

Gang Intervention A 10-Step Plan

1. Be honest with your staff. Be honest about what is occurring in your school and the surrounding community.
2. Get smart. Do not deny that gangs are present in the community and possibly in your school. Work with staff to develop programs for the school that address gang violence and life skills.
3. Identify your school's gang leaders. Pay attention to their behaviors, who they influence and what they do.
4. Do not close your doors at 3 p.m. Most juvenile crime occurs between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. Provide as much extracurricular activities and after-school programs as you can. Advocate for better federal and state funding for after-school programs.
5. Work with the police. Let them help whenever you need it. Let your students know they also can approach the police.
6. Get parents on your side. Develop good communication with parents, and allow and encourage them to be involved in the school's activities.
7. Find role models. Offer students the chance to see how others have affected the community positively.
8. Work together. Remember that everyone must be a part of the plan to prevent gang violence and intervene when necessary.
9. Recognize and believe that you can make a difference. Do not give up on our youth!
10. Create a gang prevention and crisis intervention plan. Be prepared and plan ahead.



Gangs and Schools

What teachers and administrators need to know about gangs



*Information brought to
you by the Mercer County
Department of Human
Services and the Mercer
County Youth Services
Commission*

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The Mercer County Department of Human Services is a county government agency that serves as an advocate for all Mercer County residents. It includes:

Community Services Division

Community Centers and Childcare Services
Homeless Services

Office on Aging

Office on Children and Youth Services

Office for the Disabled

Health and Behavioral Health Division

Health Office

Municipal Alliance Office

Office on Addiction Services

Office of Mental Health Services

Mercer County Geriatric Center

Mercer County Library System

Mercer County Youth Detention Center

Commissions and Councils

Commission on Abused, Neglected and Missing Children

Commission on the Status of Women

Council on Aging

Disability Advisory Council

Human Services Advisory Council

Library Commission

Local Advisory Committee on Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Mental Health Board

Youth Services Commission

For more information on the Department of Human Services, please call (609) 989-6526.

Brian M. Hughes
Mercer County Executive

Marygrace Billek
Director

Department of Human Services

Vision Statement:

The Mercer County Department of Human Services is a leader in promoting service excellence, maintaining the highest standards and achieving the best results. Our staff is highly motivated, skilled and dedicated in meeting the diverse needs of Mercer County residents.

Mission Statement:

The Mercer County Department of Human Services fosters a comprehensive human service delivery system that enhances the health, safety and quality of life for all residents of Mercer County. Our goal is to create an environment of public trust by empowering and strengthening individuals and families, advocating for sound policy, mobilizing resources, and acting as champions for those citizens who are most vulnerable and in need of services.

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Teens and Gangs

Gangs are a serious problem throughout New Jersey and the United States; they threaten public safety and damage lives.

Teens join gangs for many reasons. Some join because they are abused or neglected, or feel that way, and are searching for a substitute family. Some have low self-esteem and seek acceptance. Some seek protection. Some want excitement. Some are lured by the potential to make money.

How should school personnel best nurture, protect and create opportunities for youth?

Schools have a major role to play in preventing and deterring gangs. The purpose of this brochure is to help schools develop plans to prevent gang activity, and to control and stop it when it is present.

Attitude and awareness of your staff are major factors involving campus climate.

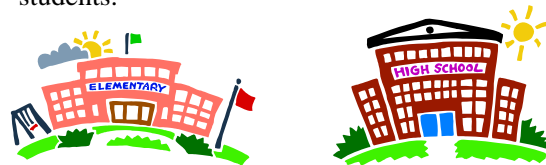
The media has presented gang members as “super human.” Remember that the school’s staff is in charge, and gang members are still someone’s child sent to you to teach. Awareness is the key; the “there are no gangs at my school” attitude has haunted many administrators.

- Train all school staff on detecting gangs (including signs and colors) and offer continuing education credits. In addition, invest in gang prevention curricula, as well as curricula that teach life skills, good decision making and conflict resolution.

- Develop a contingent plan for “pre-crisis” situations. Establish communication with local law enforcement. Always remember that the school is part of the community, and what occurs in the community can become a school problem. In addition, any staff member who deals with campus fights must stay alert to motives for the fights.
- In addition to communication with law enforcement, invest in school resource officers. These officers provide a three-prong approach to policing by acting as police officer, counselor and teacher for students.
- Campus dress policy is important and must be clear and enforceable. Do not allow students to wear gang rags, gang earrings, gang colors, or anything with gang writings; however, always consider that fads come and go, and youth will take anything gang related if it suits their fancy. Do not make dress code rules that your staff cannot enforce. In addition, enforce a zero tolerance strategy not only on gang clothing, but also on graffiti and violence.

Strong staff is an absolute necessity.

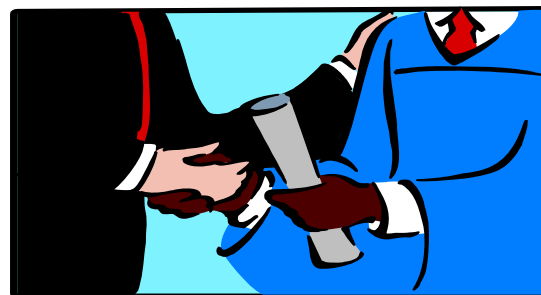
- Staff must be united, and all staff members must enforce all rules. In addition, staff must be visible and mobile, and must be accessible to all students.



Developing gang prevention and intervention strategies are important to creating a safe learning environment in all schools.

- Staff members must foster strong communication, not only among themselves, but also with law enforcement and gang units. In addition, staff must stay aware of community problems.
- Staff members must engage youth in a wide variety of extracurricular activities in the evenings, on the weekend and in the summer. Schools should serve as “safe havens” to prevent gang activity.
- Staff must maintain a strong commitment to the entire community, not just a select group.
- Staff must use parents as volunteers to assist at dances, dismissal time, at bus stops or any other places that youth congregate.
- Staff must verify that any and all rumors of gang activity are true or false. In addition, treat all threats and as potential problems.
- Staff must always remove graffiti, as it establishes territory.
- Staff must always be alert throughout the day, and take note that extensive unstructured free time is always potentially dangerous.

By providing students with a positive school environment, you help ensure a positive future for them.



Myth vs. Reality

Myth: Gangs in Mercer County are just an urban or Trenton problem.

Fact: Gangs are present in numerous municipalities.

Myth: A large number of Mercer County youth are members of a gang.

Fact: Although media accounts portray a large gang problem, only a small number of youth are members of a gang. More than 84,000 youth ages newborn to 18 live in Mercer County, and the majority of these youth have no involvement in gangs. On the contrary, the majority of Mercer County youth are in school, involved in extracurricular activities and have promising futures.

Myth: Gangs are just a law enforcement problem.

Fact: Gangs are everyone’s business to prevent.

For more information

For more information regarding gangs, or any programs that are available through the Mercer County Department of Human Services, please contact Yolanda León at 609-989-6966. The Mercer County Department of Human Services allocates almost \$4 million per year for youth programs.

To read the Mercer County Gang Prevention and Intervention Task Force’s report on gangs titled “Report and Recommendations,” please visit the Mercer County Department of Human Services’ Web site at http://www.mercercounty.org/human_services/index.htm.