

Breaking gang affiliations behind bars

Singapore Prison Service

Understanding The Reasons For Joining Gangs



A perceived lack of respect from peers, families or communities

Gang members turn to gangs for the identity and respect normally provided by families. Gang members who see themselves as "weak" or "powerless" may join gangs to become "stronger" and "protected." Often, these individuals suffer from a lack of support from their family and therefore seek support within gangs.



Peer pressure and glamorisation

Gang members crave excitement found in gang lifestyle because of the glamorisation by peers and media. They feel pressured to be included and accepted by their peers.

Sense of security



Gang members who are fearful often feel that being in a gang will keep them safe. If they are challenged by others, their gang "friends" will help them retaliate because in the gang culture, no challenge goes unanswered. Ironically, this idea of "safety" leads to increased violence. Most youths do not fully understand the consequences and risks of being in a gang, which includes crimes, physical assaults and in some cases, death.

Common Deterrents of Gang Renunciation Programme



Stigma and threats from old gang-members

Support for these potential occurrences are available in in-care and after-care. Inmates are strongly encouraged to report such instances.

Lacking support systems to cope with a perceived lost sense of security

For many renounees, most to all of their old friends are from gangs. Renouncing from gangs will require immense courage and conviction. As such, a strong support system is crucial to the success of the GRP. Apart from providing support on their end, loved ones can encourage inmates to apply for SPS's Befriending/ Religious/ Secular programmes.



How can Loved Ones Support Inmates?



1. Increase motivation and changes in thinking

Engage with purposeful conversations with inmates to motivate and encourage them.



2. Facilitate new lifestyles & confidence

Notice and encourage positive changes made by inmates, however small they might be; create opportunities to motivate inmates.



3. Reinforce their new identity

Remind them about their goals for family and work beyond prison and aftercare supervision, towards the future lives they hope to live.



4. Enhance social capital

Encourage inmates to sign up for the Befriending and family/religious/secular/ in-care programmes, as well as keep in touch with family members.

Source: <https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/understanding-and-avoiding-gangs>

This story has been told many times over. A strained relationship, a sense of isolation, mixing with bad company, dabbling in drugs, and a life revolving in addiction and crime. People are social beings and need relationships, and gangs offer (to those who join them) a ready system of relationships, especially for those who lack them.

Close to a quarter of the 7,572 inmates in 2021 had gang affiliations. Many were involved in illegal activities that had some links to gangs.

Some of the negative outcomes linked to gang membership include dropping out of school, early parenthood or unstable employment. Studies have shown that affiliation to gangs also increases the risk of drug abuse and imprisonment.

For inmates who are involved in gangs, dissociation from gangs is key to bringing about change by diminishing their access to drugs and criminal activities. This reduces the probability of re-offending. The Singapore Prison Service (SPS) places strong emphasis in urging inmates to leave their gangs, and this can be done through the Gang Renunciation Programme (GRP).

Supporting Gang Desistance

Since its inauguration in 2009, the GRP has seen over 1,500 inmates cut ties with their gangs. Working together with the Singapore Police Force (SPF) and various support groups, SPS conducts the GRP for inmates who are motivated to leave their gangs. They do this at an event attended by SPS staff, other inmates, as well as their family members, where they make declarations to renounce their gang affiliations and state their reasons for doing so.

There are various initiatives in place to support gang renounees. Within the institution, Correctional Unit Officers keep a constant lookout for renounees and check on them regularly. Those who require assistance can approach their officers to discuss their concerns, which may be regarding tattoo removal, housing issues, labour deployment, befriender support, as well as counselling. SPS also runs the Gang Alternative Programme (GAP) to help strengthen the renounees' resolve to change and resist associating with gangs.

Gang Renunciation Programme

Introduced in 2009, the **Gang Renunciation Ceremony** provides a formal ceremony for inmates with gang affiliations to renounce all ties with gangs in front of their family, other inmates and SPS staff. Close support is rendered to assist the participants' commitment to lead a gang-free life.

24%

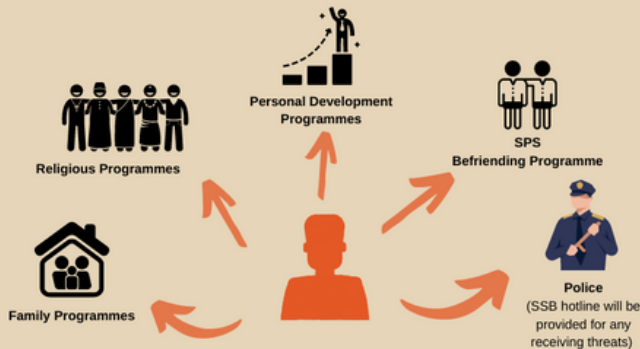
of inmates enter prison with gang affiliations

1,549

inmates have taken part in the GRP since 2009

Healthier Support Systems

After renouncing from gangs, participants will be offered **alternative support systems**. Based on the participant's **suitability**, they will be recommended for **religious/secular programmes** to support their rehabilitation journey. SPS will also recommend a **Befriender** to the participant to support their rehabilitation journey.



Additional support for renouncers



Free Tattoo Removal Services

Tattoo removal services are provided for inmates to remove offensive or gang-related tattoos. This initiative, which is supported by community partners, aims to help inmates erase labels of gang identity, as well as boost their employment prospects and reintegration into society.



SPS Befriending Programme

Befrienders provide a positive support network for inmates, especially those without strong family support or positive peers. Research has shown that positive peer influence has the potential to prevent re-offending by allowing inmates to meet their social and other needs in lawful ways.

Source: Singapore Prison Service Annual Statistics Release for 2021

Providing Community Support

In the community, SPS collaborates with the Industrial and Services Co-Operative Society (ISCOS), which runs a support group for ex-offenders who have renounced their gang affiliation. Through GAP, SPS hopes to provide continuous support to strengthen renouncers' new prosocial identity upon their release. Renouncers are given a free ISCOS membership, which provides subsidies for skills upgrading, employment assistance, and free legal guidance and advice.

Taking that First Step

Renouncing one's gang publicly is a huge challenge and it takes remarkable courage for any inmate to do so. Leaving the gang also means the inmate would leave behind his gang members and the (false) sense of security and support that the gang is believed to offer. In addition to the various forms of assistance provided by SPS, the inmate also needs the support of those most important to him, i.e. his family members and friends.

What can you do?

SPS seeks your support to encourage your loved ones involved in gangs to cut ties with their gangs. Renouncing gangs is a crucial step towards change. Show them how much it would mean to you for them to leave their gangs, as well as their past offending behaviours behind them. Constant encouragement, affirmation, and support are crucial in spurring them to overcome this obstacle.

Many inmates have renounced from gangs to focus on their families and successfully charted a different path in life for themselves and their loved ones. Let's work together to make this journey, a transformative one.

◀ [Family Resource Booklet](#)