

SOS Project

What to do

Learn how to challenge – you need to be able to stay calm, ask questions and listen to answers without losing control. Don't be afraid of confrontations, but try and stay away from accusations.

If your child is in trouble with the Police or at school – be ready to challenge obvious signs of unacceptable behaviour – one idea is to make an agreement and have set consequences for misbehaviour.

Listen and be supportive - If a young person is involved, they may not want to talk about it or be scared. Ultimately, you want to be the person your child can confide in and is honest with.

This means you need to be prepared to listen to your worst fears without the situation escalating or becoming abusive. It's important that they know you want to listen, support them and work with them to find solutions.

Don't be afraid to get help - You are not alone and there is always support out there to help you. In addition to the information in this leaflet, your local council or the Citizens' Advice Bureau have specific groups who can assist you.

But you could start by talking to the school, teachers, faith groups and even other parents. On the back page of this leaflet are organisations that can give you more information and access support.

SOS Project

Get help

If you're concerned about the issues raised in this leaflet, these organisations and resources are available to help:

Early Intervention project referrals

Please contact our head office on
T: 020 7708 8000
E: info@stgilestrust.org.uk

The SOS project

T: 020 7708 8000
W: stgilestrust.org.uk

Childline

T: 0800 1111
W: childline.org.uk

Victim Support

A national charity which helps people affected by crime
W: victimsupport.org

NSPCC

A 24hr helpline providing advice and guidance
T: 0808 800 5000

Family Lives

For advice on all aspects of parenting roles
T: 0808 800 2222

Missing People

If your child goes missing for long periods of time get in touch with the charity which can help find them at missingpeople.org.uk

St Giles

Turning a past into a future

St Giles head office: 64-68 Camberwell Church Street, London SE5 8JB
T: 020 7703 7000 **W: www.stgilestrust.org.uk** **E: info@stgilestrust.org.uk**
Registered Charity, No. 801 355

Combating violent crime

Warning signs and what you can do to help young people caught up in gangs



St Giles

MIDLANDS

Practical advice and support for parents and carers

Sometimes it feels like crime is getting more serious all the time. We see images of youth violence, stabbings and exploitation all the time. No-one would blame you as a parent or caregiver for worrying about what happens to your child, or asking what they could do to stop their child becoming another victim. Here is some guidance to consider, put together by our experienced SOS Project team.

Don't blame yourself - Even with good parental support, young people can be attracted into negative associations or habits despite your best efforts.

Have those conversations – Young people frequently tell us that if they were in trouble they would not go to an adult for help. Be that a teacher, parent or someone in authority. Why not? Because they fear they would be judged, that adults wouldn't understand or worse they would receive punishment. To get around this you are going to have to build real trusted conversations with your young person. You need to talk about what you will do if they ask you for help. You need to reassure them that you will not judge them and that you will believe them and do whatever it takes to help them. Then when they approach you, take time out and listen.

It's not just boys that get involved - Many girls may believe that what they're being pressured or coerced to do is 'normal' and acceptable. They might not realise what's happening to them is wrong. They may be afraid of what might happen if they tell anyone and they may believe no one will believe or protect them.

Check out their space – this includes physical spaces such as bedroom and where they hang out but don't forget about the online space such as the social media platforms they use.

It's wise to know what social media platforms they use and dependant on their age and maturity you should have access to their activity.

Be aware that chat rooms and texts can be used to bully and exploit young people to participate in negative behaviour. Monitor sites and games for inappropriate content – maybe even play the games with them!

Look out for changes to:

- **Dress style** - Sometimes young people wear certain clothing to align themselves to specific groups. Again, ask them about it and why they feel it is necessary.
- **Behaviour** - Most young people go through a rebellious phase, what's essential is that it does not prolong and that healthy boundaries are maintained and challenged.
- **Your child's friends** – Friends fall out sometimes and children change their interests, but who are your child's friends? When your child goes out, who are they with and what do they do?
- **Gang names** – Does your child's group of friends have a 'name' and if so, how do they see themselves?
- **Truancy** – Do you check on attendance, are you speaking to teachers, have tutors noticed anything?

If kids are not in school the question is, where are they? Some gangs exploit young people by sending them to other areas.

- **If your child starts to go missing, make sure you challenge them over their whereabouts** and if they go missing for periods of 24hrs or more ensure that it is reported and that you get help. If you're in doubt as to what your children are doing in their spare time, ask. If necessary, monitor their activities.

Post codes and unsafe areas - Harder to spot, but some young people align themselves to post codes and therefore have 'no-go' areas. If your child shows reluctance going to any specific areas, ask why, and be ready to ask again.

Unexplained cash or possessions – Has your child bought things they normally couldn't afford? Look out for possession of relatively large sums of money or for expensive items brought home. Be ready to challenge excuses, too.

Signs of bullying/physical injuries – Your child may experience bullying and pressure to join a group. They may have injuries which indicate violence from others or self-harming. Either way, they'll need your support. Make time to listen and encourage them to trust you.

Hear the music - this can be a bit of a minefield because although music associated with gangs can be threatening, violent and glamourise the myth surrounding the culture it does not guarantee involvement.

It makes sense to know what your child is listening to and what the music is about, and also to have those conversations about what the lyrics mean before you take any action.

