



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

**Your Friends.
Your Choice.**



Elementary School

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

Your Friends. Your Choice.



REDUCING **GANGS** *IN VIRGINIA*

Elementary School

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

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

2025 UPDATE

Design by the Office of Graphic Communication
Virginia Department of General Services



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Office of the Attorney General

Jason S. Miyares
Attorney General

202 North 9th Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219
804-786-2071
FAX 804-786-1991
Virginia Relay Services
800-828-1120

Dear Students,

As your Attorney General, I am working every day to help build a future in Virginia where all children can grow up in safety.

Unfortunately, gangs are still a source of violence and danger in many of our communities, and children and young people are particularly vulnerable to their promises of acceptance, security, money, and power. In reality, gangs lie, manipulate, and make false promises. All they offer is a dead-end trip to jail, the hospital, or worse.

I'm honored to present this workbook to help expose the dangers of gangs. Your life, or the life of a friend, may depend on understanding the realities of gangs and the damage they do.

This workbook teaches you how to recognize gang members, how to say "no" if you or someone you know is being pressured to join a gang, and how to make good decisions that lead to a happy, healthy, and successful future.

I hope this information will be useful to you, your friends, and your family as we work together to keep our young people and schools safe from gangs and gang violence.

Sincerely,

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

Jason Miyares
Attorney General



Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| A Letter from Attorney General Jason Miyares | 2 |
| Lesson One: Choosing Real Friends..... | 4 |
| Lesson Two: Gangs and Why People Join Them | 12 |
| Lesson Three: What's a Sister to Do? Her Brother Could Be in Trouble | 14 |
| Lesson Four: Staying Away from Gangs..... | 18 |
| Lesson Five: Tagging, Trashing, Graffiti: A Crime? | 22 |
| Lesson Six: Bullying? You Make the Call | 26 |
| Gangs in Virginia: Your Friends, Your Choices | 29 |

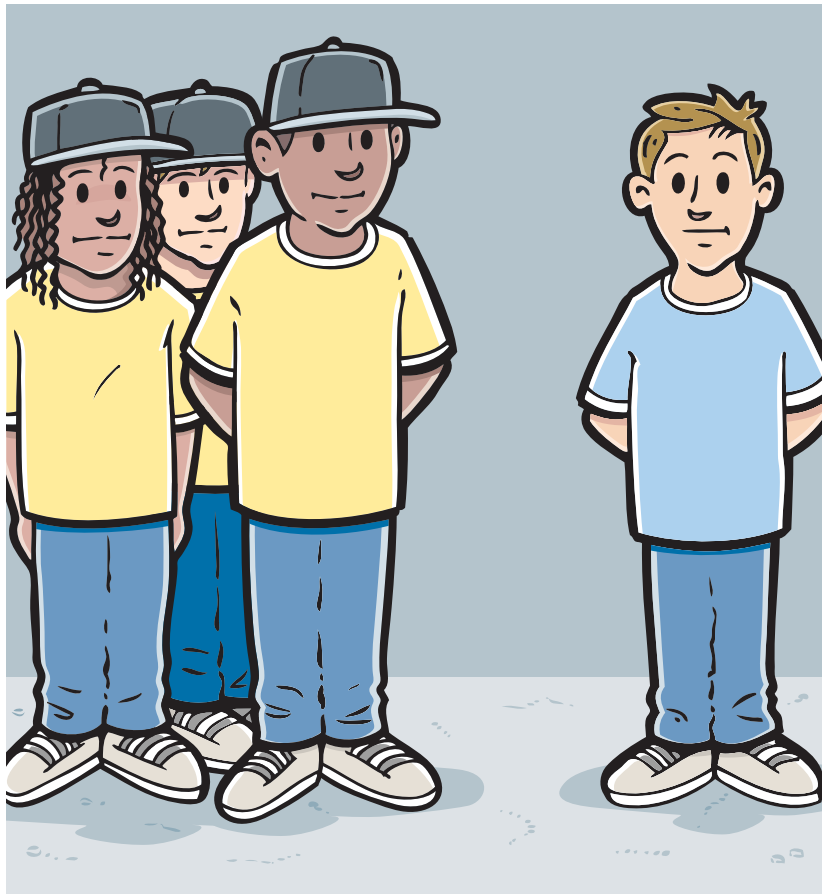


Lesson One: Choosing Real Friends

You've probably heard that it's against the law to join a gang. But what exactly is a gang? Well if three or more people

- *form a group,*
- *choose a name, colors or symbol for their group, and*
- *do two or more illegal things as part of that group – including one violent thing, like beating someone up ...*

they are a gang, according to the law. Gangs are dangerous as well as illegal. If you join a gang you will end up hurt, in jail, or may even be killed. If you're worried about gangs, turn to a trusted adult such as a teacher or coach for help.





Lesson One: Choosing Real Friends

Justin has just moved to Virginia from California. He is in the fifth grade at Central Elementary School. Justin misses his old friends in Los Angeles and talks about them often. He brags about how close he and his friends were and says he is looking for kids in his new school that just want to hang out.

Sean has been going to Central Elementary for years. He has started to become good friends with Justin. Sean really likes the style of clothes Justin wears and the music he listens to. He has promised Justin that he will hang out with him and introduce him to other kids who might be interested in joining his group. Together the two boys approach several other kids and convince them to start wearing the same colors to school.

One afternoon, Justin asks Sean and the other kids to meet him at the playground after school. Justin tells them that if they want to be part of his group, they will have to challenge a classmate to a fight. Justin says the group will dress in yellow and blue and will be called the “Central Posse.”

Sean really likes Justin and wants to stay friends with him, but Sean’s older brother has cautioned him about hanging out with Justin.



Lesson One: Choosing Real Friends

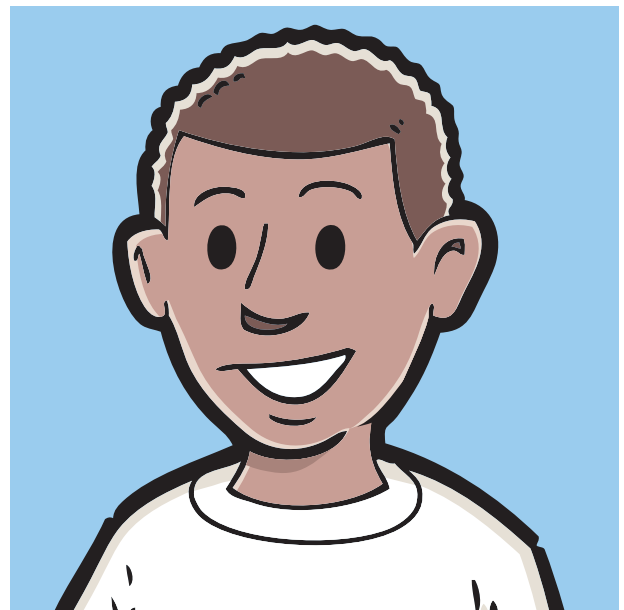
Looking for Clues

What do you think about Justin? Is he a good friend for Sean? Is he asking the other kids to do anything illegal? Let's look at this story again for clues about gangs:

... wears and the music he listens to. He has promised Justin that he will hang out with him and introduce him to other kids who might be interested in joining his group. Together the two boys approach several other kids **1** and convince them to start wearing the same colors **2** to school.

One afternoon, Justin asks Sean and the other kids to meet him at the playground after school. Justin tells them that if they want to be part of his group, they will have to challenge a classmate to a fight . **4** Justin says the group will dress in yellow and blue **2** and will be called the "Central Posse." **3**

Sean really likes Justin and wants to stay friends with him, but Sean's older brother has cautioned him about hanging out with Justin.





Lesson One: Choosing Real Friends

- 1 The boys are forming a group of three or more.
- 2 The boys have chosen a color for their group.
- 3 The boys have chosen a name for their group.
- 4 The boys are forcing people to do something violent to be part of the group.

Remember, if three or more people

- form a group,
- choose a name, colors or symbol for their group, and
- do two or more illegal things as part of that group – including one violent thing, like beating someone up ...

they are a gang, according to the law. Even if they're kids, they could be arrested under Virginia's anti-gang laws.

Sean's brother is right – Justin's "Central Posse" group sure sounds like a gang. In fact, trying to get someone to join a gang is a crime – so Justin has already broken the law.

Sometimes it's hard to tell a real friend from someone who is pretending to be a friend to get you to join a gang. Remember that a real friend doesn't threaten you, or make you do things you don't want to, like challenge someone to a fight.



Lesson One: Choosing Real Friends

Discussion

Answer each question and be prepared to discuss your answers.

1. Why did Justin want Sean to be his friend? _____

2. Should Sean stay friends with Justin? _____ Yes _____ No
3. Do you think Justin was in a gang in California? _____ Yes _____ No
4. Do you think Justin is trying to start a gang in Virginia?
Why? _____ Yes _____ No

5. What are the consequences of joining gangs? _____

6. What is the best choice for Sean? _____

7. Who could Sean turn to for answers? _____
8. Discuss: How can Sean refuse Justin's offer?



Lesson One: Choosing Real Friends

Exercise 1: True or False?

Check True or False.

- | | | |
|---|------------|-------------|
| 1. Joining a gang is dangerous. | _____ True | _____ False |
| 2. It is against the law for students to just “hang out.” | _____ True | _____ False |
| 3. If someone encourages you to join a gang, he or she is breaking the law. | _____ True | _____ False |
| 4. In Virginia, when three or more students dress alike, have a group name and commit a crime together, they are considered a “gang.” | _____ True | _____ False |

Exercise 2: What is important to you in a friend?

Finish the following statement using a number scale of 1 - 10, with 1 being the least important and 10 being the most important:

I choose my friends because they:

- | | | | |
|---|-------|---------------------------------|-------|
| • like to do the same things that I do. | _____ | • make good choices. | _____ |
| • like the same music I do. | _____ | • treat people fairly. | _____ |
| • live in my neighborhood. | _____ | • are easy to talk to. | _____ |
| • go to my school. | _____ | • do everything I tell them to. | _____ |
| • wear cool clothes. | _____ | | |



Lesson One: Choosing Real Friends

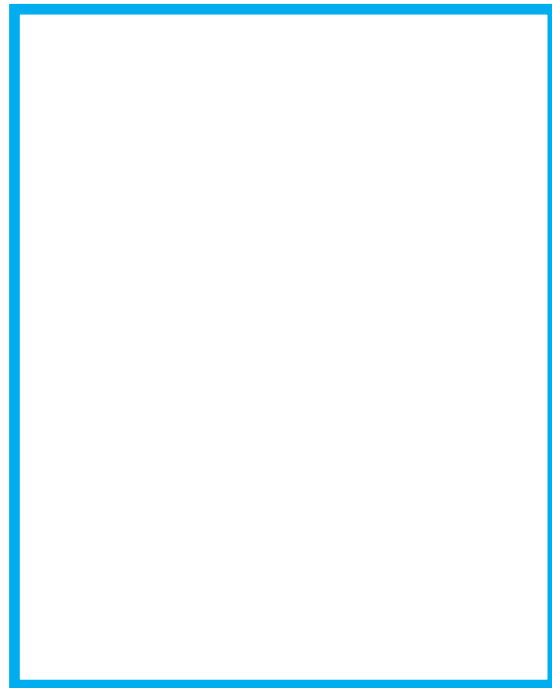
Exercise 3: My Best Friend

Finish the statements below by filling in the blanks.

My best friend is _____. I like _____
because _____.
We have been friends since _____.
We spend most of our time _____.
When we disagree, we settle it by _____.
I know my friend makes good choices because _____.
_____.

Who is my real friend?

Draw a picture of your best friend.





Lesson One: Choosing Real 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.

(This definition includes criminal acts such as organized retail theft, see *Code of Virginia* § 18.2-103.1)

Code of Virginia § 18.2-46.2 – Gang Participation – This law makes it a **Class 4 felony** for any person to participate in a gang and commit certain criminal acts on behalf of a gang. It makes it a **Class 3 felony** if the participant is 18 years or older and knows or has reason to know the gang includes a juvenile member/participant or the criminal act is an act of violence. This law makes it a separate offense to commit a crime, such as robbery, assault, arson, trespassing, damage to property, or gang recruitment on behalf of a gang.

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**, and if the offense is committed against a juvenile it becomes a **Class 4 felony**.
- (2) Any person under 18 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, it becomes a **Class 4 felony**.

Code of Virginia § 18.2-46.3 – 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 Two: Gangs and Why People Join Them

Ten Important Facts about Gangs

1. Gangs try to get members as early as elementary school and as young as seven years old.
2. Both girls and boys can be in gangs.
3. Gangs can have a mix of different races and cultures.
4. Gangs make their members “prove themselves” to the gang, often by doing something dangerous or illegal.
5. Gang members often break the law.
6. Gangs use violence to get things done.
7. Gang members are often arrested for their crimes and are victims of the gang they consider to be like family.
8. People don’t respect gang members – they fear and dislike them.
9. Gang members are followers, not leaders.
10. Committing crimes for the gang can carry very heavy punishment, even for younger gang members.





Lesson Two: Gangs and Why People Join Them

Exercise 1: Why do you think people join gangs?

List three reasons.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Remember, YOU are the one who decides whether you'll join a gang – not your group.

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.

Gangs and Crime

Most gang members do things that are crimes in the community.

Some examples are:

- Using drugs and dealing drugs
- Stealing things and re-selling them
- Beating people up
- Threatening or bullying people
- Destroying or damaging property

ALL OF THESE ARE AGAINST THE LAW!

Lesson Three: What's a Sister to Do? Her Brother Could Be in Trouble.

Who wouldn't want a group of loyal friends? Gangs lie to new members, saying they'll take care of them and treat them as family. They make their members dress alike, wear the same colors, or get tattoos, so they feel like part of the group. But instead of caring for each other, gang members are often made to do dangerous and illegal things like stealing, dealing drugs, damaging property or beating innocent people up. And by the way – that tattoo is illegal in Virginia – you may not get a tattoo or a piercing if you are under 18 and don't have a parent or guardian with you.

Keniesha has a major problem. Her older brother Jamal has been hanging out with some people in a local gang. For his 17th birthday, Jamal shocked his family by getting a tattoo on his chest that says "Blood Killas."

Jamal is always dressing in blue and never leaves his house without wearing a blue baseball cap turned backwards. Keniesha's parents are concerned about Jamal's behavior, but he just says, "You guys don't understand what you have to do today to have friends." He says his friends are loyal and would never let him down.

Keniesha has heard rumors about her brother and his friends threatening and hurting other people. Keniesha has decided that she needs help in this situation. Do you think she's right to worry about Jamal? Who can she turn to?





Lesson Three: What's a Sister to Do? Her Brother Could Be in Trouble.

Looking for Clues

Let's look at this story again for clues about Jamal's situation:

Keniesha has a major problem. Her older brother Jamal has been hanging out with some people in a local gang ❶ For his 17th birthday, Jamal shocked his family by getting a tattoo on his chest that says "Blood Killas." ❷

Jamal is always dressing in blue ❸ and never leaves his house without wearing a blue baseball cap turned backwards. ❹ Keniesha's parents are concerned about Jamal's behavior, but he just says, "You guys don't understand what you have to do today to have friends." He says his friends are loyal and would never let him down. ❺

Keniesha has heard rumors about her brother and his friends threatening and hurting other people. ❻ Keniesha has decided that she needs help in this situation. Who can she turn to?

- ❶ It's never good to hang around with gang members.
- ❷ Jamal's tattoo is illegal, and it is a gang sign.
- ❸ Jamal is wearing gang colors and styles.
- ❹ Jamal believes gang lies about friendship.
- ❺ Threats and violence are gang tactics and are illegal.



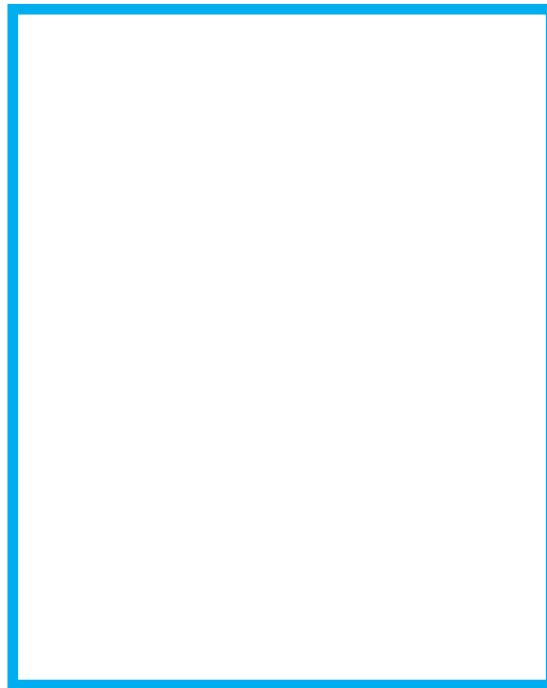
Lesson Three: What's a Sister to Do?

Her Brother Could Be in Trouble.

It sure sounds like Jamal has joined a gang – he is hanging around with gang members, wearing gang colors, has an illegal tattoo and may be involved in gang activities like harming others. It also sounds like he has believed the lies gangs tell about how they'll take care of him. He's lucky to have an observant, caring sister like Keniesha! She should talk to her parents – they are already worried about Jamal – or to her teacher or another trusted adult like a minister, coach, or counselor.

Who would you ask for help?

Draw a picture of an adult you trust.





Lesson Three: What's a Sister to Do?

Her Brother Could Be in Trouble.

Exercise

Circle the response which correctly answers the question.

1. What are the signs that Jamal is in a gang?
 - a. the tattoo on his chest
 - b. his choice in friends
 - c. wearing the color blue
 - d. all of the above

2. Why do Jamal and his friends want to hurt other people?
 - a. to stay in school
 - b. to be accepted by the gang
 - c. to get a job
 - d. to be a good citizen

3. What other types of crimes do gangs usually commit?
 - a. using and dealing drugs
 - b. destroying property
 - c. bullying others
 - d. all of the above

4. Why should Keniesha worry about her brother?
 - a. she does not have to worry
 - b. she does not understand her brother
 - c. if he stays in the gang, he will be hurt or arrested
 - d. all of the above

5. Who can Keniesha talk to about her problem?
 - a. her teacher
 - b. her counselor
 - c. her parents
 - d. all of the above

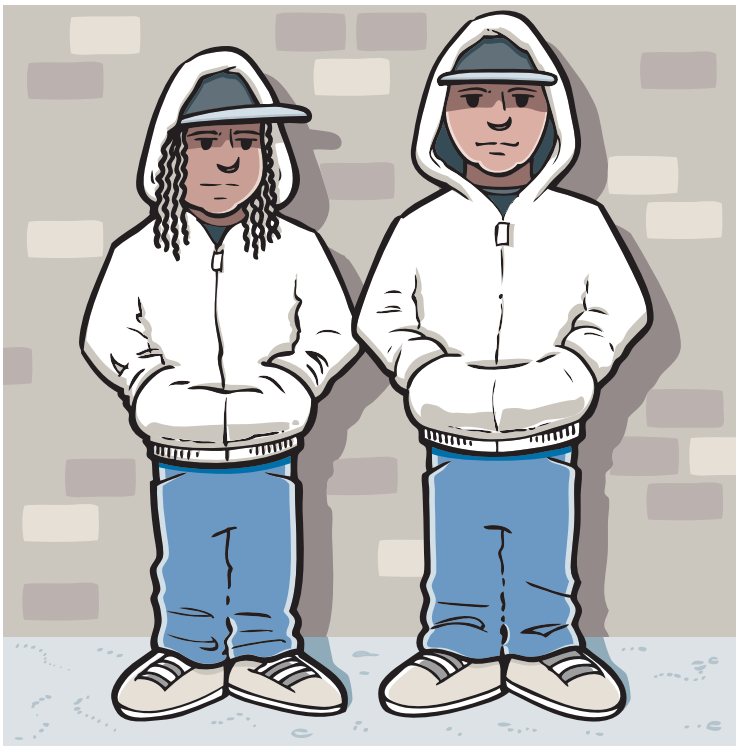


Lesson Four: Staying Away From Gangs

What Gangs Look Like: Style or Gang Wear

One way to tell if a person 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.
- Gang members often wear the same colors.
- Some gangs wear athletic wear from a certain team.
- Gang members tend to wear baggy clothes.
- Some gang members wear baseball caps backwards.
- Some gang members have tattoos or body piercings.
- Gang members may wear the same types of shoes.



Remember that not everyone who dresses like a gang member is part of 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, and the way they act. If everyone in the group is dressed the same, they may be gang members.

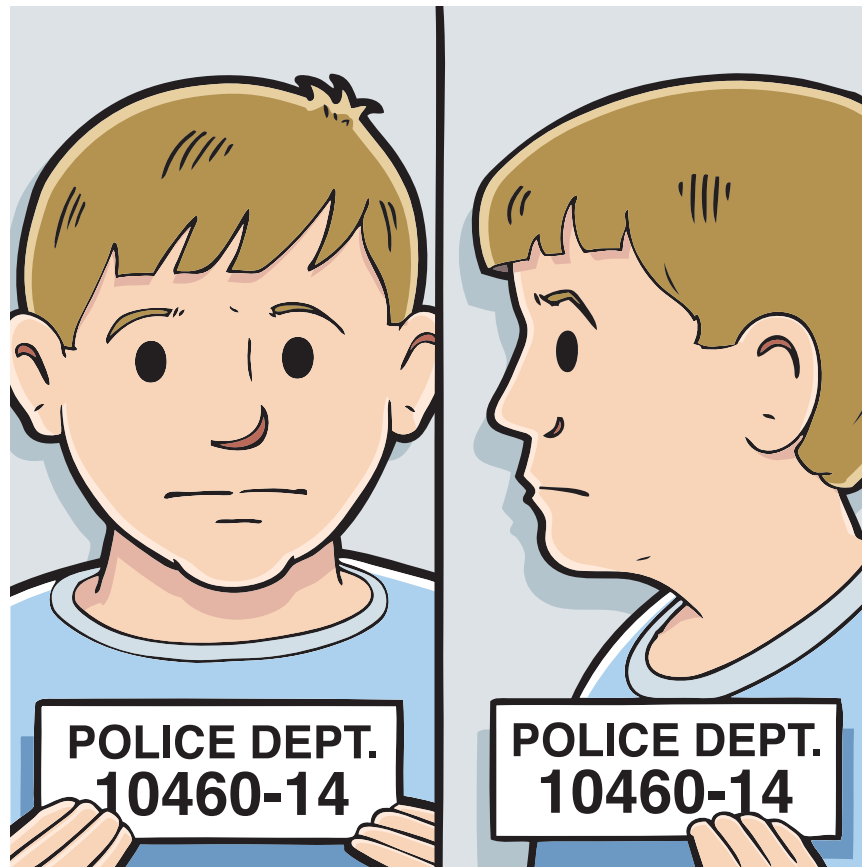
Lesson Four: Staying Away From Gangs

Gangs or “Wannabes”

Many people haven’t actually joined a gang, but are part of a group that acts and dresses like a gang. These people are often called “wannabes.”

However, the law can’t tell the difference between a “wannabe” and a gang. If you look and act like a gang member, the law may consider you one, and you may be charged as a gang member.

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



Lesson Four: Staying Away From Gangs

Here are 10 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.





Lesson Four: What Gangs Look Like

How will you stay clear of gangs?

Draw a picture of how you will avoid getting involved with gangs.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thick blue border, intended for a student to draw a picture of how they will avoid getting involved with gangs.

Lesson Five: Tagging, Trashing, Graffiti: A Crime?

*It's against the law to damage property – especially schools and other public buildings – and that makes **graffiti** (also called **tagging**) a crime (Code of Virginia § 18.2-138). Gangs often use graffiti to mark their territory. If you paint on someone's property, you – and your parents – may have to pay a lot of money to fix the damage, even if you are still a child (Code of Virginia § 8.01-43).*

Carl has just completed the fourth grade at Capitol Elementary School. He has formed a group of fellow students who are calling themselves the “Capitol Boys.” Carl says that his group is not into violence, but they do like to “mess up” people’s property.

The group likes to spray paint buildings, cars, and houses. Recently, Carl and his group spray-painted the front of their school. They like the color red because they feel that it leaves their mark throughout the community. The group feels that they are out just having a good time.





Lesson Five: Tagging, Trashing, Graffiti: A Crime?

Looking for clues

Carl has just completed the fourth grade ❶ at Capitol Elementary School. He has formed a group of fellow students who are calling themselves the “Capitol Boys.” Carl says that his group is not into violence, but they do like to “mess up” people’s property. ❷

The group likes to spray paint buildings, cars, and houses. ❸ Recently, Carl and his group spray-painted the front of their school. They like the color red ❹ because they feel that it leaves their mark throughout the community. The group feels that they are out just having a good time. ❺

- ❶ Carl and his group are young – but remember that they can still be held responsible for crimes.
- ❷ Does Carl’s group seem like a gang? Go back to Lesson 1 and see if they fit the description at the beginning.
- ❸ Spray painting property – graffiti – is a crime.
- ❹ Gangs often use colors to identify themselves.
- ❺ Remember that even if you don’t mean to be a gang, the law may treat you as one if you look and act like a gang.



Lesson Five: Tagging, Trashing, Graffiti: A Crime?

Exercise 1: What Do You Think?

Read the following statements and check your response.

- | | | |
|--|-------------|----------------|
| 1. Carl is not a gang member. | _____ Agree | _____ Disagree |
| 2. Carl 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. Elementary school students are too young to be held responsible for crimes like this. | _____ 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 |



Lesson Five: Tagging, Trashing, Graffiti: A Crime?

Damaging Property is a Crime

Carl may think he's just "messing up" property, but according to Virginia law he's committing a crime. It's against the law to damage or destroy property, and there are special laws against damaging schools and other public buildings. That's true even if the property looks deserted or neglected.

Not only will Carl and his friends get in trouble – their parents may be required to pay up to \$2,500 for the damage. (*Code of Virginia* § 8.01-43).

And if the law decides that Carl and his friends are in a gang, there may be other charges as well.



Lesson Six: Bullying? You Make the Call

Bullying is when one child repeatedly uses deliberate, harmful behavior against another child. This includes both actions and words, such as profanity (cursing) and threats. Bullying itself is not a crime. However, many things done by bullies are crimes. These include:

- *Threats - saying that you may harm someone, using words, writing or electronic communications.*
- *Harassment - repeatedly annoying or attacking a person or group in a way that makes them anxious or fearful for their safety.*
- *Assault and battery - Assault is attempting to hurt someone; battery is when you actually make harmful physical contact with them. You can be guilty of assault even if you don't actually touch a person, and you can be guilty of battery if you are just part of the group that hurts them, even if you don't touch them.*
- *Robbery - taking someone's property against their will using violence or intimidation.*
- *Hazing - making someone risk their health or safety, or hurting someone, as a condition of letting them into a group.*

For more information on these terms please visit <https://virginiarules.org>. Bullying is often used by gangs. A person who is being bullied should report the bullying to a trusted adult.





Lesson Six: Bullying? You Make the Call

Sarah has tried to make friends in her new class, but for some reason, she is constantly picked on and laughed at by other students. Lately, the treatment from several other girls in the class has gotten worse. The girls have started to curse at Sarah and have tried to get her to fight by calling her family profane names.

At one point, Sarah was punched and kicked on the playground by Kelly and Brittany. Sarah is getting fed up with this treatment and is angry and unhappy with her classmates.

Looking for Clues

Sarah has tried to make friends in her new class, but for some reason, she is **constantly picked on and laughed at** ❶ by other students. Lately, the treatment from several other girls in the class has gotten worse. The girls have started to curse at Sarah and have tried to get her to fight by calling her family **profane names.** ❷

At one point, Sarah was **punched and kicked** ❸ on the playground by Kelly and Brittany. Sarah is getting fed up with this treatment and is angry and unhappy with her classmates.

- ❶ Doing something repeatedly, over and over, is part of the definition of bullying.
- ❷ Profanity and threats can be part of bullying, and are against the law.
- ❸ Punching and kicking can also be part of bullying, and are considered assault and battery, also crimes.



Lesson Six: Bullying? You Make the Call

Exercise 1: What Do You Think?

Circle the best answer for each question

1. Sarah should handle this situation by
 - a. running away from home.
 - b. refusing to go to school.
 - c. sharing the situation with someone.
 - d. fighting Kelly and Brittany.
2. Sarah should share the situation with
 - a. her parents.
 - b. her teacher.
 - c. her principal.
 - d. all of the above.
3. Kelly and Brittany could be charged with crime(s) of
 - a. using profanity.
 - b. assault and battery.
 - c. stealing property.
 - d. both a and b
4. Sarah has the right to
 - a. leave school.
 - b. ignore her teachers.
 - c. report this situation to the authorities.
 - d. use profanity toward Kelly and Brittany.
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's Wrong with Bullying?

In the example above, Sarah has been threatened, harassed, and assaulted on the playground. All of these activities are crimes. And often, these are the kinds of crimes committed by gangs.

Bullying is no joke. It is wrong – it is harmful – and often, it is a crime.

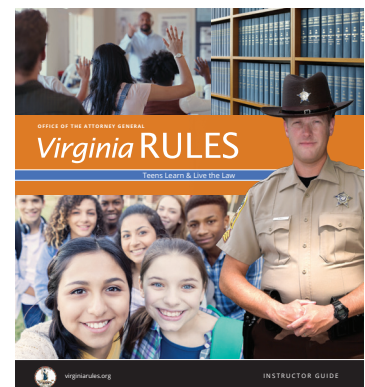
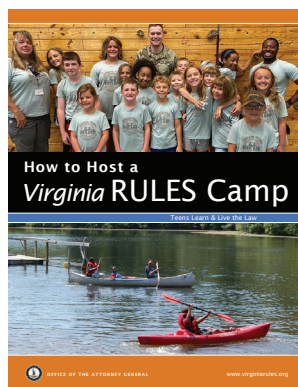


Gangs in Virginia: Your Friends, Your Choices

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 because they think they will be accepted and protected. | ____ True | ____ False |
| 10. Gangs are often involved in drugs and violence. | ____ True | ____ False |



To request other Virginia Rules program materials, visit virginiarules.org.

- 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



ag.virginia.gov

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