

# Hybrid Gangs

## BASIC FACTS

### KNOWN AS

- Cliques
- Crews
- Posses
- Copycats

### IDENTIFIERS

- Ages 12 to 24 years old
- Non-traditional
- May use symbols or colors from other gangs
- May merge with other gangs
- Very difficult to identify

### HOW THEY DIFFER FROM TRADITIONAL GANGS

- Less structured, if at all
- Members can change from one gang affiliation to another
- Can claim multiple affiliations
- May change names or merge with other gangs
- More diverse in race, ethnicity, and gender
- Do not necessarily have an allegiance to a specific gang color
- Graffiti consists of multiple conflicting symbols
- Sometimes claim an entire city as turf
- Usually located in smaller communities
- Members generally fall off within a year or two
- Use technology

Hybrid gangs have been in existence since the 1920s, but they are becoming a prevalent problem, especially among small and rural communities. These gangs (also known as cliques, crews, posses, and copycats) consist of mixed groups of youth that spontaneously form. The members usually range in age from 12 to 24. Hybrid gangs are similar to traditional gangs in some ways but are very different in others. For instance, traditional gangs usually base membership around race, ethnic, or neighborhood loyalty, while hybrid gangs often encompass a mix of racial, ethnic, and gender groups. Their operating strategies can differ as well. Hybrid gangs are usually located in smaller communities as opposed to larger cities. Because of their uncharacteristic make-up, these gangs can often be unpredictable and volatile.

## An Emerging Trend

Hybrid gangs are not new, but they are an emerging trend, thriving in many communities that may not have experienced gang problems in the 1980s and 1990s. As such, they are a growing concern facing communities and law enforcement officials—not only in large inner cities but also in suburbs and rural areas. Additionally, hybrid gangs do not limit their activity to the streets alone; they are crossing all boundary lines, including schools and the military.

Hybrid gangs are difficult to recognize; they often grow rapidly and join together sporadically. They are also difficult to recognize because they do not have an apparent recognizable theme (such as a particular color or symbol) like most traditional gangs. This lack of distinct identifiers makes it difficult for law enforcement to spot hybrid gang members and to determine whether a hybrid gang has infiltrated the community. Hybrid gangs may affiliate with the names of well-known established gangs, such as the Latin Kings, Bloods, Crips, Black Gangster Disciples, Vice Lords, and Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), while simultaneously appropriating the symbols of other gangs. The leadership structure also tends to be much looser, and they do not comply with the rules and regulations of most traditional gangs. In fact, many of their ideas of how to operate come from movies, magazines, and the Internet.

Criminal activity that makes money tends to fuel the growth of hybrid gangs almost to the exclusion of all other factors. Hybrid gangs are known to commit such crimes as stealing iPods, bicycles, and money. Members are known to be verbally and physically violent, and they often carry weapons. They also rely on new technology. For instance, they may abet their felonies, conduct cyberbullying, and commit other offenses using text messaging and social networks web sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. With the use of cell phones, gang members can more efficiently convene a group to conduct their criminal activities.



To help prevent gang activity, it is vital for community members and stakeholders to work together. Below are some steps to help you to create a safe and secure living environment for you and your family.

- **Gather with other community members and neighbors.** Identify common goals and existing fears with one another as the first step in putting a plan into action.
- **Develop a plan.** A plan with goals, objectives, and assignments will help to solidify the actions needed to be taken and increase the likelihood of the tasks being completed.
- **Work together and communicate often.** Set up a Neighborhood Watch program. Your local police department can help initiate this effort. Establish a method for communication (use e-mail, newsletters, listservs; create a community website; or a set up a neighborhood group using social media such as Facebook or Twitter).
- **Play together.** Establish fun activities to do within your neighborhood, such as barbecues, block parties, sporting events, and movie nights. This will help connect children to their communities and give them an incentive to steer away from engaging in gang activity.
- **Keep your neighborhoods clean.** The *Broken Windows Theory* states that neighborhoods are more prone to crime and criminal activity if streets are littered, if yards and houses are improperly kept, if abandoned buildings and cars are present, if graffiti is evident, and if broken fences are visible.
- **Reach out to local businesses.** Talk to local businesses. Inform them of your goals in trying to prevent gang and criminal activity and include them in the planning process. Chances are they will be willing to help because it makes the neighborhood safer for local business as well as families.
- **Follow up and stick to the plan.** Be sure to keep in touch with each other during weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly meetings. Communicate on a regular basis with updates on goals and objectives. This will help keep community members motivated.

## Gang Prevention Resources for Parents and Children

- Institute For Self-Esteem and Evaluation (ISEE) Inc.: [www.iseeinc.org/HumanBeingLoveHBL.asp](http://www.iseeinc.org/HumanBeingLoveHBL.asp)
- H.O.P.E: [www.greatnessbeginsnow.org/](http://www.greatnessbeginsnow.org/)
- Community for Youth: [www.communityforyouth.org/](http://www.communityforyouth.org/)
- Big Brothers Big Sisters: [www.bbbs.org](http://www.bbbs.org)
- National Gang Center: [www.nationalgangcenter.gov](http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov)
- Parent Resource Guide: [www.gangwar.com](http://www.gangwar.com)
- Striving To Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere (STRYVE): [www.safeyouth.org](http://www.safeyouth.org)
- Find Youth Info: [www.findyouthinfo.gov](http://www.findyouthinfo.gov)

## Gang Prevention Resources for the Community

- G.R.E.A.T Program: [www.great-online.org](http://www.great-online.org)
- National Gang Center: [www.nationalgangcenter.gov](http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov)
- National Gang Crime Research Center: [www.ngcrc.com](http://www.ngcrc.com)
- National District Attorneys Association: [www.ndaa.org](http://www.ndaa.org)
- National Crime Prevention Council's *Community Works* curriculum combines education and action to reduce teen victimization and gang involvement: [www.ncpc.org](http://www.ncpc.org)
- National Crime Prevention Council: [www.ncpc.org](http://www.ncpc.org)
- Gang units at your local police department may have information about gangs in your community. Call your station's non-emergency number and ask for the officer who works with gangs.

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