



REDUCING GANGS IN VIRGINIA

**Your Friends.
Your Choice.**



High School

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



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

2025 UPDATE



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Office of the Attorney General

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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 blue ink signature of Jason S. Miyares, written in a cursive style.

Jason Miyares
Attorney General



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Lesson One

Your Friends, Your Choices: Choosing Friends

Justin Jumps In

For Justin, life has been hard. His mother and father do not get along and he argues constantly with his brother and sister. Now that he has turned sixteen, he is eligible to drive, but his parents refuse to take him to get his license. Justin feels depressed and longs for someone to show him some respect.



Antonio has the answer for Justin. "If you want real respect, you need to join my crew." Justin and Antonio have been friends for years, but Justin has always resisted joining Antonio's group because he does not agree with the way that they treat people. On several occasions, the group has attacked innocent people without reason. But Justin is now convinced that if he ever wants to be accepted, this is his chance.

Justin finally decides to join the "Southside Posse." He first has to meet Chico, the group's leader. Chico is nineteen years of age, but he hangs out with students in high school. He quit school at age sixteen, has never held a job, and claims that he is not worried about money. Chico believes that if he needs it, he will take it.

The stage is set and Justin is officially going to become a member of the "Southside Posse," but first he must pass the test. To join the group Justin will have to go through a "beat in" ceremony where several group members will physically assault him until they draw blood. In addition, Chico has ordered that Justin join six members of the group who plan to torch a rival gang member's house. Chico's motto is "If you want respect, you have to pay the price."



Lesson One

Your Friends, Your Choices: Choosing Friends

Answer each question and be prepared to discuss your answers.

1. Why is Justin feeling depressed? _____

2. What is Justin searching for? _____

3. What is Antonio's suggestion for Justin's problems? _____

4. Will joining a gang give Justin the respect he needs? _____

5. Why do the teens respect Chico? _____

6. What must Justin do before he is considered to be member of the gang? _____

7. What might happen to Justin if he joins the gang? _____

8. What might happen to Justin if he refuses to join the gang? _____

9. What is the best way to handle this situation? _____

10. Who could Justin turn to for advice? _____



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 gangs 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, 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 You Make the Call

Check True or False.

1. Any group of three or more in Virginia is a gang. ☐ True ☐ False
2. As members of the "Southside Posse," Justin and Antonio are breaking the law in Virginia. ☐ True ☐ False
3. Certain criminal acts committed by gang members in Virginia are classified as felonies. ☐ True ☐ False
4. In Virginia, age does not matter when recruiting gang members. ☐ True ☐ False
5. By recruiting Justin to join a gang, Antonio did not break the law. ☐ True ☐ False
6. In Virginia, everyone who participates in Justin's "beat in" process can be charged with a crime. ☐ True ☐ False
7. If Chico is charged with recruiting juveniles to join a gang, he will be tried as a juvenile. ☐ True ☐ False
8. In Virginia, if someone threatens your family while encouraging you to join an gang, they have committed a felony. ☐ True ☐ False
9. In Virginia, if a gang member is injured for wanting to leave a gang, all those responsible may be charged with a felony. ☐ True ☐ False
10. In Virginia, if you are in a gang-related incident at the mall, your school division will not be notified. ☐ True ☐ False



Lesson One

Your Friends, Your Choices: Choosing Friends

1.2 Peer Pressure or Choice?

1. The best way to resist pressure is _____
_____ .
2. One thing that is important when selecting 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?

Divided Loyalty

Dalesha is at the top of her game. She has a supportive family, good grades and is working on a basketball scholarship to a major university. Currently, Dalesha is leading the district with a 24 point per game average. College coaches have lined up for a chance to recruit Dalesha, and her future appears bright.



However, Dalesha has a problem with selecting the wrong friends. She is currently being investigated for her role in a large fight between two female groups at a local mall. Although she claims that she is innocent, witnesses have stated that Dalesha was wearing gang attire and participated in the incident, which destroyed food court furniture. Several members of a rival girls' basketball team have evidence that Dalesha has sent messages through the internet and social media threatening additional violence against the "Southside Hood," a known community street gang. The evidence will connect Dalesha to the "Northside Mob," a feared gang in the north side of town.

The local police have determined that Dalesha is a key suspect in the fight and property damage. She will be arrested and charged with gang offenses later this week. The members of Dalesha's basketball team have heard the news and they are concerned whether she will be playing in the upcoming Championship tournament. What will her coach say about the situation? Will this impact her ability to play in college?



Lesson Two

With Friends Like These, Who Needs Enemies?

Divided Loyalty

1. Joining a gang is just a part of growing up. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
2. People should not be judged by their choice of friends. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
3. If someone is “hanging” out with known gang members, that’s their business. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
4. Dalesha should not be judged for wearing gang clothes. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
5. In this situation, the people who destroyed the mall property should have to pay for it. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
6. Dalesha should be allowed to remain on the basketball team following her arrest. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
7. This event did not occur at school, so Dalesha’s principal and coach should not be involved. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
8. Dalesha has let her teammates down in this situation. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
9. Interested colleges should still recruit Dalesha. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
10. Dalesha should choose between her teammates and her gang associates. _____ Agree _____ Disagree



Lesson Three

10 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 both 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 Five

What Gangs Look Like

Style or Statement

1. People are not judged on their appearance. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
2. People who are wearing gang style clothing are making a statement. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
3. Today's teen clothing style is just a fact of life. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
4. My parents have no control over what I wear. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
5. "Gang attire" is appropriate for school dress. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
6. School officials should not be able to set a dress code. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
7. Wearing clothing with profanity is a fashion statement. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
8. Using profanity is simply freedom of speech. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
9. Teens should be allowed to tattoo and pierce their body without permission from their parents. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
10. Style and appearance are important to a positive climate. _____ Agree _____ Disagree

What Does Virginia Law Say about Abusive Language?

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**.

What Does Virginia Law Say about Tattooing and Body Piercing?

Code of Virginia § 18.2-371.3 – Tattooing or Body Piercing of Minors – It is against the law for any person, other than a medical doctor or registered nurse, to tattoo a person less than 18 years of age unless the person's parent or guardian is present. This is a **Class 1 misdemeanor**.



Lesson Six

Tagging, Trashing, Graffiti: a Crime?

Just The Facts

Myth: Graffiti is not a big deal.

Fact: Graffiti causes millions of dollars in property damage each year in Virginia. It also communicates threats, marks “turf,” and is a primary mechanism of communication for gangs.

Myth: Graffiti is simple a form of art.

Fact: Art is a talent which should be expressed in the right format and not on someone’s property without their permission.

Myth: Tagging someone’s property is just a prank.

Fact: Defacing or destroying someone’s property is a crime.

Myth: Schools and businesses are not considered real property.

Fact: Schools are owned by individual communities, and businesses are owned by private companies or individuals.

Myth: Parents are not responsible for damage caused by graffiti.

Fact: In Virginia, parents may be ordered to pay up to \$2,500 for damages caused to public property by their children.



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.



Gangs in Virginia


Your Friends, Your Choices

Student Review

Check True or False.

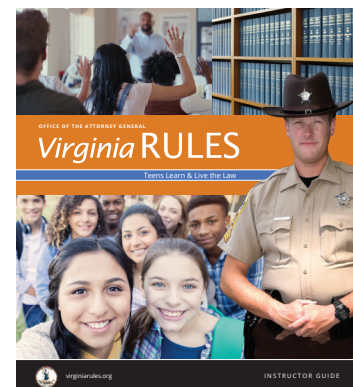
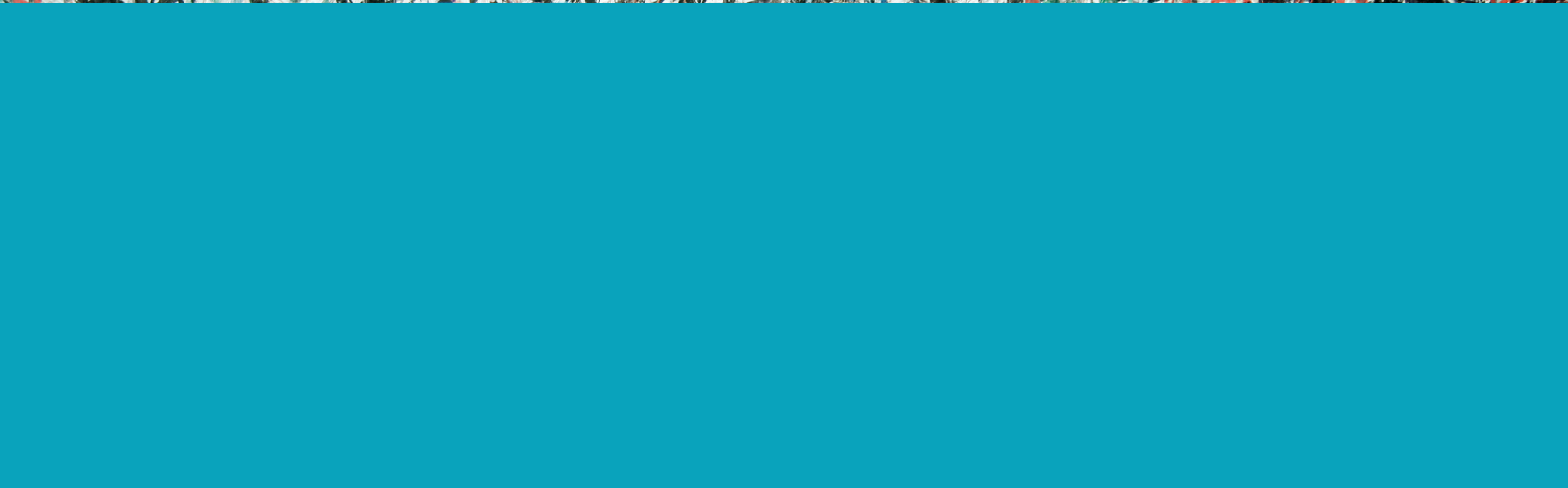
- | | | |
|---|------------|-------------|
| 1. Gangs in Virginia are dangerous. | _____ True | _____ False |
| 2. Choosing good, positive friends is a way to resist gangs. | _____ True | _____ False |
| 3. Gang members never dress alike. | _____ True | _____ False |
| 4. Destroying property is not against 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 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 |





Your Friends. Your Choice.

virginiarules.org



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



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