

## Negative Peer Culture & “Gangs”: Building Healthy Relationships

As children grow, they have more opportunities and freedom, which don't involve parents. The best way we can prepare children for that independence is to help them build positive relationships so they don't become involved with unhealthy peer groups.

### What are some reasons youth join gangs?

- To gain a sense of **belonging and attachment**
- To **escape intolerable situations** at home
- To emulate **admired persons**
- To **escape poverty**
- **Forced** into membership (through threats and intimidation or peer pressure)
- To become **rich and powerful**
- To **"Get Back"** at society
- To experience **adventure** and excitement
- To be **"Somebody"** or gain respect
- Environmental **survival**



Children form unhealthy relationships to satisfy a **need that they may not be getting elsewhere**; this may be for excitement, belonging, or a sense of power.

We can help teach children the skills they need to **stay safe and make choices that are good for themselves and others.**

It is important for children and youth to know what makes up healthy relationships.

Having adults model these behaviours helps to reinforce them for children.



### Talk to your child about these 7 Truths of Friendship:

- 1) Trust
- 2) Listening
- 3) Caring
- 4) Someone who will stand up for you
- 5) Someone you are able to have fun with
- 6) Respectful
- 7) Someone you spend time with

**Provide opportunities for children to experience these truths** through healthy relationships so they don't have to look for them in unhealthy peer groups.

Communication with children allows us to support the development of **critical thinking skills and ability to make healthy choices.**



**Some of the ways we can engage in conversations with children that will help them stay safe:**

- Listen to them without judgment
- Use kind words
- Speak one on one
- State concern for their not making good choices
- Use honest communication

## Some Ways to Model Healthy Relationships:

- Communicate **positive messages**
- Help identify your child's **strengths and talents**
- **Spend time** with your child
- Direct your child towards **healthy activities**
- Find ways for your child **to be successful** at what he or she enjoys
- Set **limits and boundaries** with your child
- Help your child develop a **sense of responsibility**
- Get to know your child's **friends** and friend's parents
- Help your child develop **conflict resolution skills**
- Develop **strategies** with your child to deal with peer pressure



These tips are important whether children are involved in a gang or not. These skills will both help keep them out and help to get them out.

Adults can also support healthy relationships by providing opportunities for children to develop **resilience** by:

- Giving children skills they need to make **healthy choices**
- Allowing them to **experience risk**
- Allowing them to make choices, increasing their sense of **personal power**
- Teaching them about what makes a **good friend** and how to support each other through healthy relationships