

NUESTRA FAMILIA OUR FAMILY

EDUCATION AND RESOURCE GUIDE



Center for Investigative Reporting
2927 Newbury St., Suite A
Berkeley, California 94703
center@cironline.org

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CENTER FOR
INVESTIGATIVE
REPORTING



LATINO
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About Nuestra Familia, Our Family

For more than three years, reporters working with the Center for Investigative Reporting spent their days inside and around Northern California's Latino street gangs. The gangs' stronghold is based not in the inner cities but, surprisingly, in the state's farm towns. There, our reporters saw firsthand the ravages of an underground, little-reported war fought among Latino youth. The result is "Nuestra Familia, Our Family," a documentary that goes deep inside one California gang to reveal its devastating effect on communities and the controversial war to stop its spread.

The film tells the story of Armando Frias, a father in Salinas, California – the idyllic agricultural region known as "Steinbeck Country" – who raised his son to be a gang member. It follows Frias' painful struggle as he turns his own life around, only to see his son become deeply involved with the Nuestra Familia prison gang and unknowingly fall into the grip of an FBI informant.

"Nuestra Familia, Our Family" also tells the hidden history of the Norteño street gang and its links to the Nuestra Familia, which, ironically, was born out of the farm workers movement of the 1960s in the fields of California. The film features interviews in prison and on the streets with family members and gang members opening up about their lives and painting a haunting picture rarely seen by the public.

Former Nuestra Familia members detail the rigidly organized structure of this prison gang and how its leaders are able to operate with impunity from the lockdown section of Pelican Bay State Prison, California's highest security prison. From there, Nuestra Familia gang leaders control the activities of thousands of Norteño gang members on the streets, managing the systems for teaching recruits and collecting taxes from gang activity, and keeping an eye on everything from who gets killed to how guns are distributed among street soldiers. As young Latinos cycle in and out of juvenile hall and prison, they are literally nurtured into a life of commitment to the gang – a commitment that is enforced by blood.

The film contains never-before-seen scenes of the Nuestra Familia in action, footage of an FBI gang informant as he appears to approve a murder, and exclusive interviews with Armando Frias, Jr., the young triggerman in that crime.

"Nuestra Familia, Our Family" brings home the sorrow of an entire community, devastated by the almost constant violence wrought by the Nuestra Familia on its once-quiet streets. Ultimately, the film is a powerful chronicle of families determined to bring an end to the terror of gangs before the next generation repeats the mistakes of its fathers.

Purpose of This Guide

“Nuestra Familia, Our Family” is a tool for communities, schools, and law enforcement agencies looking for ways to reduce or eliminate gang activity. Specific segments of the documentary are indicated as jumping-off points for discussions and other activities. The guide provides suggestions for individual action as well as community initiatives for dealing with gang behavior and activities, and is organized into the following sections:

- ▶ **Tips:** General guidelines for parents, teachers and law enforcement personnel to help young people get out or stay out of gangs.
- ▶ **Community Action:** Steps for initiating community-wide programs to address gang problems.
- ▶ **School-Based Programs:** School-wide activities and individual classroom lessons.
- ▶ **Community-Based Youth Organizations:** Activities that can be adapted for a wide variety of youth programs.
- ▶ **Resources:** Websites, articles, and organizations that can provide assistance to parents, teachers, and communities working to help young people stay away from gangs.

A Brief History of Gangs

Gangs have been a part of American society for generations. They roamed the streets of New York in the late 1800s, and the illicit activities of Chicago gangs in the 1920s and 1930s have become almost legendary. For many years, gangs were an urban phenomenon, with little or no penetration beyond city limits. That is no longer the case. Today, gangs exist in cities, suburbs and rural areas throughout the United States.

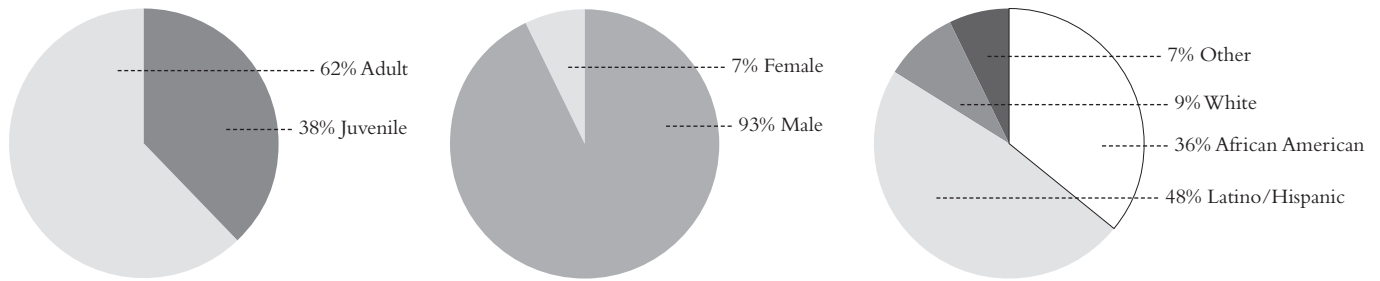
Latino gangs were present in Southern California prior to World War II and operated mainly in opposition to organizations outside the Latino community. But rapid urbanization and demographic changes in the 1950s in the Los Angeles area led to increased violence between Latino gangs. The subsequent incarceration of many more Latinos gave rise to the Mexican Mafia or “La Eme,” the first gang to be formed in a California prison.

Nuestra Familia was formed, in opposition to the Mexican Mafia, in 1968 in the California prison system to give Nortenos prison-based protection against the Surenos, a Southern California street division of the Mexican Mafia. This deadly rivalry continues to play itself out in Salinas and other small towns in central California.

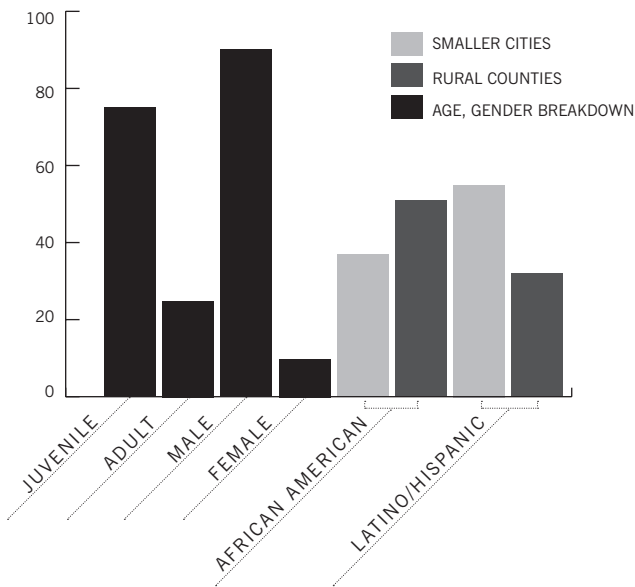
For a more complete history of Latino gangs, go to:
www.gangstyle.com/reality/hisp.php.

Statistics

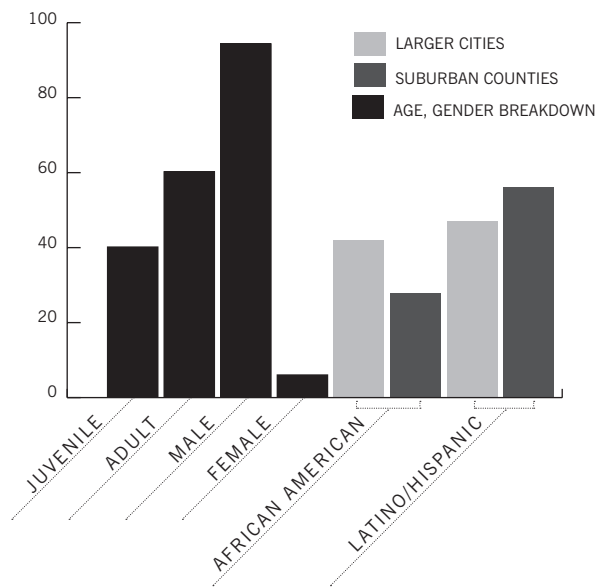
GANG MEMBERSHIP BY AGE, RACE & ETHNICITY



GANG MEMBERSHIP BY TYPE OF COMMUNITY
→ SMALLER CITIES & RURAL COUNTIES



GANG MEMBERSHIP BY TYPE OF COMMUNITY
→ LARGER CITIES & SUBURBAN COUNTIES



Source: www.iir.com/nygc/nygsa

► GANG PROFILE

The typical gang member in small towns and suburbs is a young Latino male under the age of 18. The profile is different in cities, where gang members tend to be older (over 18) and more evenly divided ethnically between African Americans and Latinos.

Source: www.iir.com/nygc/nygsa

What's the attraction?

Young people join gangs for a variety of reasons, primarily to satisfy a sense of belonging and of having a “family,” to feel protected, and to be part of a cause. Other attractions include the sense of power gang membership instills, much of which comes from access to guns, drugs and money.

Contributing social-environmental factors

The underlying factors that put young people at risk of joining gangs include: abuse or neglect, family poverty or unemployment, single parent family (usually meaning father is absent), drug or alcohol abuse by one or more family members, low education level. Add to that list a lack of positive role models, and the conditions are ripe for a young person to turn to gang membership as a way of improving his or her lot.

TIPS

For Parents & Teachers:

If you suspect that your child, student, friend or relative is in a gang but you aren't sure, here are some signs to look for:

- ▶ Tattoos that look like a gang name or insignia
- ▶ Changes in wardrobe, attitude, and tastes in music and cars
- ▶ Wearing clothing, including bandanas, of a particular color
- ▶ Increased amounts of cash that he or she explains in ways that are hard to believe
- ▶ Staying out late at night or not coming home for several days
- ▶ Getting into (more) fights
- ▶ Declining performance at school and, sometimes, skipping school altogether

To help a young person resist or get out of a gang, take action early, as soon as you realize vulnerability to gang recruitment or suspect gang activity:

- ▶ Talk with your child/student and let him or her know you care.
- ▶ Don't accept money or gifts that you think may have been obtained illegally.
- ▶ Enlist the help of others to support your efforts—a family member, friend, teacher, boyfriend or girlfriend, or an ex-gang member.
- ▶ Encourage your child/student to become active in a youth group or competitive team sport,
- ▶ Find out if there is a gang prevention program in your community and get your child/student enrolled.

For Parents

Helping your child with gang-related issues might require additional efforts. Here are some recommendations, depending on your particular situation:

- ▶ Seek family counseling to work on the problem together.
- ▶ If you or a spouse has drug or alcohol problems, get help so troubles at home won't put your child at increased risk.
- ▶ Consider moving to another neighborhood or, if moving is not an option, having your child live with a relative for a time.
- ▶ Join forces with other parents, teachers and community leaders who are working toward a goal of keeping kids out of gangs and keeping gangs out of the community.

Additional tips and advice can be found in "A Guide to Gang Prevention for Parents" at:
www.nagia.com/Gang%20Articles/Kids%20and%20Gangs.htm

For Law Enforcement

In addition to their main job of enforcing existing laws against gang activity and making arrests, police can play a role in identifying and preventing potential gang involvement by young people. To do that, it is essential to develop trust of law enforcement within the community. Ways to build that trust include:

- ▶ Get to know families through school and church activities and community sports events such as Little League.
- ▶ Participate visibly in positive community events such as festivals, parades, and civic ceremonies.
- ▶ Form coalitions with other community organizations to organize activities and programs designed to keep young people out of gangs.
- ▶ Visit schools regularly through an “Officer Friendly” program or other type of presentation to familiarize students with police work in the community.
- ▶ Set up a program that pairs police officers with at-risk youth, modeled on “Big Brother” programs.
- ▶ Consider establishing the Gang Resistance, Education And Training (G.R.E.A.T.) gang prevention curriculum, which is taught by law-enforcement officers in local schools and after-school programs. More information is at www.great-online.org.

The web site of the National Alliance of Gang Investigators’ Associations provides a list of U.S. gang investigators and their contact information. Your local GIA may be able to provide additional support for your work. Go to www.nagia.org.

COMMUNITY ACTION

UNITED FRONT

To save a community from the ravages of gang violence takes the effort of many people working together. Illicit gang activity and conflict affect all aspects of community life, and the solutions to problems caused by gangs require the collaboration of various entities within the community. One place to start is with an informal community discussion, which can lead to more specific activities focusing on particular groups or issues.

Community discussion guidelines:

Identify the various entities in the community that can and should play a role in combating gang-related problems. They can include:

- ▶ Social service agencies
- ▶ Health care providers
- ▶ Law enforcement agencies
- ▶ Teachers and other school officials
- ▶ Parents
- ▶ Church representatives
- ▶ Business leaders
- ▶ Youth organizations (including youth representatives)
- ▶ Housing authorities
- ▶ Immigrant rights groups
- ▶ Parks and recreation staff
- ▶ Civic organizations
- ▶ Local media (newspapers, radio, TV)

Plan a meeting of representatives of these groups to identify gang problems and to discuss approaches for dealing with them. Start small if necessary. It's not essential to have every group represented at an initial meeting. Once the ball starts rolling, others will join in.

Ask someone who works with groups and is comfortable leading meetings (such as a teacher, pastor, or youth leader) to run the meeting. Develop a simple agenda that allows participants to talk freely and openly. Make sure the meeting starts and ends on time. You may have to impose time limits on people who wish to speak.

→ Tip: Meeting organizers should preview the entire 1-hour film prior to the group meeting

Introduce the video “Nuestra Familia, Our Family” by showing the following segment:

This segment provides general information about the scope of gang problems and reasons why young people join gangs:

Start (2:07): Beginning of film

End (14:48): After little Mando’s interview, when he says “...not taking nothing from the Eme, Which is the Mexican Mafia.”

Approximate length: 13 minutes

Depending on how long a meeting you have scheduled and what the group’s interests are, you might also screen one or both of the following segments:

This segment focuses on the various groups within a community that have a stake in controlling and preventing gang activity.

Start (46:54): Man walking down the street with a pushcart. Audio: “The city of Salinas is still suffering.”

End (52:16): Mother kneeling at son’s grave. Audio: “... they will bury me and not the reverse.”

Approximate length: 5 minutes

This segment describes prison conditions and how gang leaders are able to recruit members and carry on other gang-related activities even while incarcerated.

Start (15:57): Shot of Mafia Mexicana insignia. Audio: “The first big Latino gang....”

End (25:53): Waves crashing on a rock in the ocean. Audio: “... that reaches from Pelican Bay 450 miles south to Salinas.”

Approximate length: 10 minutes

Review the Discussion Questions (on page 9) and discuss how the video might be used by different groups in the community.

Community Forum

This is a more formal meeting open to everyone in the community. It can be preceded by a smaller community discussion or it can be the starting point for your community’s united anti-gang effort. The goal is to define gang-related problems and determine how community groups can work together to reduce or eliminate those problems.

PLANNING GUIDELINES:

Try to get as many meeting “sponsors” as possible. A sponsor is an organization or group in the community that is interested in tackling gang-related problems and that will work cooperatively with other community groups. (See list of suggested groups in Community discussion guidelines.)

→ Tip: Encourage youth to participate in the forum, so that they have a voice and a role in planning initiatives that will affect them.

Create a flyer or small sign to announce the Forum and disseminate copies as widely as possible in the community. Be sure to list all sponsors on the flyer.

Draw up an agenda for the Forum that gives the meeting some structure but is loose enough to allow for discussion of unforeseen issues. Choose a leader who can keep the Forum on track while being sensitive to the needs of participants to express themselves.

Establish a procedure for recognizing speakers and decide whether there will be time limits on each speaker.

Decide how you will use the Discussion Questions (on page 9.) You might focus on a few that seem most relevant to your community, or you might assign one or two questions to each of several small groups following the video.

AT THE FORUM:

Briefly go over the agenda and the procedure for recognizing speakers.

Show one or more of the segments of “Nuestra Familia, Our Family” outlined in the Community discussion section above.

If the attendance at the Forum is large, break up into several small groups for discussion following the video clips. Let the groups talk about their reactions to the video before they focus on the Discussion Questions. Each group should designate a person to record the main points of the discussion and report back to the entire audience.

Draw up a list of action items that come out of the discussion. These might include such things as:

- ▶ Setting up community policing
- ▶ Providing additional child care options and other support services for working families
- ▶ Initiating community service projects where youth and adults work together

Discussion Questions for Community Meetings

1. What signs of gang activity have you seen in your community?
2. What role do (or can) the various groups and organizations in the community play in preventing gang activity?
3. Are there productive, pro-social activities that young people can get involved in, that would give them something to believe in? That would help them develop important life skills or job skills?
4. How can we get our youth involved in those activities? What partnerships can we create to make these kinds of activities for young people a reality?
5. What are some ways adults can give young people a sense of belonging?
6. How can the community support families in raising their children?
7. What does it mean to “be a man” in today’s society? How can adults help boys develop a healthy sense of manhood?
8. To what extent are girls involved in gangs in our community? Why are they attracted to gang life, and how can we counteract that attraction?
9. What changes in prison conditions would eliminate the activity and power of gang leaders who are incarcerated?
10. Why is the Nuestra Familia gang so successful at educating young men to the gang way of life? Can schools, other institutions and communities provide equally compelling education to guide young people in more positive directions? How?
11. Can prisons take on Nuestra Familia methods of discipline and education as an approach for rehabilitating prisoners? Why isn’t this happening now?

SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMS

Creating a program with an anti-gang message that resonates with young people can be challenging, but the task is made easier by using an approach that welcomes and encourages youth involvement, respects their ideas, and offers opportunities for self-expression.

SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES

In communities where there is some gang activity and a high-risk youth population, a non-confrontational way to address gang prevention is through a school assembly. Hold a meeting of school faculty several weeks ahead of time to watch the documentary, go over the assembly agenda, and determine the logistics of each of the steps below, especially the survey (#1) and the assembly follow-up (#4).

Invite a group of students to help plan and facilitate the assembly. They can be students who are already in leadership roles (e.g., student council) or students who are looked up to because of their artistic or athletic skills.

1. One to two weeks prior to the assembly, distribute and collect the Student Gang Survey (on page 14.) Compile the responses to present to the students (you may wish to create a handout). Use the survey as a starting point for the assembly with a quick review of the responses.
2. Introduce the “Nuestra Familia, Our Family” documentary by showing the following clip:
Start (2:07): Beginning of film
End (14:48): After little Mando’s interview, when he says “...not taking nothing from the Eme, which is the Mexican Mafia.”
Approx. length: 13 minutes
3. Have the students discuss the questions in small groups, each group moderated by a teacher, a student, or a teacher-student pair. Ask for responses from the group. If necessary, probe further: What do you think of Armando (the father)? Why would being in a gang make someone feel good? Why do you think the young men in the film chose to join the gang? Do you know people like the young men in the video? After 10 minutes of discussion have each group present its main points to the entire assembly.
4. Arrange to have one of the following address the assembly, followed by a brief question and answer period:
 - ▶ a former gang member
 - ▶ a prisoner who is currently doing time for gang activity (if there is a prison near your community and the necessary law enforcement arrangements can be made)
 - ▶ a law enforcement officer who works in gang investigation and prevention

5. Pose the questions below to the students. You can do this with a handout or with Power Point. Explain that these questions are at the heart of the documentary and were among the points made by your guest speaker. Tell the students that following the assembly and in the coming days and weeks some of their teachers will be using these questions as the basis for various activities, including art, writing, and class discussions.

- ▶ What gives me a feeling of belonging?
- ▶ What does it mean to be a man?
- ▶ What do I believe in?

➔ Tip: Assembly organizers should preview the entire 1-hour film before the school assembly.

In the Classroom

Follow-up to the assembly might take place in English, Language Arts and Art classes, or other classes the faculty identified in the pre-assembly meeting. Make the “Nuestra Familia, Our Family” documentary available to teachers as needed.

1. Review the questions posed at the end of the assembly.
 - ▶ What gives me a feeling of belonging?
 - ▶ What does it mean to be a man?
 - ▶ What do I believe in?
2. Have a brief discussion of these questions. Tell the class that they will be using these questions as the basis for various self-expression activities. Then focus on one question each day, giving the class a choice of writing (story, poem, song or letter) or doing a drawing or painting that answers that question. Alternatively, let the students choose which question to focus on.
3. Make a class decision about how to share their creative expressions. Some possibilities are:
 - ▶ Post a display in the classroom or elsewhere in the building
 - ▶ Print them in a booklet form or as a newsletter
 - ▶ Create a web site
 - ▶ Read written works aloud to the group
4. After this exercise, have a class discussion about
 - ▶ How to feel a sense of belonging without joining a gang
 - ▶ How to “be a man” without joining a gang
 - ▶ Things that are important to believe in besides gang life

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS AND YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

Numerous programs and organizations exist to prevent gang activity and youth violence. “Nuestra Familia, Our Family” can be used as a resource in a range of programs that provide youth with alternative opportunities and support.

➔ Tip: Preview the entire 1-hour film before using it with your group.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Introduce the “Nuestra Familia, OurFamily” documentary. Tell the group that you are going to show a segment of a video about gang activity in California. Show the following clip:
Start (2:07): Beginning of film
End (14:48): After little Mando’s interview, when he says “...not taking nothing from the Eme, which is the Mexican Mafia.”
Approx. length: 13 minutes
2. Ask for responses from the group. If necessary, probe further: What do you think of Armando (the father)? Why would being in a gang make someone feel good? Why do you think the young men in the film chose to join the gang? Do you know people like the young men in the video? Allow the group to explore these questions and others they may have.
3. Explain that the following questions are at the heart of what the young men in the video are expressing:
 - ▶ What gives me a feeling of belonging?
 - ▶ What does it mean to be a man?
 - ▶ What do I believe in?
4. Have a brief discussion of these questions. Tell the group that they will be using these questions as the basis for various self-expression activities. Then focus on one question each day, giving the group a choice of writing (story, poem, song or letter) or doing a drawing or painting that answers that question.
5. Make a group decision about how to share their creative expressions. Some possibilities are:
 - ▶ Post a display in the building where they meet
 - ▶ Print them in a booklet form or as a newsletter
 - ▶ Create a web site
 - ▶ Read written works aloud to the group
6. After this exercise, have a group discussion about
 - ▶ How to feel a sense of belonging without joining a gang
 - ▶ How to “be a man” without joining a gang
 - ▶ Things that are important to believe in besides gang life

RESOURCES

Alliance of Concerned Men

www.allianceofconcernedmen.org

Washington, D.C., nonprofit group that works with at-risk youth on a variety of issues, including gang intervention.

Boys' and Girls' Clubs

www.bgca.org

National organization that sponsors youth programs, including Gang Prevention/Intervention.

The Coroner's Report

www.gangwar.com

Provides tips, training, and resources for preventing or ending gang activity.

Hispanic Americans for Progress, Inc

www.njhap.org

A prison-based anti-gang program.

Safe Youth

www.safeyouth.org

Information on negotiation and conflict resolution.

Gangs and Kids

www.gangsandkids.com

Extensive list of tips for parents and comprehensive information on gangs.

National Alliance of Gang Investigators' Associations (NAGIA)

www.nagia.org www.nagia.org

Information for parents; how to recognize gang membership; how to get out of a gang.

Mothers Against Gang Wars

<http://homw.inreach.com/gangbang/magw.htm>

Membership organization fighting gang activity.

Institute for Intergovernmental Research – National Youth Gang Research

www.iir.com/nygc

Comprehensive information about gangs, including a list of risk factors and a Gang Strategic Planning Tool for communities.

Gang Resistance, Education And Training (G.R.E.A.T.)

www.great-online.org

Gang prevention strategies, including a curriculum for elementary and middle school taught by law enforcement officers.

National School Safety Center

<http://www.schoolsafety.us> www.schoolsafety.us

Guidelines for how schools can work with the community; downloadable brochure—“Working Together to Create Safe Schools.”

Nuestra Familia, Our Family

www.nuestrafamiliaourfamily.org

Companion to the documentary; contains articles, resources, a gang glossary and more.

Student Gang Survey

1. What is your age? male female

2. Do you know of gangs that are active in the community?

3. How many people do you know who are in gangs?

4. Do you feel afraid of gangs in your neighborhood or that you see on your way to or from school?

5. Have you personally been attacked, harassed, or otherwise approached by a gang member?

6. Have you been asked to join a gang?

7. Are you thinking of joining a gang?

8. If yes, why would you join?

9. What would keep you from joining a gang?

10. Is there anything else you would like to add to your responses?
