alcohol and other drugs.
3. Say no to violence at school and in the community.
4. Choose positive activities such as sports, organized school clubs, etc.
5. Set personal goals.
6. Concentrate on your school work, sports, and organized school clubs.
7. Talk openly about gangs to your parents, teachers, etc.
8. Choose positive solutions to your conflicts.
9. Do not dress like a gang member.
10. Be a leader and not a follower. Do not break the law or commit crimes.



### **Gangs or “Wannabes”**

Many people may not be in a real gang, but instead are part of a group that acts, dresses, and presents itself as a gang. These people are typically called “wannabes.”

If you commit certain crimes as part of a gang or a group of “wannabes,” the law can’t tell the difference, and you may be charged as a gang member.

## **Gangs or “Wannabes”: The Law Can’t Tell The Difference!**





# Lesson Four

## What Gangs Look Like

### Style or Gang Wear

One way to recognize a person who is in a gang is to look at the way he or she dresses. Here are some helpful hints:

- Gang members tend to dress alike.
- A number of gangs wear the same colors.
- Many gangs wear specific team athletic wear.
- Gang members tend to wear baggy clothes.
- Some gang members tend to wear baseball caps backwards.
- Many gang members display tattoos or body piercings.
- Many gang members wear the same types of shoes.



Remember that not everyone who dresses like a gang member is connected to a gang. It is important not only to look at the person, but also to pay attention to the friends he or she hangs out with. If everyone in the group is dressed the same, they may be gang members.

### 4.1 What Does A Gang Member Look Like?

***Describe what you think a typical gang member would look like.***

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## Lesson Five

### Tagging, Trashing, Graffiti: a Crime?

James has just completed the eighth grade at Pine Crest Middle School. He is very popular in school and is the leader of his neighborhood group. James does not consider his group to be a gang because they are not into violence. He claims they just like to mark their neighborhood by spraying the letters “PCM” on as many buildings as possible. These letters stand for “Pine Crest Mob.” In order to become a member, kids must “tag” at least ten buildings in the neighborhood.

On the last day of school, five members of the group decide to have a “tagging party” and spray their letters on all of the school doors. The plans are halted when the soccer coach drives into the school parking lot. Several members are identified and are reported to the principal. The police are called and an investigation into the property damage begins.

### 5.1 What Do You Think?

**Read the following statements and check your response.**

- |  |             |                |
|--|-------------|----------------|
| 1. James is not a gang member.   | _____ Agree | _____ Disagree |
| 2. James and his friends should not be arrested.                                 | _____ Agree | _____ Disagree |
| 3. Graffiti art is not a crime.  | _____ Agree | _____ Disagree |
| 4. The group should pay for the damages.   | _____ Agree | _____ Disagree |
| 5. The group’s parents should also be held responsible.                          | _____ Agree | _____ Disagree |
| 6. Middle school students are too young to be held responsible.                  | _____ Agree | _____ Disagree |
| 7. Spray painting the school should be handled by the school and not the police. | _____ Agree | _____ Disagree |
| 8. Property crime is not a big deal.   | _____ Agree | _____ Disagree |
| 9. Gangs should have the right to tag their neighborhood.                        | _____ Agree | _____ Disagree |
| 10. The soccer coach did the right thing by reporting the group.                 | _____ Agree | _____ Disagree |

#### What Does Virginia Law Say about Destroying or Defacing Property?

**Code of Virginia §18.2-137 (B) - Injuring, etc., any property, monument, etc.** - Anyone who destroys or defaces any property, real or personal, not his own, shall be guilty of a **Class 1 misdemeanor** if the value of or damage to the property is less than \$1,000 or a **Class 6 felony** if the value of or damage is \$1,000 or more.

**Code of Virginia §18.2-138 – Damaging public buildings, etc., penalty** - Anyone who destroys or defaces public property shall be guilty of a **Class 1 misdemeanor** if the damage to the property is less than \$1,000 and a **Class 6 felony** if the damage is \$1,000 or more.

**Code of Virginia § 8.01-43 – Action against parent for damage to public property by minor** - The parents or guardians of a child may be ordered to pay up to \$2,500 for damages caused to public property.





## Lesson Six

### Bullying? You Make the Call

Robert wants to change schools. He has had enough of being picked on and being made fun of by several older boys at his school. Now that he is in the seventh grade, Robert hoped this year would be better. Shortly after the start of school, Phillip and John, two eighth grade students, began to make profane comments about Robert's parents.

Recently, Phillip and John found Robert after school and shouted obscene remarks at him. When Robert tried to ignore the boys they pushed and shoved him and at one point Phillip punched him, knocking him to the ground. Robert tried to get up from the ground and regain his balance, but John kicked him repeatedly until Robert broke free and ran. Robert is not sure what he should do. His grades have started to suffer, and he wants a fresh start at a new school.

### 6.1 What Do You Think:

**Circle the Best answer for each question**

1. Robert should handle this situation by
  - a. running away from home.
  - b. refusing to go to school.
  - c. sharing the situation with someone.
  - d. fighting Phillip and John.
2. Robert should share the situation with
  - a. his parents.
  - b. his teacher.
  - c. his principal.
  - d. all of the above.
3. Phillip and John could be charged with the following crimes
  - a. using profanity.
  - b. assault and battery.
  - c. stealing property.
  - d. both a and b
4. Robert has the right to
  - a. leave school.
  - b. ignore his teachers.
  - c. report this situation to the police.
  - d. use profanity toward Phillip and John.
5. Bullying should be reported because
  - a. it is unacceptable behavior.
  - b. it causes someone harm.
  - c. if not reported it could get worse.
  - d. all of the above.

### What Does Virginia Law Say about Bullying?

**Code of Virginia §18.2-416 – Using Abusive Language to Another Person** – Any person, including a minor who curses, abuses, or uses violent or abusive language toward another person, may be guilty of a **Class 3 misdemeanor**.

**Code of Virginia §18.2-57 – Assault and Battery** – Any person who assaults and batters another person shall be guilty of a **Class 1 misdemeanor**.





# Gangs in Virginia

## Your Friends, Your Choices


### Student Review

**Check true or false.**

- |   |            |             |
|---|------------|-------------|
| 1. Gangs in Virginia are dangerous.                                     | _____ True | _____ False |
| 2. Choosing good, positive friends is a way to resist gangs.            | _____ True | _____ False |
| 3. Gang members never dress alike.                                      | _____ True | _____ False |
| 4. Destroying property is not against the law in Virginia.              | _____ True | _____ False |
| 5. Parents are not responsible for the damage caused by their children. | _____ True | _____ False |
| 6. Gang members often wear the same athletic clothing.                  | _____ True | _____ False |
| 7. Profanity is against the law in Virginia.                            | _____ True | _____ False |
| 8. Violence is the best way to solve a conflict.                        | _____ True | _____ False |
| 9. People join gangs to be accepted and protected.                      | _____ True | _____ False |
| 10. Gangs are often involved in drugs and violence.                     | _____ True | _____ False |



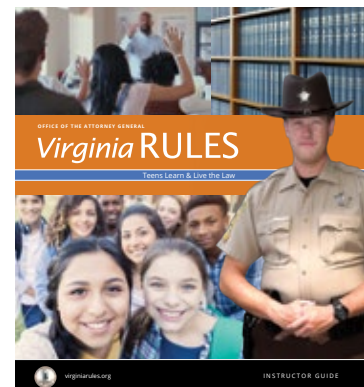




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[virginiarules.org](http://virginiarules.org)





To request other Virginia Rules program materials, visit [virginiarules.org](http://virginiarules.org) or call (804) 786-1922.

- Reducing Gangs in Virginia workbooks (elementary, middle and high school and parent/teacher versions available)
- How to Host a Virginia Rules Camp Guide
- Virginia Rules Instructor Guide



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Brochure design by the Office of Graphic Communications  
Virginia Department of General Services. Illustrations by Phillip Payne.