

Gäng- snacket

**A guide for parents and other
key adults**

Do you fear criminal gangs might be recruiting your child?

Today, far too many children in Sweden are drawn into criminal gangs. Some are even as young as 10–12 years old. As a parent, teacher, coach, family member or other trusted adult, it isn't unusual to feel frustrated and sad. Especially if you feel alone in your situation.

Don't be alone – talk with others

A first step is to start by talking things over with other adults, and with your child. There are also many community organizations and other resources that are experienced with providing support and help.

Be on the lookout for warning signs and if you think you see something, don't hesitate to ask for support. Now. Together we can ensure a safe and secure childhood for all children, free from criminal activity and victimization.

Gangs are present where your child is

People who are criminals, or who associate with criminals, can be found around schools, in city centres or even near your home. The gangs are also present in the digital world. Members of the gangs can contact children through various social media platforms and encrypted chats. Often, these are older youths pretending to be friends with your child.

They might, for example, offer pizza, give compliments and gifts, or entice them with money. Gangs can give a child a sense of belonging, but it can also involve rapid processes where older individuals use threats or coercion to get young people to start committing crimes. Sometimes, criminals threaten to harm family members if the child does not comply with the gang's demands.



Some warning signs to watch out for are:

- ➔ If your child starts lying or hiding things
- ➔ Starts to socialize with new, older unfamiliar teenagers or adults
- ➔ Comes home unexplained with new clothes or a new smartphone
- ➔ Stops asking you for an allowance or seems to have more of their own money
- ➔ Sending or receiving suspiciously large or frequent payments (by Swish or bank account transfers)
- ➔ Abruptly expresses themselves very differently, stating new opinions that don't appear to be their own
- ➔ All of a sudden has two separate SIM cards
- ➔ Follows or communicates with criminals on social media
- ➔ Downloads encrypted chat app

What do the gangs want with children?

Criminals often want the child to help out with various tasks. The activity may perhaps be delivering or receiving drugs or weapons, threatening others, or in some cases even kill someone. The tasks may seem very small or unimportant at first, but can quickly become quite dangerous.

Not only boys are involved

Girls have also been drawn into gangs and criminality. They often have slightly different roles than boys have. They may be asked to hide or transport money and/or drugs. But more and more often they are doing the same things as the boys do. A young girl with no criminal record is rarely stopped by the police and the gangs being aware of that can take advantage of that by involving girls. That's one of the reasons why it can take much longer to recognize that a girl has become involved in some kind of criminal activity.

Vulnerable children and teenagers in particular

Some children can be particularly vulnerable when gangs attempt to recruit new members. For instance, this may involve children with neuropsychiatric and intellectual disabilities, or those placed in various types of residential care facilities, such as SIS and HVB homes.

Criminal gangs are the wrong way to go

Criminals will never help your child achieve their dreams. They will only exploit your child to gain status, earn money or avoid being arrested and imprisoned themselves.



How children are lured into crime:

- Gifts of expensive shoes, clothes, and money.
- Thinking they will gain status and respect
- Wanting to feel a sense of belonging to a group, a sense of camaraderie

Children often see older youth who seem very successful. Some young children believe that gangs can help them achieve their dreams.

You are the most important person to your child

As a parent, you are an extremely important person in your child's life – even if they don't always how it. And this is also true for other adults who are significantly involved in a young person's life. You are the one who can see things, who can ask, and who can listen to their concerns and fears. And who are always there for them. It is also important to take an interest in your child's digital life.

Ask, and keep asking

Many children realize that what is happening is not okay. They may feel ashamed or want to protect the rest of their family. Therefore, they may avoid sharing with you what is going on with them, or even outright lie to you. Even though you have a close and loving relationship.

It is important to keep asking how they are and what they are doing, even if your child is reluctant to respond or avoids answering. Your continued presence means a lot.



HOW WAS YOUR DAY?

Things that protect children from crime:

- Active engagement with activities during free time, and secure routines
- Regularly attending school, with extra support if needed
- Doing things together with known adults
- Parents setting clear boundaries and speaking up when things appear to be out of bounds
- Parents and other adults listening and asking

It is important to make efforts to understand your child's thoughts and feelings - without judgment, so that your child has the courage to talk about both the good and the bad things that are happening.

BARNDOM UTAN BROTT

Ett initiativ från Länsstyrelserna

If you have concerns about your child becoming involved in criminal behaviour, know there is support and help available for both you and your child.

If you are more comfortable remaining anonymous when you phone or e-mail, that is possible.

Support is available throughout Sweden:

- ➔ Children's Rights in Society (Bris) - national helpline for children: 116 111
- ➔ Bris telephone support for adults in Swedish: 077-150 50 50, English and Arabic: 077-448 09 00
- ➔ Victim Support Sweden - Brottsofferjouren support line - for victims of crime, witnesses or their relatives: 116 006 or brottsofferjouren.se
- ➔ Föräldralinjen - parental support helpline for those who are concerned about a child: 020-85 20 00 or mind.se
- ➔ Police: to make a report or provide tips, telephone 11414 or polisen.se/ tips Phone 112 in an emergency.



Länsstyrelserna



Polisen