



Violence, Youth & Gangs

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The recent concerns about the growth of youth violence in communities and

formed groups who identify themselves by a name, are associated with a particu-

lar neighborhood or 'turf', and often engage in recurrent criminal activity.

They display symbols of their group in dress (bandanas or hats), colors, tattoos, graffiti, hand signals, and language. Male gang members outnumber female gang members by 20 to 1, and the age of members ranges from 12 and 24.

Boys join gangs to gain respect, attention, power, material gain, self-defense, and a sense of belonging. They see membership in a gang as offering pride, friendship, increase in self-worth and status, and excitement. Although only a small percentage of youth join gangs, homicide and assault are more

likely to be committed by gang members than non-gang members. In addition, gang violence has increased in levels and in lethality in recent years with the availability of firearms. Girls join gangs for protection and are largely exploited by male gang members.

Gangs also offer an identity and social recognition to adolescents who feel powerless, frustrated or are lacking traditional support structures such as family and school success. Control of 'turf' is essential to the well being of the gang, and local schools then become part of a gang's territory and source of new members.

Managing and preventing gangs in school requires a balanced approach of prevention, intervention, and enforcement

strategies. Gangs are a community problem, but as schools are part of the community they