

# ADVICE FOR PARENTS AND CARERS ON GANGS AND DRUGS

## ADVICE ON GANGS

The vast majority of young people are not involved in gangs and want nothing to do with them. However, the behaviour of a small number of young people who are involved has a significant impact on communities, their families and friends, as well as themselves.

### WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE JOIN GANGS?

Young people join gangs for reasons which make sense to them, if not to adults. Some reasons young people may join a gang are:

- Respect and status
- To gain friends
- A sense of belonging
- Excitement
- To find a substitute family
- Power
- Protection
- Money
- Peer pressure

### SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR

Gangs often leave signs of their presence and your child might adopt some of these signs; either as a member or as an associate of a gang. Any sudden changes in your child's lifestyle should be discussed. Signs may include:

- Specific dress style
- Poor behaviour
- Talking differently – new slang or language with an aggressive tone
- Poor school results or skipping school
- Carrying weapons
- Unexplained injuries or sums of money/possessions
- Staying out unusually late
- Graffiti style tags on possessions
- Interest in music which glorifies weapons/gang culture

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Talk to your child and listen
- Encourage them to get involved in positive activities and to think about their future employment
- Get involved in your child's school activities
- Know your child's friends and their families
- Always know where your child is and who they are with
- Help them to cope with pressure and how to deal with conflict without use of violence
- Speak to them about the serious consequences that occur from violent or illegal behaviour
- Help them to understand the dangers of being in a gang and find constructive alternative ways to use their time
- Keep lines of communication open
- Be aware of what your child is doing on the internet
- Look for ways of disciplining your child that does not involve harshness, anger or violence
- Work with other parents and schools to watch their behaviour
- Contact local organisations that provide mentoring and other support for young people
- Talk about your child's behaviour with their school and other parents



## IF YOUR CHILD IS ALREADY INVOLVED

- If your child is already involved in a gang, they may be scared and not want to talk about it. It is important that they know you want to listen and support them. Make sure they know they have a choice.
- Ask them what you can do to help. Try to agree about what they should do next. Work with them to find solutions and choices.
- Seek help from local community organisation or youth services, who can offer specialist help.

Committing crime and ending up with a criminal record will affect the rest of your child's life. Having a criminal record can prevent a young person getting a job, going to university and even travelling abroad.



# ADVICE ON DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

All drugs carry risks. In young people, the effects can be especially unpredictable and dangerous. The consequences of being charged with drug offences include a criminal record and a custodial sentence, both of which can impact negatively on future life choices.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD LOOK FOR

- Loss of interest in sports or favourite activities
- Lack of interest in appearance or personal hygiene
- Dramatic mood swings, excessive tiredness, lethargy, changes in appetite
- Sudden changes in established friendship groups
- Taking time off school
- Dilated pupils, red eyes, bad skin
- Spending, stealing or borrowing money, coupled with a refusal to explain how/why.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT YOUR CHILD IS TAKING DRUGS

Don't panic. Try to remain calm and listen. Offer support, make sure they are safe of any immediate danger and don't pressure them, wait until they are ready to talk things through. **Get help and if it is a medical emergency call 999.**



# USEFUL CONTACTS

To report a crime and other concerns that do not require an emergency response, call 101. Always call 999 in an emergency

**Safer Neighbourhood Policing Team** – you can contact your local Safer Neighbourhood Team for advice by calling 101. Or alternatively, to find their details please visit [www.police.uk](http://www.police.uk) and use the search tool

**Welwyn Hatfield Community Safety Partnership (CSP)** – contact your local CSP to report an issue or for information on how to signpost/support a vulnerable young person by emailing [feelsafe@welhat.gov.uk](mailto:feelsafe@welhat.gov.uk)

**Crimestoppers** – a free, confidential service where you can report information about a crime anonymously. **Freephone: 0800 555 111**

**Hertfordshire Services for Young People** – for more information and support for young people, or to make a referral visit [www.servicesforyoungpeople.org](http://www.servicesforyoungpeople.org), call **0300 123 7538** or email [SfYP@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:SfYP@hertfordshire.gov.uk)

**YMCA** – for youth groups in the local area or support visit [www.oneymca.org](http://www.oneymca.org) or [general@oneymca.org](mailto:general@oneymca.org)

**Family Lives** – get advice on all aspects of parenting, open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. **0808 800 2222** or visit at [www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)

**ChildLine** – offers a free confidential helpline and online service dedicated to children and young people. **0800 1111**

**Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Board** – if you're worried about a young person being abused or mistreated or if you are a young person being abused or mistreated. **0300 123 4043**

**CGL** – drug and alcohol support service **01707 256532** [herts@cgl.org.uk](mailto:herts@cgl.org.uk)

**Hertfordshire Wellbeing Service** – for support with mental health and wellbeing visit [www.hpft.nhs.uk](http://www.hpft.nhs.uk)

**Talk to Frank** – free confidential drugs information and advice line, **0300 123 6600** or visit [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)

**The Living Room** – addiction therapy and support for individuals and families [www.livingroomherts.org](http://www.livingroomherts.org)

