

Getting Out of a Gang

You can walk away from gangs

For most gang members, the gang they belong to meets some kind of need in their life: for safety, love, excitement or money. When a gang member learns that he or she can meet these needs in other ways, the gang may lose its appeal, and this person may decide to walk away from the gang life. However, being a gang member is far more dangerous than the typical dangers faced by most of today's teenagers. For that reason, the issue for many gang members is not if they will decide to stop being a gang member. The issue is whether they will live long enough to make that decision.

Make a plan to get out

When gang members decide they want to leave the gang, there are a few simple steps they can follow:

- **There is no need to tell the gang you are leaving.**
- **Begin spending your time doing other things.** Instead of spending time hanging out with your gang friends, find something else to do during that time. Look around. There are possibilities everywhere: sports, recreation centers, Boys and Girls Clubs, arts programs, drama, school activities, church, and even spending time with your family.
- **Stop looking like a gangster.** For many gang members, dressing down makes them feel safe because other people are afraid of the way they look. As you begin to believe in yourself, you will find that you don't need to make other people feel afraid in order to feel good about yourself. Stop wearing the clothes that you think have a gang meaning.
- **Find other things to say, other things to do, and other people to do them with.** (HINT: This is much easier if you stop dressing like a gang member first.) Stop hanging out with gang members, talking like a gang member, and acting like a gang member.
- **Stop contact with the gang.** Your parents can probably help you with this, but if not, try asking a teacher for help or maybe just an older friend. Some former gang members have said that when they started trying to leave the gang, they stopped taking phone calls from their gang friends, or had their family members tell friends from the gang that they were busy or involved in some other activity

Find people who will support you and believe in you

Getting out of a gang isn't easy, but it can be done. Young people across America make the decision to have a better life every day. Find people, especially adults, who think you are special and will keep telling you that. In your mind, think of a supportive adult wherever you go (school, neighborhood, recreation center, church) that you can touch base with if you have a problem or need to talk. Then use these people to help support you as you change with good advice and assistance. Finally, begin believing in your power to change. Gangs are a dead-end street. No matter who you are, what you have done, or where you live, you deserve better.