

WORKING WITH GANG/GROUP INVOLVED YOUTH

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WHY DO YOUTH JOIN GANGS/GROUPS?



Not all children/youth are equally at risk to join a gang



Risk factors are factors that increase an individual's level of vulnerability



Risk factor exposure can begin before birth, and youth experience risk in multiple domains of their lives



Hill et al. (1999) found in the Seattle study that children with seven or more risk factor indicators were 13 times more likely to join a gang than were children with none or only one of these indicators

WHY DO YOUTH JOIN GANGS/GROUPS?

Individual Domain	Family Domain	Peer Domain	School Domain	Community Domain
Problem behaviors (reactivity, impulsivity, and aggressiveness)	Low parental supervision and monitoring	Negative peer network	Low school commitment	None
Negative life events (death, absent parent, school suspension, illness, victimization)		Negative peer influences	Low school attachment	
Attitudes toward negative behavior				

(Source: Klein and Maxson, 2006)

TRAUMA AND GANG/GROUP INVOLVEMENT

Negative life events are a significant risk factor for joining a gang

Exposure to trauma affects decision-making, stress response, and behavioral/mental health issues

Incarcerated youth with gang ties report higher levels of exposure to more severe violence

Source: National Child Traumatic Stress Network

WORKING WITH GANG/GROUP INVOLVED YOUTH



Know enough to be able to do your job

You need to know enough to manage gang-related behavior in criminal justice settings or in school



Don't overreact to gang involvement

Enforce policies clearly and consistently without harsh/punitive measures

Gang members have the same rights and feelings as anyone else



Be yourself – don't imitate or pretend to know more than you do.



The background of the slide is a dense field of small, colorful wooden figures, possibly representing people or a community. The figures are in various colors including orange, brown, grey, blue, and red, and are scattered across the entire frame. The overall tone is somewhat muted and textured.

WORKING WITH GANG- INVOLVED YOUTH

Take time to become familiar with gangs in the area:

- History
- Rivalries
- Trends
- Motivation
- Identifiers
- Language
- Values

WORKING WITH GANG/ GROUP INVOLVED YOUTH

Build a good relationship with youth

- **Don't** stereotype
- **Do** treat youth with respect and expect respect in return
- **Don't** assume that you know their struggle
- **Do** practice active listening (i.e. motivational interviewing)
- **Don't** lecture or preach
- **Don't** dip in and out
- **Do** keep showing up consistently for the long haul
- **Don't** make promises you can't keep
- **Do** treat them like a human being
- **Don't** bring up past traumas, but be willing to listen if the youth brings it up
- **Do** use a trauma-focused lens when interacting with youth; avoid re-traumatizing vulnerable youth



WORKING WITH GANG/GROUP INVOLVED YOUTH

Establish clear boundaries.

- Manage behavior in a way that is clear, calm and consistent
- Be willing to explain what behavior is needed and why--Don't assume they know
- Correct behavior in private when possible
- Control your emotions during interactions, don't get defensive or set up a competition
- Be aware of the youth's likely trauma triggers: loud voices, putting hands on the youth, etc.
- Habits take time to establish, so repetition is key

ROLE OF STREET OUTREACH WITH GANG- INVOLVED YOUTH

- Experienced with gangs in the local community
- Reach out to youth who may be disengaged from mainstream systems
- Build a trusting relationship with gang-involved young people
- Use that relationship to correct their behavior and connect them to services
- Serve as subject matter expert on gangs for partner agencies

KEY ISSUES IN GANG/GROUP INTERVENTION

✓ Positive replacements



Recognize accomplishments

They need positive feedback about themselves



Reinforce positive behavior

Notice when the youth does the right thing



Define what “doing well” means



Never underestimate the potential of our youth

LEAVING THE GANG/GROUP

Exit strategies should address:

- **Safety** – what risks will the youth face in their school, neighborhood and home?
- **Replacement** – how will the youth replace the time spent with gang friends?
 - Work
 - School
 - Positive activities
- **Rethinking**
 - How does the youth reimagine themselves and their social interactions?
 - It takes time and reinforcement for gang youth to begin to see themselves in a new, more positive way
- **Support**
 - Who can support the youth in different areas of his/her life?

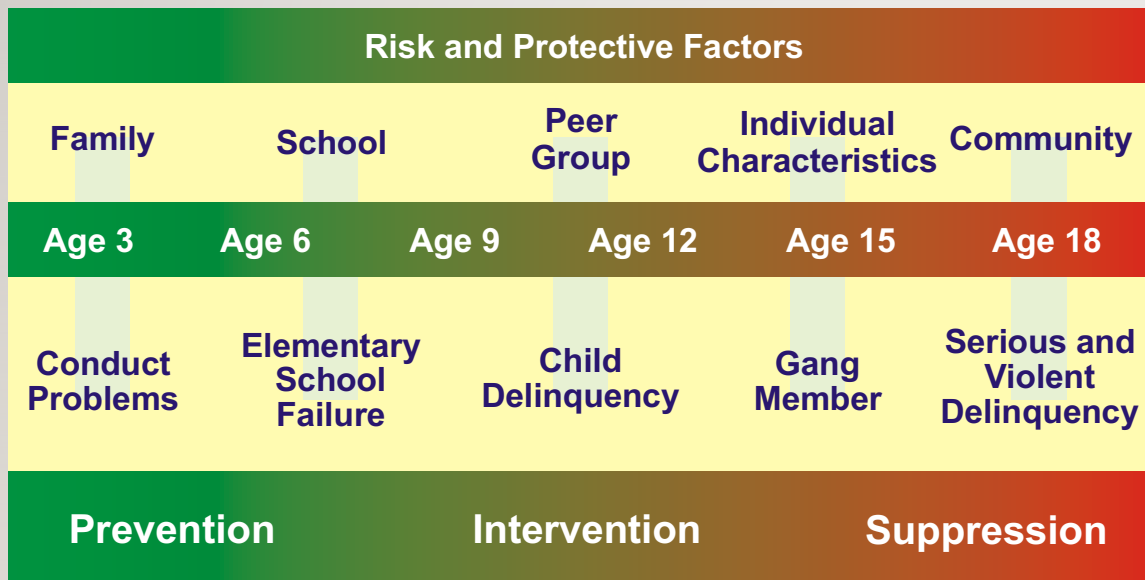
Dosage of services should be scaled to an individual's level of risk

- Client level of involvement
- Client living environment
- Client school engagement
- Client's natural supports
- Client's home situation is unstable



How large a dose of intervention services will be required to offset the risk factors in this client's life?

COMMUNITY GANG STRATEGIES



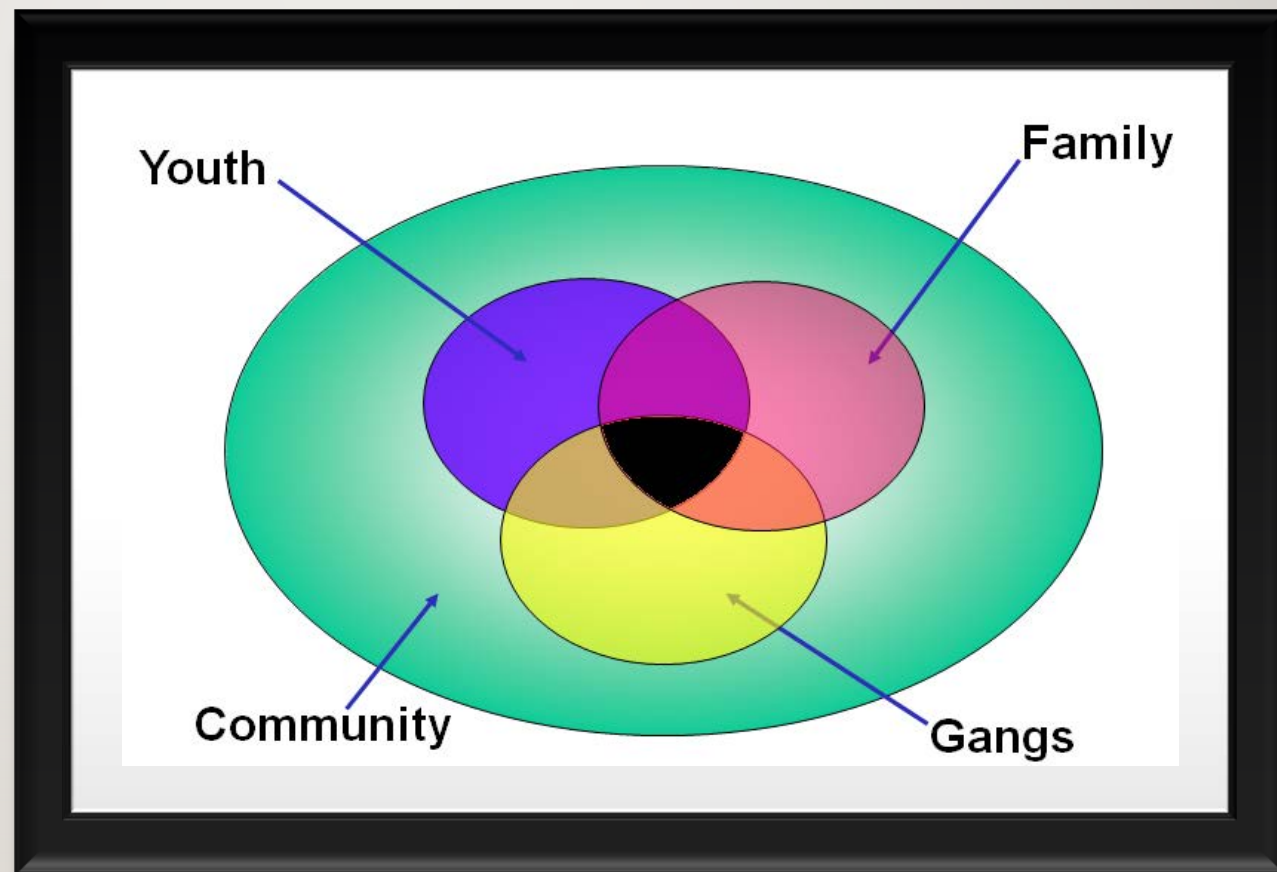
- **Primary gang prevention** – broad approach to inoculate most children against gangs
- **Secondary prevention** – targeted to children and youth at highest risk
- **Intervention/reentry** – intensive services for gang-involved individuals
- **Suppression** – targeted toward most criminally involved groups and individuals

© Howell, 2003
 (Howell, 2003; Klein and Maxson, 2006; Spergel, 2007).

THE OJJDP COMPREHENSIVE GANG MODEL

- A gang violence reduction model that provides a structure for a collaborative response to gangs
- Has been implemented around the United States
- Has been evaluated and tested since the early 1990s
- Has been implemented in cities of varying sizes around the U.S. and has resulted in reductions in gang-related violence and increases in pro-social outcomes for gang-involved individuals.

TARGETS OF THE MODEL



YOUTH AT HIGH RISK OF GANG INVOLVEMENT



Have many areas of risk



May not engage with traditional brick & mortar agency locations



Are involved in multiple sectors



Require a team approach that crosses agency boundaries



Have compelling and time-sensitive safety issues

THE OJJDP COMPREHENSIVE GANG MODEL

- Why it works
 - Agencies already spend significant money and time dealing with gang issues
 - Information sharing between agencies increases effectiveness of all agencies
 - Targeted strategies based on local assessment

MULTIDISCIPLINARY INTERVENTION TEAM

- Comprised of representatives from law enforcement, probation/parole, social services, education, mental health, and outreach agencies.
- Creates an individualized case management plan for each client
- Engages gang members in direct services
- Dismantles or surmounts barriers to crucial services
- Assists with focused enforcement activities and client accountability
- Evidence-based practice (OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model)

CORE BELIEFS
INTEGRAL TO
TEAM-BASED
GANG
INTERVENTION

- Gang members often have multiple-agency involvement
 - Child protection agencies
 - Law enforcement agencies
 - Juvenile/adult courts
 - Social services agencies
 - Schools
- Gang members frequently experience barriers to needed services
- “It takes a village.”

FOUNDATIONS OF TEAM-BASED INTERVENTION

- Participation of key agencies
- A quantifiable understanding of the community's gang problem (assessment)
- Data-derived screening criteria for program clients
- Team-based case management focused on social intervention, opportunities provision, and accountability.

STRUCTURE OF THE TEAM



GOALS OF THE INTERVENTION TEAM:

01

Assist gang members in transitioning out of the gang lifestyle

02

Improve the effectiveness of agencies serving gang-involved clients

03

Reduce overall gang-related crime in the community

TEAM ROLES

- Education
- Law enforcement
- Probation/parole
- Social services/mental health
- Outreach

WORKING WITH GANG-INVOLVED CLIENTS

- Screening:
 - Is the client appropriate for the program?
- Intake:
 - What do we need to know in order to serve the client?
- Needs assessment:
 - What are this client's specific needs?
 - What does the client want?

TEAM-BASED CASE MANAGEMENT

- Once clients have been assessed, the team should:
 - Create a plan to address specific areas of need:
 - Family
 - Personal
 - Education
 - Employment
 - Other
 - Take into account the client's current level of functionality
 - Assign responsibility for follow-up to members of the team

CORE ISSUES IN TEAM-BASED GANG INTERVENTION

- Safety is paramount
 - Clients
 - Community
 - Team members
- Information sharing within the team has two goals
 - To assist the client
 - To protect the community and the client from potential safety risks
- Information should not be used to penalize or handicap the client
- Information should be closely guarded within the team

ADAPTING THE TEAM-BASED APPROACH TO VARYING DEGREES OF GANG PROBLEMS

- Most appropriate for areas with serious/violent gang problems
- Can be utilized on a smaller scale
- Can be adapted to address other issues – homelessness, trafficking
- If you are less experienced with gang intervention, your initial focus should be on younger, less gang-involved youth.

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RESOURCES

- National Gang Center Strategic Planning Tool: <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/spt/>
- Youth Gang Programs and Strategies: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/171154.pdf>
- OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model: <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/comprehensive-gang-model>
- Cure Violence: cureviolence.org
- Group Violence Reduction: <https://www.nnscommunities.org/>
- Getting out of Gangs, Staying out of Gangs: Gang Intervention and Desistance Strategies. <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/Getting-Out-Staying-Out.pdf>
- Youth LINC Program (King County): <https://ccyj.org/our-work/reducing-gang-violence/>
- Accelerator YMCA Alive & Free Program: <https://www.seattlemca.org/accelerator/violence-prevention>

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