



# COMBATING GANG ACTIVITY AND YOUTH CRIME

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

THE SAFETY OF OUR CHILDREN is a top priority of the Office of the Attorney General. Keeping children safe from gangs, school violence and drug abuse is an especially important challenge for our communities.

Juvenile crime, particularly gang activity, harms neighborhoods, families and schools in many ways: from property damage by graffiti vandals to truancy to the most serious offenses, including drug trafficking and murder.

Signs of youth gang activity often include a rise in truancy, minor vandalism and delinquent behavior. Groups of juveniles may develop identifying signs such as similar clothing styles or hand signs. Violent gangs typically boast a name and leader or leaders, who repeatedly engage in criminal activities both as a group and individually for economic gain. Juveniles involved in hate gangs collectively engage in acts of violence toward specific groups or individuals, often without regard to turf or material gain.

Acknowledging a gang problem in your community is an important first step to combating such activity. Gangs thrive on intimidation and publicity and often use violence to establish and maintain their reputation. Some residents and officials fear that by giving the problem any attention, they are encouraging gangs by providing them the notoriety they seek. Denial is

never beneficial. Gangs are found in every locality — large metro areas, medium cities and small towns.

To combat juvenile crime and gang activity, communities must act together to send a clear message that criminal behavior will not be tolerated. Assess the problem by establishing cooperative relationships among schools, police and community organizations. Call neighborhood meetings for citizens who are concerned about gangs. Involve the media, parents, and local law enforcement.

Graffiti removal is another crucial step to reclaiming neighborhoods and reducing fear. Clean up graffiti and keep it cleaned up! Graffiti is the calling card of gangs and can provide insight to the kinds of gangs present in your neighborhood. Always photograph the marks for law enforcement documentation. Many counties maintain a Graffiti Eradication Fund which may be used to repair damage or provide public rewards for identifying and aiding in the apprehension and prosecution of graffiti-related offenders.

Gang activity often occurs when young people do not have access to socially acceptable alternatives. Academic support and positive extracurricular activities are essential for at-risk youth.

To compete successfully with gangs, recreational programs must offer excitement and close, supportive relationships. Mentoring and other after-school programs can offer a safe place for children to learn and interact when they would otherwise be left alone.

Some children need help with interpersonal and decision-making skills. To help keep schools and communities safe, the Office of the Attorney General created a free DVD-based program for educators called “Consequences.” This curriculum helps students understand how the Texas juvenile justice system operates and how criminal behavior impacts their lives. It includes video interviews with young men and women who are dealing with the consequences of having made bad choices when confronted with gangs and crime. The curriculum also includes classroom activities that help students apply the lessons they have learned.

The Office of the Attorney General is committed to helping Texas communities and law enforcement professionals combat juvenile crime and gang activity. Continued cooperation among parents, schools, law enforcement professionals and community organizations helps our children make good decisions and keeps our neighborhoods safe.

## POINTS TO REMEMBER



### COMBATING GANG ACTIVITY & YOUTH CRIME

- If you suspect gang activity in your community, acknowledge the problem.
- Establish a united front by involving schools, neighbors, and local law enforcement.
- Clean up graffiti and keep it cleaned up.
- Encourage community programs and initiatives as safe alternatives for at-risk youth.

## RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITIES

### Office of the Attorney General

Juvenile Crime Intervention

(512) 463-4024

[jci@oag.state.tx.us](mailto:jci@oag.state.tx.us)

### Texas Youth Commission

Office of Prevention

(512) 424-6130

[www.tyc.state.tx.us](http://www.tyc.state.tx.us)

### Texas School Safety Center

(512) 245-3696

<http://cscs.txstate.edu/txssc.htm>

### Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse

1-800-638-8736

For more information on this and other topics, visit the Attorney General’s Web site:

[www.oag.state.tx.us](http://www.oag.state.tx.us)



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