

Gang related violence

Gangs in Thurrock

Thurrock has at least one local gang, as well as known gang members – 'nominals' – or affiliates from other boroughs, usually having been moved to local accommodation by London authorities.

The gang culture in Thurrock is different to that in Essex or London. It is important that parents, carers and those working with young people, know the signs and can get support if they feel a young person is involved, or at risk of becoming involved, with gangs.

Grooming – how it begins

Young people are enticed initially by the offer of free drugs or cash, or even just friendship and acceptance into a circle. This can develop into the promise of more money or rewards if they do something in return – for example, taking a parcel or packet to a specific address, selling small amounts of cannabis to friends or holding weapons.

Young people can be approached in:

- the local park
- outside shops
- outside school or college
- at youth clubs
- in communal flats

Girls can be enticed into gang affiliation just as much as boys.

What follows

The promise of trust and respect follows. This could be:

- an increase in the amount of money handed over
- larger amounts of drugs being given on a promise of a cash return – with the chance to make extra money for themselves
- being asked to go into a different area for a few days or weeks, to a flat to sell drugs
- being asked to hold a weapon
- being asked to commit violent or sexual acts on others as punishment or revenge

Increasing danger

With an ever-increasing number of young people wanting to get involved, and a higher earning potential through the ranks, there is a desire among gang members to sustain their place or move to the top end of the chain.

Increasingly, young people can be persuaded or encouraged to out-perform their peers. This could result in them being more open and suggestible to taking greater risks, involving more danger and behaviour of more serious concern – criminal or otherwise.

Vulnerable adults

Vulnerable adults or those with learning disabilities may also be groomed. Gang members may approach them to use or take over their flat as a base – known as 'cuckooing'. Vulnerable people in this situation are at risk, and can be being coerced into behaviour they don't want to be part of.

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What attracts young people

There are many reasons why young people feel attracted to gangs and can be desperate, queuing or fighting to get in.

Young people want to join gangs:

- for protection from others – gangs, groups or peers
- for safety in numbers
- to be accepted
- to feel part of a family
- for a sense of identity
- for respect
- because siblings or other family members are affiliates
- for status amongst peers and others
- because gangs are common in the area
- because it's easier to get girls, sex
- due to fear of intimidation or threats from others
- due to peer pressure
- due to a lack of family or emotional support
- due to cultural identity
- because they have no positive role models
- because they're bored
- because they think it's attractive and cool
- for financial gain and other rewards

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Gang structure

There are different roles and levels of authority within gangs.

These roles include:

- **Teenies** – generally those under the age of 10 – below the age of criminal responsibility – who are used to carry drugs and weapons, or move parcels between older members
- **Runners, Shotters** – generally aged between 12 and 15-ish, those who move drugs between older members, sell drugs in the streets, arrange street deals, stay in 'trap' houses where drugs are sold or made
- **Youngers** – generally aged under 18, they have some level of authority over teenies and shotters, are street dealers of class A or B drugs, can set up trap houses, recruit teenies, runners and shotters, report directly to elders
- **Links, Baby Mama, Bae, Wifey** – girls used by members as girlfriends, used for sex, exploited, they will carry or hide weapons, drugs and money for members of any age
- **Elders** – generally aged over 18, they are in charge of running street operations and trap houses, deal in larger amounts of class A and B drugs, facilitate purchase of firearms and other weapons, have authority over street dealers and youngers, respected
- **Faces, Olders** – those at the top or higher end of the chain, limited contact with street level operations, not often seen or known by street level members

Street names

Street names are generally used and often, other members will not know each other's real names. This creates a reputation – a 'rep' – as names can be chosen because they represent a threat or talent, but they are also used so gang members can't be identified.

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Behaviours

The behaviour of young people can change when they become involved with a gang.

Behaviour at home

At home, behaviour changes can mean:

- withdrawing from family
- secretive behaviour
- blocking family from social media
- aggression
- unexplained injuries
- being late for curfew
- absconding from home
- breaking family rules
- pushing family boundaries
- new friends that you don't know
- expensive items of clothing, footwear, electrical goods, jewellery, watches
- increased amounts of cash
- unaccounted for money in their bank

Behaviour at school

At school, behaviour changes can mean:

- withdrawing from school
- loss of interest
- no longer attending school clubs
- a breakdown of friendships
- aggression
- unexplained injuries
- breaking school rules
- pushing boundaries
- lack of respect
- truanting or long term absences
- expensive items of clothing, footwear, electrical goods, jewellery, watches
- being dropped off at school in unknown cars or taxis
- being approached outside of school by unknown people

Behaviour with professionals who work with young people

Around professionals, behaviour changes can mean:

- secretive behaviour
- not being open
- a change in your professional relationship
- being withdrawn
- aggression

- unexplained injuries
- not attending meetings or appointments
- concerns being raised by parents, carers, teachers, social workers, youth workers
- being taken to appointments by unknown people
- arriving in taxis or unknown cars
- new mobile phones and not providing the number
- receiving calls throughout their sessions and wanting to leave quickly
- a careless, reckless attitude
- carrying weapons or things that can be used as weapons
- expensive items of clothing, footwear, electrical goods, jewellery, watches
- change in friends
- association with other gang members
- tattoos

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Slang, brands and symbols

Slang	Meaning
Air	ignore something, not worth talking about
Allow it	stop it
Bait	easy to get caught
Bare	lots of
Beef	trouble
Burner	cheap phone, pay as you go
Ends	home area
Fam	family
Food	drugs
Hen	Hennessy – alcoholic drink
Merk	murder or kill
Nitty	derogatory name for female
On fleek	perfect
P's	money – paper money or notes
Pagan	person who moves between gangs, or has no affiliation
Shank	stabbed, a knife
Shook	nervous, scared
Sket	derogatory name for female
Slipping	being in the wrong area, not being prepared for something
Strap	gun
Whip	car

If you hear a word that you don't understand, you should make a note of it and either Google it or look it up on www.urbandictionary.com. It may seem like another language but it's important you know what they're saying.

Brands

What might look plain or inexpensive could actually cost a lot of money. You may question how a young person could afford these items worth hundreds, or even thousands, of pounds.

Tattoos

Several symbols are common in gang tattoos. These include:

- rosary beads with a cross on the hand
- a heart with £ or \$ on the hand

- family, loyalty, respect wording
- postcodes, letters, numbers
- 'Money over Bitches' – MOB
- wads, rolls of cash, dollars, paper money
- 'Soldier', 'Souljah'
- Nicknames and street names
- RIP tattoos

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What to look for

Once you are aware of the structures, behaviours, brands and symbols of gangs, you can look for these signs both at home and away from home.

At home

Questions you can ask yourself include:

- **Friends** – Do you know them? Do you know their families? Where do they live? Do they concern you? Do they have tattoos or expensive clothes? Are they open to meeting family? Are they respectful?
- **Socialising** – Where do they hang out? How do they spend their free time?
- **Social Media** – Do you know their social media names? Do you know their mobile phone habits? How many phones do they have? Do you have their numbers? Can you 'follow' them on social media? Do you know what they're posting?
- **Obsessions** – Are they obsessed with gang culture? Do they want specific clothing, colours or brands?
- **Their look** – Do you think they look like a gang member? What does a gang member look like?
- **Bank accounts** – Is money coming in and going out that is unaccounted for?
- **Surroundings** – Respect their privacy but take note of surroundings – do you know what's in their room? Do you know how many knives are in your kitchen?

Away from home

Questions you can ask yourself include:

- **Friends** – Do you know them? Are they gang members or are their gang concerns with them?
- **Social Media** – Are you worried by what they are posting and what photos are they showing on social media?
- **Attendance slipping** – Are they attending appointments, school or college?
- **Tagging/graffiti** – Are they tagging school books, desks, their school bags with symbols or letters, postcodes, street names?
- **Street names** – Are others referring to them as another name, are they referring to others by street names?
- **Family** – are you in contact with family? Are they aware of concerns or are they oblivious? Are they worried? What else can they add to your concerns? Do they need support?

If your gut feeling is that something isn't right, don't sit on concerns – share them with others.

Be aware

By staying aware you can:

- spot the signals – look for the silent signs
- share concerns and get help – it's safeguarding

Remember, not all kids who hang around in groups are in gangs.

You can find more information on gangs and gang culture at:

- www.gangline.com
- www.gov.uk/government/policies/knife-gun-and-gang-crime
- safe.met.police.uk/gangs_and_violence/get_the_facts.html
- www.saferlondon.org.uk

Get online – times move quick, so keep up to date with what's going on.

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What you can do

There are a number of ways that parents, carers and professionals who work with young people can deal with concerns about gangs. These include:

- **talking and listening** – encourage the young person to talk to you, tell them about your concerns and about gang culture so they can see the risks themselves, ask them questions and listen to how they talk and what they say, be prepared to learn, encourage them not to associate with gang members or 'wannabes', encourage them not to identify with gangs or pledge allegiance to a specific gang, encourage them not to hang out where gangs hang out, nor to accept lifts from gang members in cars, nor attend social events arranged by gangs, nor tag any gang graffiti, nor use gang hand signals
- **monitoring attendance** – monitor non-attendance and share with parents and carers, check-in with them regularly, encourage them to make contact
- **setting rules and boundaries** – impose and monitor curfews, increase reporting and appointments, consider limiting or monitoring access to social media, educate the young person about gangs, and the risks and consequences including carrying weapons or drugs, show interest in their friends and social activities, respect their privacy and feelings but be fair and consistent
- **getting savvy** – listen to their music and be aware of the lyrics, use the internet to research, view YouTube video clips that are educational to both parents and young people in respect of gangs, search the meaning of new slang words, be aware of high profile gang activity and murders in the press as this may be spoken about or you may recognise names or they may tell you a friend has died or gone to prison

Be aware

Be aware of:

- the differences – the scene in Thurrock is not the same as London
- the things you say – consider comments you may make about race issues, the government or high profile news stories
- the news and what is going on around you – the causes of recent riots, stop and search, what's going on in Thurrock

Work with others

Professionals who work with young people should:

- record concerns
- record street names, associates and areas they talk about
- share intelligence, information and concerns
- regularly meet all involved agencies to assess and manage risks and safeguarding

Work with others to manage risk effectively and safeguard the young person.

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How to get help

If you are a parent or carer, or are worried about a child involved with gangs, contact the Thurrock multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH).

Children's Services initial response

Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, RM17 6SL

t: 01375 652 802

Professionals working with young people can contact the Serious Youth Violence (SYV) lead officer in our Youth Offending service, who can offer advice, training, monitoring and support.

Professionals can also make a referral to the Gang-Related Violence (GRV) group. This operational group consists of:

- Youth Offending service
- Probation service and Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC)
- Police
- Social care
- Housing and Community Safety

The group meets monthly to discuss known gang 'nominals' or those living in Thurrock who are of concern. They share intelligence and manage risk. Members of the group undertake home visits and meet regularly with known gang members.

To pass on concerns, ask questions, seek advice or for a copy of the referral form, contact the SYV lead and GRV chair:

Gang-related violence and serious youth violence

e: gangs.thurrock@thurrock.cjsm.net