

# **Understanding Youth and Gangs**



**A Parent Resource**



## Our Youth, Our Future

**Your** children mean the world to you. As parents you want only the best for them: A bright future filled with love, health, and opportunity. Like any parent, you do all that you can to get them there. You care for them, you show them love, and you encourage them to exhibit these qualities in turn.

Parenting also involves guiding children to avoid temptations that might take them down a negative path. It is important to recognize at the earliest possible stage when our children might be exploring a negative path, and how to prevent them from wandering down it.

All parents can benefit from learning to recognize the signs of gang-involvement, so they can help their kids get back on a positive path.

It is critical for the community to act together to keep our youth safe and protected from the influences of criminal gangs.

Let us hope for a bright and safe future for all our youth.

A message from Dr. Gira Bhatt and Dr. Roger Tweed

**Acting Together: Community University Research Alliance**

Funded by the **Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada**





## Message from Balwant Sanghera

Chair, South Asian Community Coalition  
Against Youth Violence

**The** South Asian Community Coalition Against Youth Violence continues to work hard in keeping our youth on the right track. In this regard we have undertaken several initiatives, and I am very pleased to present this booklet which is a collaboration between our partners, the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit-BC and the Acting Together Community University Research Alliance project, Kwantlen Polytechnic University.

During my active career as a school psychologist, I had the opportunity to work closely with youth, parents, and teachers. One issue that has caused the biggest concern to me as a parent and now as a grandparent is the tragic loss of our youth to the menace of the dangerous drugs trade and senseless gang violence.

Preventing youth from following the path of violence and gang involvement requires that we as parents, teachers, and community members remain informed and proactive to protect our youth from gang influences. This booklet has been created to provide useful information about how criminal gangs operate and recruit youth in our province. Importantly it provides guidelines on how to read the early signs of gang involvement.

I remain optimistic that our collaborative efforts and shared resources such as this booklet will help us create a safe community for all.



## Message from Dan Malo

Chief Officer, Combined Forces Special  
Enforcement Unit-BC

**As** the Chief Officer of the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit of British Columbia, I am privileged to lead a team of 400 officers and civilians who are committed to the suppression of organized crime and gang violence throughout our province. As we have seen too often, those involved in gangs and organized crime have a callous disregard for the safety of others and when disputes between them arise, it puts us all at risk.

Gangs and gang violence transcend ethnicity, socio-economic status, and geography. We have seen gang murders take place in public places across B.C. and no city is immune to the effects of gangs. This is unacceptable to me, the police community, and I am sure, to you as well.

I hope this booklet gives you a better understanding of how you can join us to fight the lure of gangs and gang violence in our communities. The police cannot fight gangs and organized crime alone, and there is a role for everyone to play in our collective fight against gangs, especially when it comes to intervention and prevention. Communities working with the police and police with communities are how we are going to have the biggest impact in the lives of our young people.

In reading this booklet you have taken an important first step to playing a significant part in understanding the issue of gangs and recognizing the warning signs. I encourage you to share this booklet and the information contained in it with your family and friends.





## **Why do criminal gangs target young teenagers to participate in their gang activities?**

Criminal gangs make money from the sale of illegal drugs such as cocaine, ecstasy, and marijuana. To keep their trade flourishing they need to make sure that these drugs remain in demand and are available to those who want to use them.

Once a cargo of drugs arrives, the gangsters need 'sales agents'—those who will pick up small packages from the middlemen and deliver them to drug consumers.

Since the older gangsters do not want to be caught by police while delivering drugs, they target teenage youth, most of whom do not have any history of criminal involvement. If caught by the police, the amount of drugs in their possession is generally minimal and

therefore any criminal conviction may result in a more lenient sentence and possibly no jail time.

In B.C., criminal gangs are known to recruit young men around the age of 16 who have their driver's license. Like typical teenagers, the youth are open to adventure and are willing to try out new and dangerous ways of living. The lure of making quick money on the side can be very tempting for this age group. Also, the risk may not seem huge given that all they need to do is pick up a small package and deliver it to a designated location.

**Persuading a youth to take that first step of accepting and delivering a drug package is the beginning of a dangerous path that leads to gang involvement.**

# The First Step into Criminal Gangs:

It begins with the **Dial-a-Dope** stage.

- » A Dial-a-Doper is an individual who delivers drugs to specific locations day or night.
- » A Dial-a-Doper is typically a teenager or young adult who has access to a vehicle.
- » It works very much like a pizza delivery service. The youth gets at least one cell phone from the gangster group. The customers—who need drugs—simply dial a phone number. The youth answers

that call, and then runs a 'quick errand' in his or her car to deliver the drugs to the address or location provided.

- » The drugs are usually delivered within a half an hour to one hour of the call made to the Dial-a-Doper. Customers/drug users are provided with a phone number for them to call to order drugs.

**Reloaders** are individuals who supply the drugs to the Dial-a-Dopers. Depending on the amount of activity in Dial-a-Doping, a drug line run by a reloader can bring in as much as \$1500 per day. Reloaders often supply drugs from a safe house.

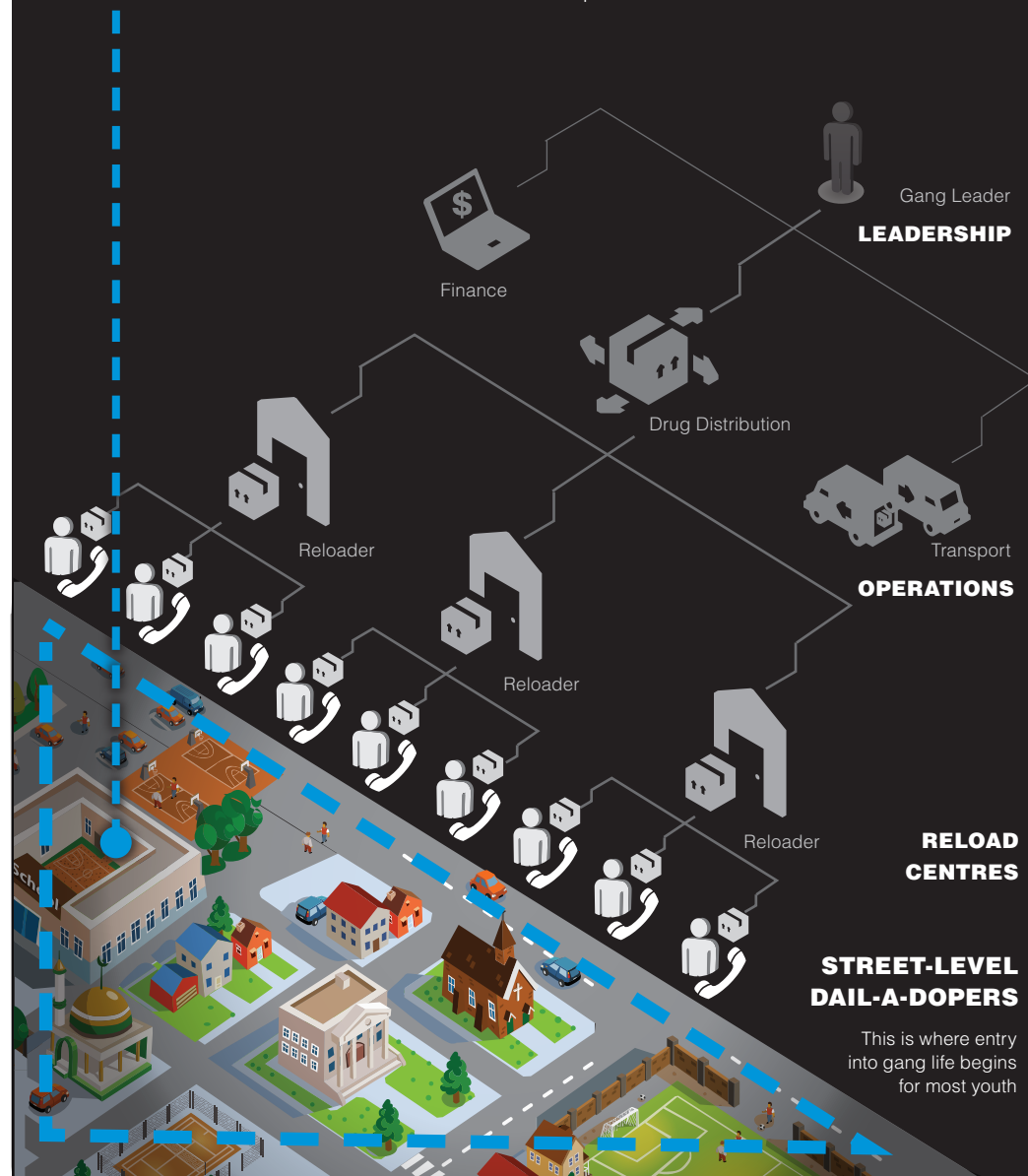
**Safe houses** are typically rented by individuals who are paid a nominal fee to do so in their own names or even family members who are likely unaware of what is happening in the house. The premises are usually empty and nothing in the location ties any gang-involved individual to it.

## Youth Protection Zone

Parents and community can keep youth in this zone.

People who are at the top of the gangs are usually older. Their main job is to coordinate the transportation of drugs and weapons, the distribution of money, and to contract people to maintain the import, export, buying, and selling of drugs.

Additionally, they also hire people for extortions and kidnapping to force repayment of debts from lower level gang members, including the young Dial-a-Dopers.







Below are facts based on extensive evidence compiled by police departments on their interactions with street level Dial-a-Dope-involved youth.

- » Dial-a-Dopers are drawn to gang life by the prospect of making a great deal of money.
- » Dial-a-Dopers make very little money.
- » Dial-a-Dopers **will** front (provide without payment) drugs to their trusted customers.
- » Dial-a-Dopers are at risk of being 'ripped off' of their drugs.
- » Dial-a-Dopers are almost always held responsible for any losses.
- » Despite the strict control of the gang leader, it is common for Dial-a-Dopers to **accumulate debts**.
- » The gang leader will **not** always know who his Dial-a-Dopers are and the Dial-a-Dopers do **not** always know whom they are working for.
- » Dial-a-Dopers are **not** well protected by the gang leaders.
- » Given the secrecy of gang life, the **families** of Dial-a-Dopers are **not** well-protected from any direct involvement in the transactions.
- » Dial-a-Dopers almost always have a valid driver's license.
- » Most gangs do **not** give the Dial-a-Dopers access to stolen vehicles for transporting drugs.
- » Before being hired by a gang, Dial-a-Dopers do **not** need to show loyalty by stealing from a rival gang.
- » Despite their low level in the gang hierarchy, it is **not** easy for Dial-a-Dopers to leave the gang at any time.

## Bitter truth about joining gangs

- » The newcomers to a gang (most of them at the Dial-a-Doper level) are almost always led to believe they will make a lot of money—a claim that is 99% false.
- » Many end up poorer than when they started because they owe money to their gang (late payments, drug rips, fronting drugs).
- » Most gang members are low-level members who could earn more money by working at a fast food restaurant. Some may show off whenever they have money, but more often than not they are broke or in debt.
- » Many end up having to borrow or steal money from their family or sell their possessions just to pay off debts and that is often not enough, which results in gang members coming to the family's home to extort or threaten parents or siblings.
- » They are often kidnapped, beaten, and tortured as a way of sending messages from one gang member to another.
- » They get robbed and beaten by customers.
- » They are targeted by the police and are likely to be arrested, have their property seized if it is used during the commission of a criminal offence, and **a criminal record will prevent them from doing things like traveling outside Canada.**
- » One of the most common reasons to quit is being tired of getting beat up.
- » Most youth gang members eventually quit their gang, but the longer they are involved, the harder it is to quit.

## Recognizing the signs of a Dial-a-Doper Youth

- » Dial-a-Dopers will have a number of different cellphones.
- » The process of selling drugs via Dial-a-Doping takes the youth out of the house for short durations and often at all hours of the day and night.
- » Dial-a-Dopers often possess business cards.
- » Dial-a-Dopers often carry a lot of cash even though they live in debt and fear.
- » Dial-a-Dopers often keep financial records.
- » Typically, Dial-a-Dopers do keep the drugs they are selling at home.
- » Dial-a-Dopers tend to keep their room locked or demand privacy and will often become upset or mad if parents or siblings want to know what is in their rooms or why they want privacy.
- » Dial-a-Dopers are under great pressure and will often display signs of stress or moodiness.

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Research shows gang members are likely to **die before age 30.**

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# Gang Prevention

## What can Parents do?

- » Always know where your kids are, what they are doing, and who they are with. Explain to them that you are asking questions about their activities and whereabouts because you are interested, you love them, and you care about them.
- » Help your kids choose friends who are not involved in any criminal or antisocial activity.
- » Build strong family ties by making family events fun such as regular family dinners, outings, watching movies and playing games with them.
- » Accompany your kids to after-school activities such as sports, and stay for the whole duration as often as possible.
- » Participate in parent-teacher meetings and events at your kids' schools.
- » Take interest in your kids' homework and make sure they complete it.
- » Encourage your kids to participate in school activities and do volunteer work in the community. Do the same yourself.
- » Ensure that they take pride in their cultural/ethnic/religious/linguistic heritage while fully participating in the mainstream life of our society.
- » Have open communication with your kids so they feel comfortable to share with you their concerns and worries. Thank them and reward them for sharing information, even when the information might be potentially worrisome.
- » Remember that kids learn a lot from observation. So modeling good behaviour yourself, such as leading a life that is free of crimes, drugs, and violence is very important.
- » Foster thankfulness in your kids by modeling thankfulness yourself for your own life situations and people in your life.
- » Remain consistent in your message to kids that although you love them unconditionally, antisocial behaviour is not acceptable. Ask questions for an honest conversation.
- » Emphasize the importance of 'being true to self' and reward them for doing the 'right thing' despite peer pressure.
- » Demonstrate that forgiving others for their harmful actions towards you is better than trying to take/plot revenge.
- » Keep an eye on your kids' choice of movies, videos, and internet browsing habits. If you see a consistent theme of violence and crimes, talk to them and steer them to other entertainment choices.
- » Make your kids understand that although money is important, long lasting happiness in life comes from having good trusting relationships with family, friends, neighbours, and the community.
- » If you are worried that your kids may be involved in antisocial and/or self-destructive behavior, remember that it can be changed.
- » Avoid 'tough love' such as cutting them off or forbidding them from going out. Instead, stay involved and let your kids understand that making mistakes and wrong choices are part of learning and that you will always help them correct their mistakes.
- » When you are worried about your kids' well-being and need some help, talk to their school teacher, counsellor, or even a police officer. An earlier check and prevention will help your kids stay on track and avoid getting into a dangerous life of crime, violence, and gangs.





**Kids who feel connected with their family, friends, school, neighbourhood, and community are less likely to get involved in gangs.**

**Kids report high life satisfaction when they have an adult in their home such as a parent, a relative, or a caregiver who knows where they are, who they are with, and what they are doing.**

## Potential Protective Factors

### Individual Level (Internal)

- » Low level of belief in violence
- » Optimism and hope
- » Balanced self-esteem
- » Gratitude
- » Forgiveness
- » Humility
- » Authenticity ('being true to self')
- » School Success

### Social Level (External)

- » Positive relations with family and peers
- » Pro-social peers
- » Strong commitments to school
- » Positive connections with the community
- » Involvement in pro-social activities
- » Parental/Adult involvement in school and leisure activities
- » High expectations from teachers

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## Potential Risk Factors

### Individual Level (Internal)

- » Antisocial beliefs
- » Impulsivity
- » Unemotional/Callous personality traits
- » Early history of violence/delinquency
- » Weapons use
- » Substance abuse
- » School failure

### Social Level (External)

- » Family violence
- » Substance abuse in the family
- » Limited parental monitoring
- » Inconsistent/Inappropriate disciplinary practices
- » Low socio-economic status
- » High-crime neighbourhood
- » Delinquent peers
- » Peer rejection
- » Sense of alienation



## Concerned about youth involvement in gangs?

### Contact:

#### THE COMBINED FORCES SPECIAL ENFORCEMENT UNIT—BC

WEB : [www.cfseu.bc.ca](http://www.cfseu.bc.ca)

WEB : [www.endganglife.ca](http://www.endganglife.ca)

EMAIL : [inquiries@cfseu.bc.ca](mailto:inquiries@cfseu.bc.ca)

TEL : 778-290-2040

#### BC CRIME STOPPERS

WEB : [www.bccrimestoppers.com](http://www.bccrimestoppers.com)

TEL : 1-800-222-TIPS (8477)

#### YOUTH AGAINST VIOLENCE LINE

WEB : [www.youthagainstviolenceline.com](http://www.youthagainstviolenceline.com)

#### GANG PREVENTION IN BC

WEB : [www.gangprevention.ca](http://www.gangprevention.ca)





This booklet has been prepared in consultation with Acting Together-CURA project researchers, police agents, service providers, parents, and youth.

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