



REDUCING GANGS

IN VIRGINIA

**Your Friends.
Your Choice.**



Parents and Teachers

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



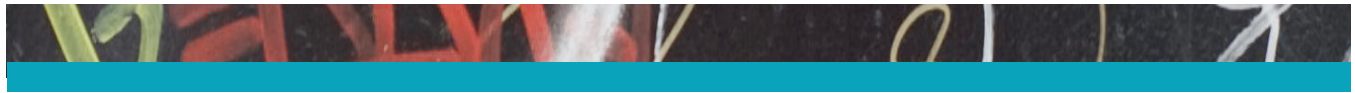
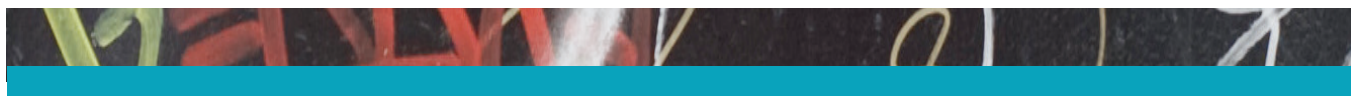


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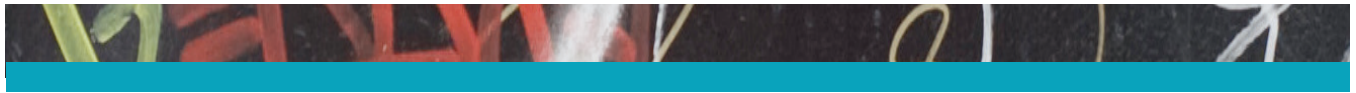
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Parent / Teacher Survey

Please check True or False

- | | | |
|--|------------|-------------|
| 1. Gang membership in Virginia is decreasing. | _____ True | _____ False |
| 2. Street gangs are only a problem for large cities. | _____ True | _____ False |
| 3. Street gang members are recruited as early as elementary school. | _____ True | _____ False |
| 4. Providing positive alternatives for students could help them avoid gangs. | _____ True | _____ False |
| 5. Most street gangs use violence and intimidation to recruit members. | _____ True | _____ False |
| 6. Some students join street gangs for protection. | _____ True | _____ False |
| 7. Most street gang members resist alcohol and other drugs. | _____ True | _____ False |
| 8. Tattoos and body piercing are possible signs of gang membership. | _____ True | _____ False |
| 9. Open communication with students is a positive way to avoid gangs. | _____ True | _____ False |
| 10. Parents and teachers are prohibited from reporting youth gang activity. | _____ True | _____ False |



Section One

Facts about Street Gangs

National Facts

- As of 2025, more than 33,000 violent gangs are criminally active in the U.S., with 1.4 million members.
- Large national street gangs vary in organization from the highly structured Gangster Disciples to loosely structured associations of Bloods and Crips.
- “Homegrown” gangs also exist in cities across the U.S.
- Gang members generally range in age from 12 to 24.
- 9% of students identified gang activity in their schools.
- About 2,000 homicides a year are gang-related and homicides increased by 35% in major U.S. cities in 2021.
- Gang involvement in human trafficking and identity theft is increasing.
- Gang recruitment has expanded to include social media recruitment and peer pressure.
- Students involved in gang activity are more likely to develop an anger identity, increased economic hardships, and family problems.





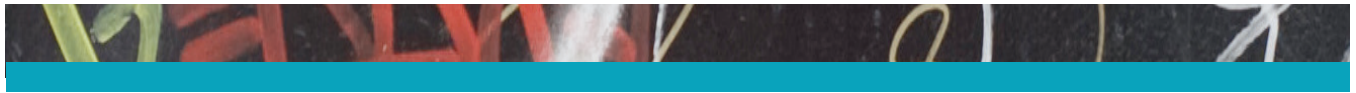
Section One

Facts about Street Gangs

Virginia Facts

- Street gangs have become more prevalent in the last several years.
- Law enforcement officials have reported an increase in gang involvement in every region of the state.
- The following is a list of identified street gangs in Virginia.
 - MS-13
 - 18th Street
 - South Side Locos
 - La Primera
 - La Raza
 - Latin Kings
 - Bloods
 - Crips
 - Gangster Disciples
 - United Blood Nation (UBN)
 - Folk Nation
 - Hell's Angels
 - Pagans
 - Warlocks
 - Outlaws
 - Skinheads
 - Asian Gangs
 - Tiny Rascal Gang





Section One

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 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.



Section Two

Preventing Gangs in Virginia

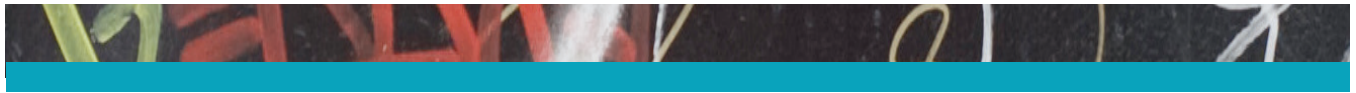
The Signs Were There

Josh is a sixteen-year-old high school student who has never created a problem for his parents or teachers. During his elementary and middle school years Josh was constantly recognized for his honor roll status. Josh's parents have always had an open communication relationship with their son. But lately, things have been different.

High school has provided Josh with a number of new challenges. His parents maintain that ever since he started hanging out with Chico, their son has changed. His grades are slipping, and he often talks about quitting school. His parents have also learned that Josh has been skipping school for the first time. His parents have information that Chico is nineteen years old and does not have a job. In a recent visit from several of Josh's long-time friends, his parents learned that Chico is the leader of a local gang. Josh's friends have stated that Chico has provided illegal drugs for several students and that they have witnessed him threatening Josh while coercing him into joining the gang. The friends state that Josh is afraid of Chico because of Chico's group's past record of robbery and serious assault.

Josh has started to dress in gang attire and is due to face a gang initiation where he will be "beat down" as a form of pledging to join the group. His parents are upset and don't know what to do. They have questioned the school about their options.





Section Two

Preventing Gangs in Virginia

Review Exercise

What are the options in this situation? Discuss the following questions.

1. Why is Josh facing new challenges in high school?
2. What are some of the challenges that high school students face?
3. How are they different from those faced in middle school?
4. What were the signs that Josh was in trouble?
5. What should his teachers have noticed?
6. What should his parents have noticed?
7. Should the parents and teachers dialogue about the problem?
8. How can the school help in this situation?
9. Should the parents confront Chico?
10. Should the parents contact the police?



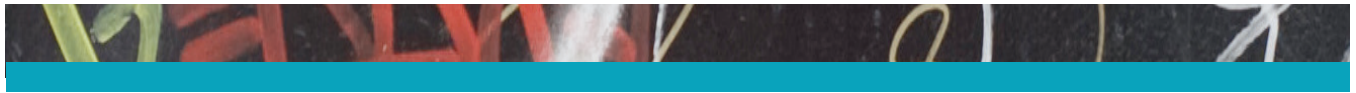
Section Three

A Teacher's Role

Mrs. Johnson is a teacher at Central Middle School. She is popular with her students and many of them confide in her. Last week, several students advised her that a new gang called "Central Posse" had formed in the school. This group dresses in red, and its members have threatened and intimidated a number of students within the school. Several leaders of the group have been charged and convicted of robbery and assault and battery in the past.



Mrs. Johnson fears that innocent students are being influenced and intimidated by this group. She has discussed her concerns with other teachers who reject the idea of a gang presence within their school. Mrs. Johnson doesn't know what she should do next and fears that the problem will only get worse.



Section Three

A Teacher's Role

Please circle the correct answers in the following questions.

1. What should Mrs. Johnson do about her concerns?
 - a. Meet with the parents' association.
 - b. Discuss her concerns privately with other teachers.
 - c. Quit her job.
 - d. Document her concerns.
2. What should Mrs. Johnson tell the students who confide in her?
 - a. To mind their own business.
 - b. That they are wasting their time.
 - c. That they should transfer schools.
 - d. That she will try to help them with their concerns.
3. Where can Mrs. Johnson go for assistance?
 - a. The principal.
 - b. The school resource officer.
 - c. The counselor.
 - d. All of the above.
4. Why should Mrs. Johnson document her concerns?
 - a. It helps protect her role as a teacher.
 - b. It helps protect the students.
 - c. It eliminates the problem.
 - d. Both A&B.
5. Teachers should be concerned about gangs in school because ...
 - a. It takes away from education.
 - b. It affects the school climate.
 - c. It increases the potential for violence.
 - d. All of the above.



Section Four

Warning Signs That Your Child or Student May Be Involved with a Gang

- Admits to “hanging out” with kids who are in gangs
- Shows an unusual interest in one or two particular colors of clothing or a particular logo
- Has an unusual interest in gangster-influenced music, videos, movies, or websites
- Uses unusual hand signals to communicate with friends
- Has specific drawings or gang symbols on school books, clothing, or walls, or displays tattoos
- Comes home with unexplained physical injuries (fighting-related bruises, injuries to hand/knuckles)
- Has unexplained cash or goods, such as clothing or jewelry
- Carries a weapon
- Has trouble with the police
- Exhibits negative changes in behavior such as:
 - Withdrawing from family
 - Showing a decline in school attendance or performance
 - Staying out late without a reason
 - Displaying an unusual desire for secrecy
 - Exhibiting signs of drug use
 - Breaking rules consistently
 - Speaking in gang-style slang

Section Four

What Parents Can Do to Prevent Gang Involvement

- Spend quality time with your child.
- Get involved in your child's school activities.
- Be a positive role model and set the right example.
- Know your child's friends and their families.
- Encourage good study habits.
- Teach your child how to cope with peer pressure.
- Help your child develop good conflict resolution skills.
(See <https://wehavekids.com/parenting/Sources-of-Conflict-Between-Parents-and-Teenagers>)
- Encourage your child to participate in positive after-school activities with adult supervision (recreation centers, organized sports, youth groups).
- Take action in your neighborhood (create a neighborhood alliance, report graffiti).
- Talk with your child about the dangers and consequences of gang involvement. Let your child know that you do not want to see him or her hurt or arrested. Explain to your child that he or she should NOT:
 - Associate with gang members.
 - Attend parties or social events sponsored by gangs.
 - Use hand signs, symbols, or language that is meaningful to gangs.
 - Wear clothing, including specific colors, which may have meaning to gangs in your area.



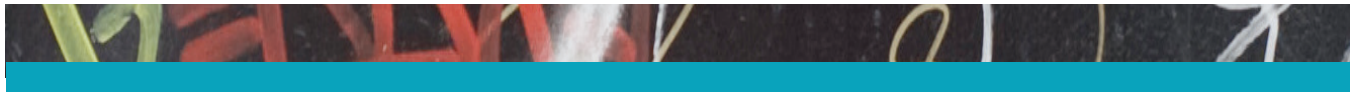


Section Four

What Teachers Can Do to Prevent Gang Involvement

1. Know your students.
2. Observe students for signs of changing attitudes and personalities.
3. Be aware of attendance issues, including truancy and tardiness.
4. Be aware of sudden or gradual academic performance changes.
5. Stay current on student trends, such as style, music, etc.
6. Be aware of students communicating with hand signals.
7. Refer at-risk students to internal or external services.
8. Be aware of graffiti on books, lockers, clothes, etc.
9. Talk openly about gang-related issues and concerns.
10. Document and report issues to administration, security, law enforcement, and parents.





Section Five

Gangs and the Law in Virginia

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 § 18.2-46.3:3 - Gang-Free School Zones – This law establishes Gang-Free School Zones in which enhanced penalties apply for violations of the gang statutes. These zones are identified as on public property or within 1,000 feet of school grounds (including colleges/universities), school buses, and public/community centers (including public recreation centers). These enhancement apply when violations occur within the designated areas, regardless of where the person intended to commit such violation.

Code of Virginia § 18.2-46.2 (gang participation) and Code of Virginia § 18.2-46.3 (gang recruitment.)

Code of Virginia § 18.2-46.2 – Gang Participation - 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 § 18.2-55.1 – 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**. Hazing means to purposely or recklessly endanger a person's life or safety in connection with membership in youth or street gang.

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



Section Five

Gangs and the Law in Virginia

What Does Virginia Law Say about Gangs?

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 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 families 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**.

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.

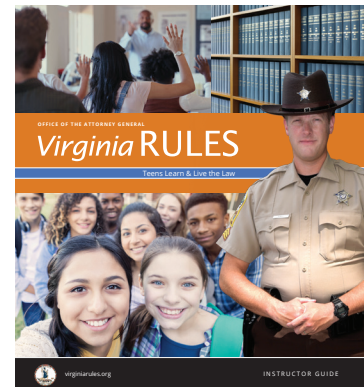
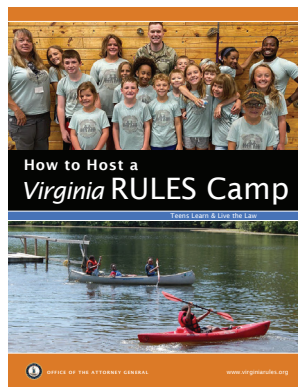
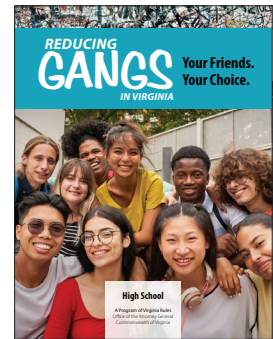
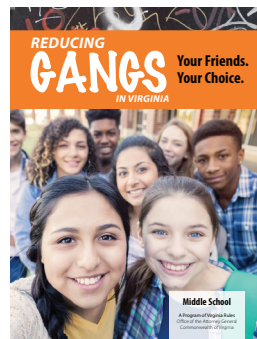
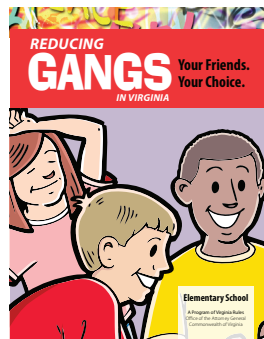
Code of Virginia § 18.2-138 – Damaging public buildings, etc., penalty – Anyone who destroys or defaces public property shall be guilty of a **Class 1 misdemeanor** if the damage to the property is less than \$1,000 and a **Class 6 felony** if the damage is \$1,000 or more.

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.



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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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