

# WHY GANGS?

by [Mike James](#)

One of the major issues facing the police in the United States today is the gang problem. The gang problem has mushroomed from our urban areas and city streets to the suburbs. **What leads kids into gangs? How would you know if your son or daughter was involved? What can we do to stop the people we love from getting involved with gangs?** We will address each of these questions in this article.

Many young people today are joining gangs. **Self-preservation** is a major reason for one joining a gang. Being a member of a gang provides a sense of family, protection, identity, acceptance, and financial gain. In order to understand why youth join gangs we should look to see what those who have joined gangs say. In his book, Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member, Sanyika Shakur, also known as Monster Kody Scott, offers a number of reasons.

According to Shakur, the concept of **respect** is magnified 30X in the ghettos and slums of America. Being part of a gang could provide you with respect. Shakur also mentioned the ubiquity of violence in his neighborhood. The norm was to strike back against others with violence. The economic destitution of his family and the domestic violence between his parents compounded the situation he developed in. He also mentioned the fact he has “never been at peace and nothing has ever been stable.” Shakur goes on to say, “I’ve always felt like a temporary guest everywhere I’ve been, all of my life, and, truly, I’ve never been comfortable.” In the Crips gang that Shakur belonged to he found the stability he was looking for. According to Shakur, changes took place in the neighborhood, but the neighborhood never changed. So the gang was out to protect their turf, the neighborhood, which was their stability. Although they did not say it, death was looked upon as a reward, especially if one died for the neighborhood. It’s interesting that Shakur even says that the “set” (gang) functioned as a religion.

**Peer pressure** is another aspect of why youth join gangs. Shakur mentioned that where he grew up many kids got involved in gangs. He likened it to a middle-American town where most kids go to college. In south Los Angeles most kids have some interaction with gangs. Shakur eventually ended up in prison and that is where his transformation occurred. Through educating himself Shakur found a new cause and purpose.

A **number of signs** that could possibly indicate that someone is involved in a gang could be the following:

- hats and baseball caps (some worn backwards or with a certain tilt)
- combs (placement in hair)
- baggy clothing
- combat style clothing
- T-shirts (custom printed, with gang name)
- tattoos and branding
- hand signals and body swaggering
- not participating in family activities, secrecy
- new friends
- defiant behavior
- graffiti (may also be on personal belongings)
- use of nicknames
- drug or alcohol abuse

**How can we stop our kids from getting involved in gangs?** Well if we look back at the reasons why kids get into gangs we can learn how we can stop them from joining gangs. Looking back at what Sanyika Shakur said I think one of the biggest things we can do for our youth is provide them with a **stable home**. Shakur found a family in his gang. His parents did not provide him with the stability young people need.

Another thing to think about is if you live in a **bad neighborhood** you may want to leave it. The norms and mores of those around you can have an influence on your children. If you can't leave your neighborhood you need to work hard to change it. Working with your local police department you can set up neighborhood watch programs that will have the police on the scene quickly to take care of trouble when it arises. You will have to work with those around you to take back "bad" neighborhoods. We also need to make sure our kids are being **educated and learning** that the world is more than just the neighborhood they live in. Exposing kids to the good things in the world can help override the bad influences that may be just around the corner.

The most important thing we can do is making our children **aware of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. Everyone is looking for something in life. Some find it in their family, friends, causes, chemicals, or things. But the most important thing we can find in life to fill us up is God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.