

# Gangs 101

**Busting the myths  
and revealing  
the consequences**

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**Credits**

Written by Jodi Pushkin, NIE manager  
Designed by Times staff

Teen drug-use is a problem that plagues our schools, our businesses, our families. It is up to all of us to show our youth a better life. From elementary to high school levels, our youth are at risk.

Where there is drug use, there are often gangs and violent behavior. Statistics show teens that use drugs are almost twice as likely to engage in violent behavior, steal, and join gangs, as those who do not use drugs.

Anti-drug programs, and gang enforcement and prevention are key priorities for Hillsborough County. Our Criminal Justice Liaison office administers federal and local substance abuse funds for community treatment, education, and prevention. It also provides support to the Hillsborough County Anti-drug Alliance, and sponsors special events and exhibits to promote community substance abuse awareness.

Keep this newspaper insert throughout the school year as a reference. It is filled with helpful resources to answer questions and get help for drug prevention, gang problems, bullying, and more.

One solution is to not set the problem aside and pretend it’s not happening. It starts at home where parents must work to show our children a better life. Positive family relationships can help keep teens from falling in with a dangerous crowd. We are their role models, and it is up to us to encourage them to reach higher and dream bigger.

We must mentor our children, and encourage their participation in activities that reflect their interests and needs. Authority figures must work to have a greater dialogue with our teenagers. Most importantly, love them and hug them. And when our children reach the crossroads, it’s up to them to choose their path to success.

*Ken Hagan*

**Ken Hagan**  
Chairman  
Hillsborough County  
Board of County Commissioners

*Rick A. Lott*

**Rick A. Lott**  
Mayor  
City of Plant City

*Joseph A. Affronti, Sr.*

**Joseph A. Affronti, Sr.**  
Mayor  
City of Temple Terrace



Dear Parents and Students,

Tampa has become a safer city over the last six years thanks to the dedication of the men and women of the Tampa Police Department. Though major crimes have been reduced by more than 50 %, gangs, drugs and bullying are still major issues that our children may face in school each day.

Often times teens see gangs as a way to make money, feel protected or feel like they are a part of a “family,” but this couldn’t be further from the truth. We want you to know there are better options available to you. In order to help you become more aware and educated on these issues, the Tampa Police Department has launched a new, interactive website: [TampaBayGangs.com](http://TampaBayGangs.com). By working with local partners we have developed a site that uses innovative, interactive technology that actually custom tailors a conversation with each person who logs on to the site. We want young people to learn constructive and productive ideas that will place them on a positive path in life. Local role model Warrick Dunn hosts [TampaBayGangs.com](http://TampaBayGangs.com), and I thank him for his participation and support of the program.

On behalf of the City of Tampa, we are pleased to join with Hillsborough County to encourage parents to talk more about issues such as gangs, drugs and bullying with their children. In order to help encourage constructive behavior, it is important to address these and other issues that kids are challenged with today. By working together we can help ensure that every child is provided the opportunity to for a positive life.

I wish you a safe, productive school year.

Sincerely,

*Pam Iorio*

Pam Iorio, Mayor



# Crime 101: Just the facts



**Labeled as a “gang member”**

Did you know there is a law in the state of Florida that defines what a gang “member” is? It is Florida Statute Chapter 874, also known as the “Criminal Gang Prevention Act.” This law includes a list of criteria used to determine whether someone is a gang member or associate.

A “criminal gang” is a formal or informal organization, association or group that has as one of its primary activities the commission of criminal or delinquent acts, and that consists of three or more persons who have a common name or common identifying

signs, colors or symbols, including, but not limited to, terrorist organizations and hate groups.

**Criminal gang associate means a person who:**

- Admits to criminal gang association
- Meets any single criteria for criminal gang membership

**Criminal gang member is a person who meets two or more of the following criteria:**

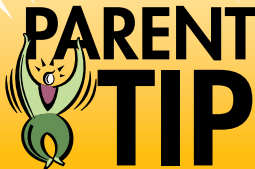
- Admits to criminal gang membership
- Is identified as a criminal gang member by a parent or guardian

- Is identified as a criminal gang member by a documented reliable informant
- Adopts the style of dress of a criminal gang
- Adopts the use of a hand sign identified as used by a criminal gang
- Has a tattoo identified as used by a criminal gang
- Associates with one or more known criminal gang members
- Is identified as a criminal gang member by an informant of previously untested reliability and such identification is corroborated by independent information
- Is identified as a criminal gang member by physical evidence
- Has authored any communication indicating responsibility for the commission of any crime by the criminal gangs

**Criminal gang-related activity means:**

- An activity committed with the intent to benefit, promote or further the interests of a criminal gang, or for the purposes of increasing a person’s own standing or position within a criminal gang
- An activity in which the participants are identified as criminal gang members or criminal gang associates acting individually or collectively to

- further any criminal purpose of a criminal gang
- An activity that is identified as criminal gang activity by a documented reliable informant
- An activity that is identified as criminal gang activity by an informant of previously untested reliability and such identification is corroborated by independent information



Listening is the stronger part of a conversation, especially with a child. Making sure you understand how the child reacts to what is being said is just as important as getting the information right. Make sure you get all the information, because children follow directions better when adults include them in the discussion and decision. They might just have some good ideas on how to get things done. Children who can carry on a good conversation, especially with adults, generally are more self-assured and successful in life.

## It’s the law

**Felony vs. Misdemeanor**

A “felony” is a crime that is punishable by more than one year in prison, or death. A “misdemeanor” is a crime that is punishable by imprisonment for less than one year.

**Felonies and Misdemeanors are broken down into degrees with different levels of fines and imprisonment: Felonies**

Capital Felony:	Death or life imprisonment with no parole	
Life Felony:	up to 40 years to life	up to \$15,000 fine
1st Degree Felony:	up to 30 years	up to \$10,000 fine
2nd Degree Felony:	up to 15 years	up to \$10,000 fine
3rd Degree Felony:	up to 5 years	up to \$5,000 fine

**Minors can face adult prison sentences.**

**Misdemeanors:**

1st Degree Misdemeanor:	up to 1 year	up to \$1,000 fine
2nd Degree Misdemeanor:	up to 60 days	up to \$500 fine



# Gang Life 101

community. In Florida, hundreds of local gangs have been identified from Pensacola to the Florida Keys, and can be found in small rural towns, upper middle-class neighborhoods, schools and other areas.

## Why do kids join gangs?

Kids often will join a gang for a sense of power, excitement, recognition or status.

They believe that belonging to a particular gang will allow them to achieve a level of status that was impossible to attain outside of the gang. Kids join gangs to:

- Have prestige or power
- Find friendship or brotherhood/sisterhood
- Get protection/security from gang violence
- Make a lot of money fast
- Feel a sense of belonging
- Be considered "cool" by other kids

## Different yet the same

A gang is a group of people who want to be seen as different from others and want others to see themselves as a distinct group. A gang is organized, may or may not have leadership and commits criminal and/or delinquent acts in the

## How do gangs recruit their members?

Kids often are confronted by gang members in their neighborhoods or in school. Gang members will use peer pressure or fear and intimidation tactics to get others to join their gang.

Kids are told lies about all of the good things that happen when they join. They are told they will earn a lot of money, make friends, go to parties and belong to a close "family" that will care for and "love" them.

Most members are boys, but 10 percent of all gang members are girls.

## What are associated risk factors?

- Living in an area with a high level of gang activity, drug or alcohol use, available firearms
- Lack of a positive support system at home
- Violence against family members
- Exposure to TV shows, movies and/or music that glorifies violence

## PARENT TIP

Help your children learn to build healthy relationships. Teach them to define friends as peers who help them realize their dreams, who accept them for who they are and help them stay out of trouble. Parents, you have more influence in this area than you think. It starts by knowing who your children's friends are and where they live. Finding other children who share your child's productive interests increases the likelihood your child will stay focused and on the right path. Your child is likely to be happier and more successful when involved in structured and supervised activities such as organized sports, park or after-school programs, or civic or youth groups.





- Lack of alternative activities, such as community youth programs
- Lack of positive role models
- Low self-esteem and/or a sense of hopelessness about the future
- Poor decision-making and communication skills
- Too much unsupervised free time
- Poor school achievement
- Problematic child-parent relationship
- Lack of respect for authority (parents, teachers, law enforcement officers)
- Family members who are or were gang members

### What are some typical pre-gang behaviors?

Gang involvement does not happen overnight. It is a gradual process.

Here are the warning signs:

- Poor progress or achievement in school
- Truancy from school
- Lack of hobbies or too much leisure time
- Frequent contact with authority figures or police
- Drawing gang insignias/symbols/signs
- Friends are gang members or "dressing down" or "sagging and bagging" in gang attire
- Dressing in traditional gang clothes or colors

### How do kids become gang members?

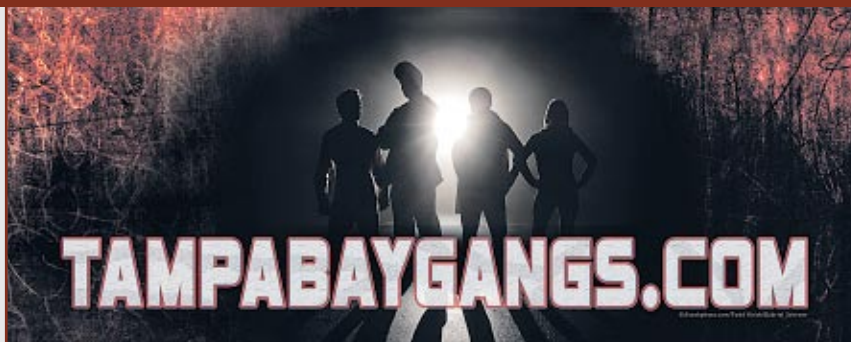
- Beat In: A prospective new member may be asked to endure a beating by several members of the gang.
- Sexed In: Female inductees sometimes have intercourse with multiple members of the gang.
- Blessed In: Occasionally, a prospective gang member will not have to endure any of the normal gang initiation rituals.
- Acts of Violence: Some gangs require inductees to commit a violent felony (armed robbery, car jacking, aggravated assault)

Sources: United States Department of Justice, Florida Department of Law Enforcement and Tampa Police Department

Law enforcement has a two-pronged approach to gangs: enforcement and education. Enforcement is conduct by Gang Suppression Units that execute regular attacks on gang activity throughout

the Tampa Bay area. Recently law enforcement launched its education component on the war against gangs with a state of the art, interactive, English and Spanish Web site that targets children 10-16 years old. The goal of [tampabaygangs.com](http://tampabaygangs.com) is to reach children before the gangs do.

The technology is called WAHI, which stands for web automated human interaction. This technology creates the feeling of conversa-



tion by custom tailoring responses to each audience member. Tampa Bay Buccaneer Warrick Dunn kicks off the video. The site is designed to appeal to kids who may have glamorized gangs in

their minds. On the site, a convicted gang member talks to the kids and prompts them to answer questions. Through this two-way communication, a subtle, but strong, anti-gang message is delivered. The Web site also focuses on the parents and teachers of children who are interested in gangs. There is also a branch for business owners or community members who may be affected by gangs.

# GANG COMMUNICATION

## HAND SIGNS

The "throwing" of hand signs in public is non-verbal communication between both allied and rival gangs. Gangs use unique hand signs to show allegiance to their own gang, as well as to disrespect an opposing faction.

## GETTING INK

New gang members may write on their hands or arms in pen or marker, getting comfortable with the idea of being a member. Typically, no one is allowed to wear a specific gang's tattoos unless that person is an actual member.

## GRAFFITI VS. TAGGING?

Graffiti is the newspaper of the street. Each gang has its own unique symbols and cryptic writing. Gang graffiti is not artwork. It is communication that the gang uses to publicize and send messages. Tag graffiti is considered an art form by taggers. There is usually no gang affiliation.

**If you see gang graffiti in your neighborhood, call 1-877-GANGOUT.**



# BULLYING

# 101

## PARENT TIP

Problems in life are inevitable. Solving them is a learnable skill. When conflicts occur, parents can teach their children a lot by setting up "family meetings" where problems are outlined, possible solutions discussed and decisions made. A calm discussion can often help everyone realize their needs and how people may get more of what they want by participating in the listening as well as the talking portion of the discussion. Trust, commitment to solutions and teamwork are often the by product of family meetings.

### The crime of intimidation

Gangs and bullying go hand in hand. Bullying can be one person picking on another physically or mentally, or it can be a group of people ganging up on a person. No matter what the numbers, bullying makes people feel unsafe and bad about themselves.

There are three different types of bullying: physical bullying, verbal bullying and relationship bullying. All of these types of bullying are ways that one person can make another person feel hurt, afraid or uncomfortable.

Bullying was once considered a rite of passage. Now, parents, educators and community leaders see bullying as a form of abuse that can have long-term effects on victims, robbing them of self-esteem, isolating them from their peers, causing them to drop out of school, and even prompting health problems and suicide.



A recent study by the Family and Work Institute reported that one-third of young people are bullied at least once a month, and six out of 10 American teens witness bullying at least once a day. Witnessing bullying can be as harmful as participating in the act. Often

the witness feels helpless to stop the bullying, or the witness may feel he or she will be the next target.

Bullying is not a game. In a study by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, nearly 60 percent of boys classified as bullies, in grades six to nine, were convicted of at least one crime by the age of 24, while 40 percent had three or more convictions.

Sources: PBS Kids and the National Crime Prevention Council

### The negative effects of bullying

Did you know that 74 percent of 8 to 11-year-old



children say that teasing and bullying happen at their school? What exactly is bullying?

- Fighting, threatening, name-calling, teasing or excluding someone repeatedly and over time
- An imbalance of power, such as size or popularity
- Physical, social and emotional harm
- Hurting another person to get something

Bullying is a major problem in schools and our communities. Its effects can be long-lasting and severe. Every day, nearly 160,000 children miss school because they are scared of bullying, according to the National Education Association.

### Kids who are bullied are more likely to:

- Do poorly in school
- Have low self-esteem
- Be depressed
- Turn to violent behavior to protect themselves or get revenge on their bullies

### Kids who bully are more likely to:

- Do poorly in school
- Smoke and drink alcohol
- Commit crimes in the future

Source: National Crime Prevention Council

### Gangs vs. bullying

Gangs and bullying seem to have many similar characteristics. Both use intimidation, violence and fear as tools. It is important to remember that bullying does not necessarily mean gang involvement; however, it often can lead to gang affiliations. Here are some characteristics that set gang involvement apart from individual or group bullying:



**Exclusivity** – Gangs tend to be restricted, causing members to cutoff all outside influences from non-members, including friends and family.

**Crime** – Activities and attitudes are frequently criminal and antisocial in nature.

**Rivalries** – Anyone associated with a gang may be in danger from either known or unknown rivals or adversaries. Families and friends of members are at risk of harm, as rivals do not consider their well being.

**Loyalty** – Members are expected to participate forever in the gang once they have been “jumped in.” They also are expected to remain involved in the gang’s activities.

Source: Parents. The Anti-Drug.

Parents vs. bullying

Parents can play a central role to preventing bullying and stopping it when it happens. Here are some ideas:

- Teach kids to solve problems without using violence and praise them when they do.
- Give children positive feedback when they behave well. Help give them the self-confidence to stand up for what they believe.
- Ask your children about their day and listen to them talk about their lives.
- Take bullying seriously.
- If you see any bullying, stop it right away.
- Encourage your child to help others who need it.
- Don’t bully your children or bully others in front of them.
- Support bully prevention programs in your child’s school.
- Talk to your child about high-risk behavior such as involvement with gangs and drugs.
- Monitor your child and know who his or her friends and friends’ parents are.
- Set clear rules for your child.
- Identify risk factors for delinquent behavior, violence and gang involvement for your child.
- Recognize warning signs indicating your child already may be involved with a gang, including unexplained cash, weapons, drugs and being in trouble with police.

Source: National Crime Prevention Council



Don’t Be Bullied...  
take charge, report a bully  
and remain anonymous!

www.crimestopperstb.com



1-800-873-TIPS

To Be Eligible For A Crime Stoppers Reward Information Must Be Given To Crimestoppers First. Paid For By The Office Of The Attorney General Crime Stopper Trust Fund.

Most reports of bullying will not result in criminal charges.

LEARNING WITH THE TIMES



Speaking out

• Many people choose to ignore gang and bullying activity in their neighborhoods and schools. Does silence hurt? Think about events in history that may have been prevented or their impact lessened if people had spoken up and did not close their doors against violence. In your school media center, research a war crime or genocide that occurred during the 20th century. Discuss with your classmates what role bystanders played in these events. Look for articles in the

St. Petersburg Times about current crimes that continue because of people’s silence. Write a short essay about the information you find. Share your information with your class and on the NIE Blogging Zone. Go to [tampabay.com/nie](http://tampabay.com/nie). Click on NIE Blog and then go to the Tampa Gangs category.

• Online journaling can be a great way to express your thoughts. Think about bullying and the ideas presented on this page. Does bullying go on in your school, home or neighborhood? Can it be avoided? Have you observed an unjust action or behavior? What did you do? If you could go back in time and revisit that moment, would you handle it differently? Why is it sometimes difficult for people to speak out or act against wrongdoing? Share your thoughts on the NIE Blogging Zone. Go to [tampabay.com/nie](http://tampabay.com/nie). Click on NIE Blog and then go to the Tampa Gangs category.

# Truth and consequences

# 101

## The truth behind the hype

**MYTH:** *The football team wears "colors" and calls themselves the same name. Why aren't they a gang?*

**FACT:** Because a "gang" commits crimes or delinquent acts; they don't do anything to enhance their communities. In fact, they tear the community down. It's not about how a group dresses; it's about how they act. A group of people who take or destroy other people's stuff is nothing but thieves and vandals. Whoever is raising you probably works hard to give you things you need for school and things you may just want. How does stealing a cell phone or mp3 player, or breaking a car window help anyone?

**MYTH:** *I know plenty of kids in a gang and they are cool. They only mess around; they don't do any harm.*

**FACT:** If you know those kids, then you know they are almost always getting into trouble. The world has rules. There are consequences to constant trouble. Sometimes the ones who do the least harm suffer the worst consequences. How many

kids have been shot in the last year that you know weren't the intended target? How many died? Those are consequences beyond anyone's control.

**MYTH:** *I won't get in trouble for spray painting or vandalizing property because I am a kid.*

**FACT:** You may not think that getting fingerprinted, photographed and ordered to appear in court is "trouble." But what will you think when you and your parents are ordered to pay restitution (money paid to compensate for loss, damage or injury caused)? The judicial system can put a lien on your parents' house or car, or even take money from their paycheck to pay for something you damaged. The judge can make you pay the cost from your car or paycheck, as well!

**MYTH:** *I'm not in a gang, but I help my friends who are banging when they are challenged to a fight. Besides, none of us will say we were fighting if the police catch us, so I can't get arrested.*

**FACT:** First of all, being arrested may be the least of your problems. If you

are perceived by a gang as helping a rival gang in a fight, even though you may not consider yourself a member of the gang, those rivals do! You have just made yourself their enemy.

If that doesn't bother you, consider this: What if that rival gang has a coward among them who brings a gun to a fist fight? Do you think the bullets will know the difference between the true members of the gang and those just helping out? Many Tampa shootings start out as fist fights.

**MYTH:** *Kids don't do any serious time for committing crimes.*

**FACT:** Tell that to Sylvester McBride, a 17-year-old former Middleton High School student. He was a member of a local Tampa gang and got deep into the gang life... until he was charged with several armed robberies. For those charges, he was tried and sentenced as an adult, and will spend the next six years of his life in a Florida state prison. If you knew Sylvester then, you know that it doesn't matter how nice you are to your friends. Your

actions have consequences. While you may be finishing college in six years, Sylvester will just be starting over.

You also can consider Rashad Smith's story. He was 14 years old when he tried to shoot a man from the neighborhood. The reputation Rashad had built with his violent past came crashing in on him. He was tried and convicted as an adult. At 15 years old, Rashad received a sentence of 20 years in Florida state prison, with 10 years' probation after he gets out. Where will you be in 20 years? Will you be watching your children play Little League? Will you be celebrating a promotion at work? Will you be taking care of your parents as they get older? Can you imagine what awaits Rashad when he starts his life over? Who will be left for him to come home to? You also may want to think about what could happen to you if you continue to commit crimes when you become an adult. Adrian Lorenzo Thomas, 30, of Tampa, was convicted in federal court of possessing cocaine with intent to distribute. His long history of violent





crimes led to the inevitable consequence of being sentenced to 24 years in federal prison.

**MYTH:** *Joining a gang will protect me from bullies and other gang members in my neighborhood and at school.*

**FACT:** Being in a gang actually increases your chances of being a target for rival gang members. You are far more likely to be injured or killed if you are in a gang.

**MYTH:** *A gang is a family.*

**FACT:** Real families don't force people to commit crimes just to get respect and love. Real families accept you and love you for who and what you are. Being in a gang will not solve your problems at home, and it may make things much worse. If you join a gang, your family members may become targets for rival gangs. Joining a gang will increase the number of fights you have with your parents. When you get into trouble with the law, your parents and family members will be hurt and disappointed, and it will be a financial strain on the family to help you. You will set a bad example for your brothers and sisters.

Want to learn more facts about gang life? Check out Darius' story at [tampabaygangs.com](http://tampabaygangs.com).

# Don't end up behind bars like this teenager



**Sylvester McBride is facing a lengthy prison sentence for gang activity.**

Meet 17-year-old Sylvester McBride. He likes to have fun. He likes to party and hang out with his friends. He hates rules and being told what to do. He worries about his sister and brother getting in with the wrong crowd. McBride thinks about his future. He wants to go to college, join the military and become a paramedic.

But all of that will have to wait because McBride, a high school freshman, will be spending the next six years in a Florida state prison.

McBride first started getting into fights when he attended McLane Middle School. He fought with students at school and fought with his mother at home. Following rules was not a strong point for this 13 year old. He told his mother, "I am not a kid anymore. You're not gonna tell me what to do." He liked to stay out until 2 a.m. hanging out with his friends, drinking and smoking weed.

McBride sneaked out of the house when his mom grounded him. Having parties, smoking and drinking, I thought that we all were cool." Being cool involved needing money. The teen did not have a job, but he wanted things so badly he "would do anything to get it."

From his first crime of battery, McBride quickly pro-

gressed to burglary with the help of his fellow gang members. Burglary didn't seem like a big deal. McBride admits he was scared when he broke into people's houses, but he kept doing it. He never got caught. That is until he was arrested for armed robbery on Feb. 17, 2009.

Now he has been tried and sentenced as an adult. "The worst part of jail is the loss of freedom," McBride says. "People are always telling you what to do."

McBride admits that he joined a gang because he thought it was cool. There really was no pressure, though. A lot of other kids who grew up in his Tampa neighborhood are not in gangs. "They know not to go out there and do stuff. They are afraid to get in trouble," McBride says.

"My mom used to say I could get in all kinds of trouble staying out that late. She was right. I always thought I wouldn't get caught. I was 15 when I first broke into someone's house." Other people got caught and went to jail. One of McBride's friends and fellow gang members was shot to death in their neighborhood, but McBride still thought gang life was cool.

Now he knows different. Now he is worried about his future. Although he is planning to take his GED test, he is nervous that he will not get a decent job because of his prison record.

Sitting in a chair, dressed in an orange uniform, McBride says, "I should have just stayed away from all that. I could have gotten out, but I chose not to." The teen advises other kids to "walk straight home" after school. "Be smart. Think smart. You got to make that decision."

McBride says being in prison "isn't cool. It ain't worth it. It ain't wrong to do the right thing."



## LEARNING WITH THE TIMES



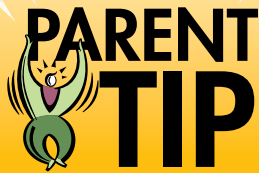
### Fact vs. fiction

Knowing the difference between fact and fiction is very important, especially when it comes to gangs in your community. Oftentimes, gangs influence young people by providing propaganda or false information to persuade them to join the gang. Look through the news sections of the electronic edition of the St.

Petersburg Times. Select a few articles of interest and evaluate those articles for facts and opinions. Draw a line down the center of a piece of paper. Label one side fact and the other opinion. List statements in each category and discuss with your class why these statements fall into that category.



# Drugs 101



Be a good role model for your children. Telling them “Do as I say not as I do” doesn’t work. You can help your child avoid negative behaviors such as smoking, drinking, drugs and sexual activity, and adopt positive behaviors such as tolerance, patience, hard work and respect. When children learn these fundamentals, they are more likely to make better choices because nobody listens to a hypocrite.

## Teen violence and drugs

Did you know teens that use drugs are almost twice as likely to engage in violent behavior, steal, abuse other drugs and join gangs as compared to teens who do not use drugs? The most widely used drug by teens is marijuana. While most young people seek acceptance or belonging through positive family and peer relationships and extracurricular activities; other teens are vulnerable to falling in with a dangerous crowd, which can lead to drug use, other risky behaviors or even joining a gang.

*Source: Parents. The Anti-Drug.*

## Did you know?

Kids who are regular marijuana users often have shortened attention spans, decreased energy and ambition, lack of judgment, high distractibility, and impaired ability to communicate and relate to others. Kids who regularly smoke marijuana often make risky decisions about driving or sex. Using marijuana can lead to symptoms of depression and thoughts of suicide. Marijuana today is more than twice as powerful, on average, as it was 20 years ago. It contains twice the concentration of THC, the



chemical that affects the brain.

*Source: The Office of National Drug Control*

## Alcohol: a popular drug of choice

Life within a gang includes two infectious features: violence and alcohol. Because alcohol is an important and regular part of socializing within gang life, drinking works as a social glue to maintain the cohesion and social solidarity of the gang.

Within a gang, violent activities associated with drinking include fighting between members, or notions of honor or respect. At a more symbolic level, drinking is associated with two important ritual events in gang life: initiations and funerals. In the same way that violent behavior is an integral part of gang life, so is drinking.

*Source: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism*

**For additional information and help, go to  
[hillsboroughcounty.org/liaisons/criminaljustice](http://hillsboroughcounty.org/liaisons/criminaljustice)**



## Signs and symptoms of teen drinking and drug use

It can be difficult to notice drug and alcohol abuse in teens because changes in moods or attitudes, unusual temper outbursts, changes in sleeping habits and changes in hobbies or other interests are common in teens. However, being aware of your child's actions and behaviors can help with the warning signs. You should look for signs of depression, withdrawal, carelessness with grooming or hostility. Also ask yourself, is your child doing well in school, getting along with friends, taking part in sports or other activities?

## Parents are the anti-drug

Parents need to know the facts about drugs and their relationship with gangs and other violent behavior. Setting rules and enforcing them can make all the difference in teens' lives.

- Young people who are not regularly monitored by their parents are four times more



likely to use drugs.

- Parents are the most powerful influence on their kids when it comes to drugs. Two-thirds of youth ages 13-17 say losing their parents' respect is one of the main reasons they don't smoke marijuana or use other drugs. Parental disapproval plays a strong role in turning back drug use.
- Kids who learn about the risks of marijuana and other illicit drugs from their parents are less likely to use drugs.

Source: Parents. The Anti-Drug.

## LEARNING WITH THE TIMES



### Drug news

News stories about drug busts, features about how people are trying to rebuild their lives after involvement with illegal drugs, and editorials and editorial cartoons that deal with the current illegal drug crisis are prominent in the news. Look for articles about drugs and drug abuse in the electronic edition of the St. Petersburg Times. You can use the e-mail notification feature to monitor this subject over the course of a few weeks. What is the main information being conveyed in these articles? Keep a journal of the main ideas of the articles. Be sure to jot down the who, what, where, when, why and how information in these articles. Share your thoughts about what you have learned with your class and on the NIE Blogging Zone. Go to [tampabay.com/nie](http://tampabay.com/nie). Click on NIE Blog and then go to the Tampa Gangs category.

# The truth about marijuana

**MYTH:** Marijuana is harmless.

**FACT:** Marijuana is the most widely used illicit drug among young people today and is more potent than ever. Marijuana use can lead to a host of significant health, social, learning and behavioral problems at a crucial time in a young person's development. Getting high also impairs judgment, which can lead to risky decision-making on issues such as sex, criminal activity or riding with someone who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

**MYTH:** You can't get addicted to marijuana.

**FACT:** Don't be fooled by popular beliefs. Kids can get hooked on pot. Research shows that marijuana use can lead to addiction and dependence. Each year, more kids enter treatment with a primary diagnosis of marijuana dependence than for all other illicit drugs combined.

**MYTH:** There's not much parents can do to stop their kids from experimenting with marijuana.

**FACT:** Most parents are surprised to learn that they are the most powerful influence on their children when it comes to drugs. But, it's true, so this message needs to start with parents. Kids need to hear how risky marijuana use can be. They need to know how damaging it can be to



their lives and they need to begin by listening to someone they trust. By staying involved, knowing what their kids are doing, and setting limits with clear rules and consequences, parents can keep their kids drug free.

**MYTH:** There are no long-term consequences to marijuana use.

**FACT:** Research shows that kids who smoke marijuana engage in risky behavior that can jeopardize their futures, such as getting in trouble with

the law or losing scholarship money. Marijuana also can hurt academic achievement and puts kids at risk for depression and anxiety.

**MYTH:** Marijuana isn't as popular as other drugs, such as ecstasy, among teens today.

**FACT:** Kids use marijuana far more than any other illicit drug. Among kids who use drugs, 60 percent use only marijuana.

**MYTH:** Young kids won't be exposed to marijuana.

**FACT:** Not only are they exposed to marijuana, they are using it. Between 1991 and 2001, the number of eighth graders who used marijuana doubled, from one in 10 to one in five.

**MYTH:** Parents who experimented with marijuana in their youth would be hypocrites if they told their kids not to try it.

**FACT:** Parents need to make their own decisions about whether to talk to their children about their own drug use. But parents can tell their kids that much more is known today about the serious health and social consequences of using marijuana.

Source: Parents. The Anti-Drug.



# Consequences

# 101

## PARENT TIP

Every behavior has a consequence. Some consequences are positive and some are negative. Some occur naturally, such as failing a test you didn't study for or not being able to afford the admission price to somewhere fun because you didn't save any money for later. It is not advisable to protect your child from all these "natural consequences," nor is it advisable to pile on. Consequences that relate to misbehavior, or "logical consequences," need to be applied so a child learns from his or her mistakes, such as increasing or decreasing privileges when children handle or mishandle responsibility. Consistency is often more important than severity.



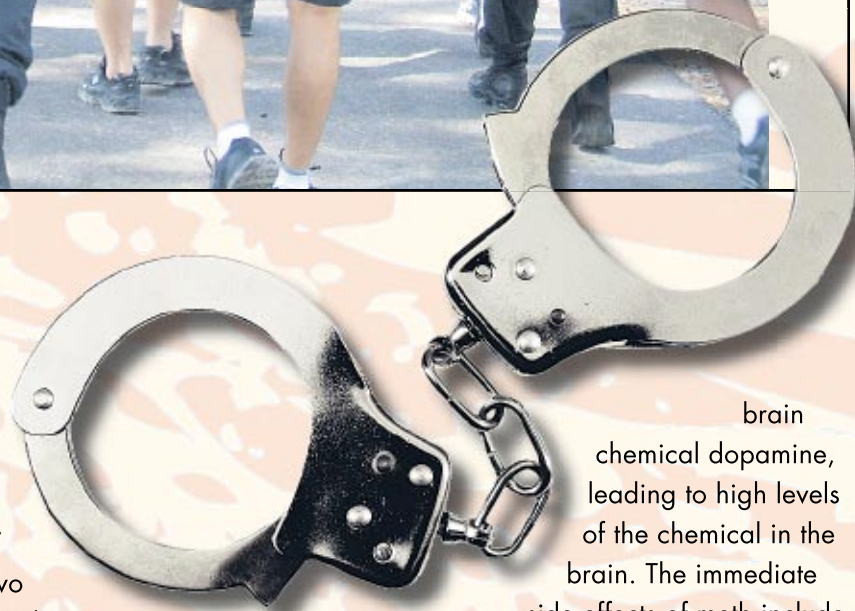
### Meth: a growing threat

According to the National Drug Intelligence Center, gangs are the primary distributors of illegal drugs on the streets of the United States. One of the most widely created and distributed drugs is methamphetamine. Methamphetamine is a powerful central nervous system stimulant. Street names include "speed," "crystal," "crank" and "ice." Meth remains in the body for up to two days, and its effects last up to 12 hours. It is taken by mouth and intravenously through needles. In crystal form, it can be snorted and smoked. Methamphetamine is accessible in various colors, ranging from white or yellow to darker colors such as red or brown. It has an odor similar to cat urine, dirty socks or a dirty diaper.

*Source: National High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program*

### A toxic substance

Methamphetamine is highly toxic. It affects the brain by increasing the release and blocking the reuptake of the



brain chemical dopamine, leading to high levels of the chemical in the brain. The immediate side effects of meth include loss of appetite, severe dental problems, anxiety, confusion, mood disturbances, insomnia, increases in heart rate and blood pressure, stroke, nerve damage and hyperthermia. Chronic methamphetamine abuse changes how the brain functions. Using meth for long periods of time can result in impaired motor skills, memory loss, cognitive problems, paranoia, hallucinations, delusions, increased respiration, rapid heart rate, irregular heart beat, high blood pressure and death.

*Source: The National Institute on Drug Abuse*



# Arrest and consequences

## When a minor is arrested, he or she:

1. Will be fingerprinted and photographed.
2. Will have his or her fingerprints submitted to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Database and the FBI Database.
3. Will not be able to seal or expunge the arrest information in the FBI or in private databases.
4. May have a difficult time obtaining a job or difficulty being accepted to colleges or the military because the arrest record is public and/or incomplete.
5. May face media exposure because the juvenile arrest record is open to the public if he or she was arrested for a felony.
6. May be required to submit to an HIV test.
7. May be questioned by police without a parent or attorney being notified or being present.
8. May be asked, during intake, private personal information without a parent being present.
9. Can expect some private personal information provided during the intake to the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) to be viewable by the prosecutor and the judge before the minor is convicted of a crime.
10. May have his or her school notified of the arrest and may be suspended from school.
11. Can expect intake information to be included in the DJJ database and may not be able to remove it for 25 years after the youth's final referral to DJJ.
12. Will have to attend another school, if charged with assault, battery, aggravated assault or battery on a school employee.
13. May be removed from the U.S., if not a U.S. permanent resident or citizen.

14. May be charged as an adult, face adult sentences or be held in jail.

## If found guilty as a result of a trial or a no contest or guilty plea, the minor:

15. Who is adjudicated on a felony will have to give his DNA for the state's DNA database.
16. Cannot live with or visit someone who lives in public housing or Section 8 housing.
17. May have his learner's permit or driver's license suspended, if adjudicated of a drug offense.
18. May not be able to serve in the military.
19. Cannot serve in the military, become a law enforcement officer or security guard if convicted of domestic violence (misdemeanor or felony) against a spouse or significant other, minor or dependent, in the same household.
20. Who is adjudicated on a charge of assault or battery, aggravated assault or battery on a school official, or of bringing to or possessing a firearm or weapon in school, at a school function or on any school-sponsored transportation, or of making a threat or false report will have his school notified and have to attend another school because he will be expelled.
21. May be subject to indefinite commitment in the future if it involved a "sexually motivated" offense.
22. Who has an adjudication of delinquency for a felony offense cannot lawfully possess a firearm until he reaches 24 years of age, provided he is not convicted of a felony offense as an adult.
23. May not be able to petition to seal or expunge the juvenile record.

## If convicted as an adult, in addition to items 15 through 23 above, the minor:

24. Will be sentenced to state prison, may face long-term confinement af-

ter he has served a prison sentence if he has ever been arrested or convicted of a sex-related or sexually motivated charge.

25. May be removed or deported from the U.S., if not a U.S. permanent resident or citizen.
26. Will be ineligible for Florida college financial aid (Bright Futures, Gold Seal Vocational and Academic Scholars) if convicted of a felony.
27. Will be temporarily disqualified from receiving federal student financial aid if convicted of possession or sale of a controlled substance while receiving the aid.
28. Will not be able to petition to seal or expunge his adult or juvenile arrest record.
29. Will never have his juvenile record automatically expunged if convicted as an adult for a forcible felony prior to having the juvenile record automatically expunged.
30. Will lose his civil rights (if convicted of a felony and 18 years old or older), including the right to vote, hold public office, be a juror, own or possess firearms or carry a concealed weapon.
31. Will have to register as a convicted felon or sex offender (if applicable) if convicted of a felony.

32. Will not be eligible for food stamps if convicted of trafficking drugs.

33. May face a mandatory prison sentence on future felony charges. A prior felony conviction, including adjudications as a juvenile, may subject the person to a longer prison term or mandatory sentence.

34. May not be able to obtain employment with the state, a county, law enforcement, a public school system, a seaport or an airport.

35. May have the conviction used against him if he testifies, to impeach or undermine his credibility.

36. Will have his photograph posted on the Department of Corrections Web site if convicted of a felony and sentenced to probation or state prison.

37. May face long-term confinement after he or she has served a prison sentence if he or she has ever been arrested or convicted of a sex-related charge.

38. Will have any occupational license revoked if convicted of selling drugs, if his civil rights are not restored.

39. May be denied an occupational or business license for certain professions, if convicted of a felony and his civil rights are not restored.

Source: Tampa Police Department

## LEARNING WITH THE TIMES



### Resisting peer pressure

Teenagers may encounter situations where they feel pressured to do things that may be harmful to them, such as use illicit drugs, drink or join a gang. Using the cartoons in the St. Petersburg Times as models, create a cartoon showing a scenario in which a character uses resistance skills when he or she is pressured to use drugs, drink or join a gang. As a journal writing activity, discuss why it is important for young people to be prepared for situations where they may feel pressured to do something that may have negative effects on their life. Share your thoughts on the NIE Blogging Zone. Go to [tampabay.com/nie](http://tampabay.com/nie). Click on NIE Blog and then go to the Tampa Gangs category. You can submit your cartoon to XPI, the NIE online student gallery. Go to [tampabay.com/nie](http://tampabay.com/nie) and click on the XPI logo for details.



# Dreaming 101



## Looking to the future

Everyone goes through times in his or her life when life seems challenging and not satisfying. That is when children often turn to gangs. So what is the alternative? Parents can help children find fun, fulfilling things to do. Oftentimes, there is help within your community.

- Develop positive alternatives: Find out about after-school and weekend activities your child can take part in and enjoy. If none are available, get creative. Can parents organize clubs or sports teams? Can the school offer its facilities for extracurricular programs? Can older kids tutor or mentor younger ones?
- Talk with other parents. By befriending other children's parents, you'll find out how they feel about gangs and youth violence. Together, you can create support systems and exchange tips to help spot problems before they happen.
- Work with police and community agencies. Report suspicious activities and set up a neighborhood or business watch program.
- Create programs to counter youth involvement

in gangs. Beyond the police, many neighborhood groups within your community can help you and other concerned parents develop anti-gang strategies.

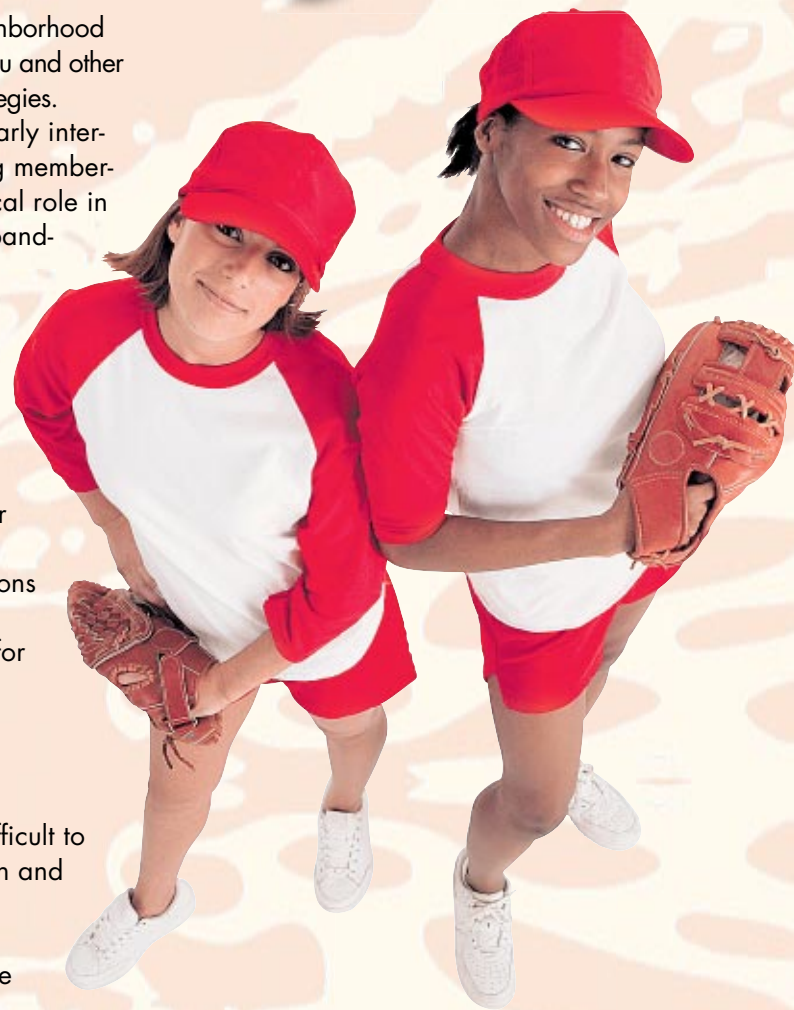
- Power in numbers: Studies show that early intervention is key to preventing youth gang membership. As a parent, you can play a critical role in creating a gang-free environment. By banding together with other parents in your community, you can lobby to:
  - Help schools develop a variety of extracurricular programs for young people.
  - Raise awareness about gangs through youth workshops, public seminars and community newspaper articles.
  - Work with schools, local organizations and police officers to establish community-based awareness strategies for youth gangs.

Source: Ottawa Police Service

## Smart choices

Working families increasingly find it difficult to care for their children during the afternoon and early evening hours. There is help through after-school programs. According to the U.S. Department of Education, "school-age children and teens who are unsupervised during the hours after school are far more likely to use alcohol, drugs and tobacco, engage in criminal and other high-risk behaviors, receive poor grades and drop out of school than those children who have the opportunity to benefit from constructive activities supervised by responsible adults."

Quality after-school programs can provide positive environments and enriching age-appropriate activities. Quality after-school programs develop children's abilities so that they may grow into healthy, responsible



adults. Here are just a few of the after-school programs in the Tampa Bay area:

### Hillsborough County 4-H

<http://hillsborough4h.ifas.ufl.edu>

**Hillsborough County Parks and Recreation**  
[hillsboroughcounty.org/parks/recreation/recreation-facilities.cfm](http://hillsboroughcounty.org/parks/recreation/recreation-facilities.cfm)

### Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative

[thpl.org](http://thpl.org)

### Hillsborough County Schools Out-of-Time School programs

<http://host.mysdhc.org>

### Hillsborough County Schools Athletics Department

<http://athletics.mysdhc.org>

### City of Tampa Parks and Recreation

<http://athletics.mysdhc.org>

## LEARNING WITH THE TIMES



### Responsibility and respect in action

When people become famous, many kids look up to those people. Becoming a role model for another person is a great way to influence good behavior. Look in the electronic edition of the St. Petersburg Times and find a person who is a good role model. You might even find good examples on the comics pages. Make a list of reasons why this individual is a good role model. Next, pretend you are going to interview this person for your school newspaper. Write out six questions that you would ask this person about being a role model. Trade questions with a friend and answer them as you think the role model would. Share your thoughts about the characteristics of a good role model on the NIE Blogging Zone. Go to [tampabay.com/nie](http://tampabay.com/nie). Click on NIE Blog and then go to the Tampa Gangs category.



Think about it

"About 29 percent of all juvenile offenses occur on school days between the hours of 2 p.m. – when young people begin to get out of school – and 8 p.m.," according to the U.S. Department of Education. "Indeed, the hour immediately following the typical time of release from school – from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. – yielded more than twice as much violent crime as the preceding hour, from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m."

An open letter – if you're thinking of getting out of a gang

I know a 25-year-old girl who was a Surena. She told me that when she was 16, both she and her cousin were shot in a drive-by shooting. She was pregnant at the time. Her cousin died. And so did her unborn baby. Now she will never have kids. No one from her gang was able to take her pain and suffering away. Not one of them could give her her baby back. None of them can make it where she can have a baby now. Their promises of love and sisterhood were useless and as dead as her child.

That's the reality of it. I think sometimes people don't tell you guys what reality is. But here it is.



There is no safe way to stay in the gang and stay alive. The very nature of gang life is not about love or family, it is about war. War within yourself and with others on the streets that live in different parts of town and wear different colors.

Is the neighborhood you live in worth losing a child over? Is the neighborhood you live in worth being in a wheelchair the rest of your life or

being in a bed with all kinds of tubes running into you, someone wiping your butt for you, waiting for you to eventually die? Is it worth dying for?

...And for all the promises their gang has made to them, about loyalty, love and brotherhood/sisterhood, gang cannot raise them from the dead.

Source: Gangstyles; [www.streetgangstyle.com](http://www.streetgangstyle.com)

There are a number of ways to spend time with your child. All are important. These include parallel time, productive time, play time and quality time. Parallel time includes any time you just show up, such as at their track meet or anything that involves their interests. Productive time revolves around tasks, such as helping with homework, helping them finish chores or projects. Play time can be a powerful entry to viewing their world because you share fun, especially if you let them pick the activity. Quality time is the most important relationship bonding activity available. By your listening and talking with children, they actually listen more, and it strengthens the parent/child relationship.



Kids, here are some fun things you can do instead of joining a gang:

- Join an after-school extra-curricular activity, such as a sport, club or any other program.
- Find an enjoyable hobby that you can do safely in a fun and friendly environment, such as riding a bike, playing a sport with some friends or jogging in your neighborhood or at your school track.
- Do your homework, study, stay in school and keep your grades up. By maintaining good academic performance, you can set better goals for yourself for the future.

Parents, here are some strategies to combat gangs in your neighborhood:

- Work to establish more recreational and leisure-time activities for youngsters.
- Work with law enforcement to create tougher laws and crack down on gang activities in the community.
- Step up efforts to get drugs (a chief source of gang money) out of your neighborhood.
- Increase parental supervision of children, their activities and their friends.
- Establish a neighborhood watch program.
- Collaborate with other community residents, young people, school personnel and law enforcement personnel in your community. Report Graffiti to 877-Gangout.
- Enact ordinances – school board, city and state that make it a felony for gangs to recruit in school or intimidate youngsters to join a gang.
- Support initiatives that provide for a rich assortment of extracurricular programs for kids.
- Organize an army of citizens to erase gang graffiti whenever it appears.



# Parent prevention 101

## You can make a difference

Parents, you can make a difference in the life of your child. By encouraging your child to dare to dream, you can encourage him or her to have a better future. Children need boundaries. Whether they say they like it or not, most children want to know where the limits are.

- Parents must be aware of the behavior and activities of their children.
- Continual monitoring of behavior and positive verbal communication between parents and young people is a must.
- Be a positive role model. Your kids monitor your behavior, too! Don't send mixed messages about the expectations you have for your child.
- Set limits for your children and enforce them.
- Do everything possible to involve your children in supervised, positive group activities.
- Praise your children for doing well and encourage them to do their very best.
- Get to know your children's friends and their parents.
- Do not allow your children to dress in gang-style clothing, to practice gang hand signs or to write gang graffiti on any surface, including their bodies.

- Know where your children are at all times, and schedule activities to occupy their free time. If you need help finding activities, talk to the guidance counselors at your child's school.
- Get involved in your children's education, and encourage them to stay in school. Be active in the PTA. If your job keeps you from participating in person, then ask your kid about school every day, and follow up on checking their homework or other assignments.
- Teach your children to set positive goals, to hold high standards and to prepare for a positive future.
- Explain to your children that only a very small percentage of young people join gangs.
- Help your children to understand the natural consequences of being involved in a gang.
- The more connected a child is with family, school, community and positive activities, the less likely he or she will be attracted to gangs.
- Look for the signs! Don't deny them if you see them. You only have so much time to free your child from the grip of gang membership. Wait too long to respond to the signs and you may lose your child.



help keep your

school safe

remain anonymous

**crimestopperstb.com 1-800-873-TIPS**

## Resources

**TampaBayGangs.com**

### Children's Services

**[hillsboroughcounty.org/childrens-services](http://hillsboroughcounty.org/childrens-services)**

### Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office

**[hcsso.tampa.fl.us](http://hcsso.tampa.fl.us)**

### National Gang Center

**[nationalgangcenter.gov](http://nationalgangcenter.gov)**

### National Youth Violence Prevention

**Resource Center [safeyouth.org](http://safeyouth.org)**

### Parents. The Anti-Drug

**[theantidrug.com](http://theantidrug.com)**

### Project Safe Neighborhood

**[psn.gov](http://psn.gov)**

### Tampa Police Department

**[tampagov.net/police](http://tampagov.net/police)**

**813-276-3200**

This publication is a partnership between the St. Petersburg Times Newspaper in Education program, the Tampa Police Department, Hillsborough County and Crime Stoppers.

Funded by the Office of the Attorney General/ Crime Stoppers Trust Fund.

This project was supported by Grant No. 2006-PG-BX-0100 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Office for Victims of Crime. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not represent the official position or policies of the United States Department of Justice.