



ARE YOU THE PARENT OF A TAGGER?

As you drive to work each morning, you see the eyesore created by the overnight activities of the most prolific group of graffiti vandals in your neighborhood. Do you think of your own teenage son or daughter and ask yourself the question “Is my son or daughter involved in this criminal activity?”

Well, maybe you should! If you think that your kids could not possibly be taggers, think again. Taggers are generally members of small loosely knit groups of adolescents, many from middle and upper income families, whose primary source of entertainment and excitement is the vandalism of private property with “Tagger Graffiti”. Your child could be a member of one of these groups.

Some indications that your child may be a tagger are:

- a. Your child stays out until early morning or all night.
- b. Your child frequently wears a large back pack or baggy pants. Clothing may be paint stained. Packs and loose clothing can be used to hold paint cans or carry graffiti tools.
- c. Your child carries tools used for etching glass, like, hole punches, rocks, glass cutters, screw drivers, awls, metal scribes or other sharp object. Your child may not be able to explain exactly why he or she has this in their possession.
- d. Your child has taken up the hobby of ink making.
- e. Your child has large quantities of magic markers, shoe polish containers, or other devices used for drawing.
- f. Your child sleeps during the day and is active outdoors at night.
- g. Your child has paint on the tips of his/her fingers.
- h. Your child frequently has permanent marker stains on his/her hands.
- i. Your child has graffiti magazines, flyers, a “piece book”, or other portfolios of tags.
- j. Your child possesses large quantities of postal stickers, “My Name is” stickers or other large stickers used for “sticker tagging” or “Slap tagging”.
- k. Your child is in possession of graffiti paraphernalia such as markers, etching tools, spray paint, bug spray and starch cans. The bug spray cans are used to make tags that will only show up in the rain.
- l. Your child is in the age group statistically associated with tagging, ages 12-18 (sometimes older).
- m. Your child has graffiti displays or tags on clothing, binders, backpacks, and the underside of the bill of their hat.

- n. Tags you see on the walls of your neighborhood are seen on your child's walls, books and clothing.
- o. Your child is frequently deceitful about his/her activities.
- p. Your child has quantities of paint cans but does not have the income to afford it.
- q. Your child associates with other children with the traits described above.
- r. Uses the internet to access pro graffiti websites (www.bombingscience.com www.12ozprophet.com www.undergroundhiphop.com) and post on forum sites and communicate with other taggers. Often they use school computers to do this.
- s. Your child has photographs of graffiti and tags on walls that look familiar to you.

Obviously, each of these factors, alone, does not necessarily point to tagging; however, together they make a convincing circumstantial case. As a parent you have a legal and moral responsibility to find out what your child is doing when he or she is not at home. If you do not know, you should find out for the child's sake, as well as your own, since you may be civilly or criminally liable for your failure to control the child's behavior.

Definition of Graffiti:

Generally, graffiti can be defined as **the defacing of public or private property by painting, drawing, writing, etching or carving without the property owner's permission.**

The offence of Mischief found in the Criminal Code of Canada gives police the power to lay charges for graffiti related incidents.

Section 430(1) ccc states everyone commits mischief who willfully:

- a. destroys or damages property;
- b. renders property dangerous, useless, inoperative or ineffective;
- c. obstructs, interrupts or interferes with the lawful use, enjoyment or operation of property; or
- d. obstructs, interrupts or interferes with any person in the lawful use, enjoyment or operation of property.

Penalty Section 430(4) states everyone who commits mischief in relation to property, other than property described in subsection (3):

- a. is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years; or
- b. is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction.

History

The word *Graffiti* comes from the archaeological term for Graffito which is defined as *ancient drawing or writing scratched on a wall or other surface*. Graffiti has gone

through many changes throughout history, from the caveman's drawings on the walls, to markings on ancient Greek pottery. Graffiti has evolved from occasional writing on the bathroom walls and back alleys to a group of persons who seek to gain notoriety and recognition by marking buildings and any object that presents a canvas for their markings.

A New York courier using the tag *TAKI 183* is credited as the starter for modern Graffiti when he used the subway to access all five boroughs of New York in the 1970's. This explosion of tagging coincided with the arrival of Hip Hop music in the late 1970's and 1980's. To this day Hip Hop and Graffiti remain joined at the hip with each other.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF GRAFFITI (Main Saskatoon Types)

- a. *Hip Hop or Wild Style*: Sophisticated, often pre-planned cartooned murals, which incorporate a tag. Lettering is commonly done in bubble or three-dimensional form. Uses many different colours. Wild style often employs the use of arrows.
- b. *Tag or Signature*: Currently the most common graffiti in Saskatoon. This is the individual assumed name of graffiti writer, a "Tagger". The Tagger will then practice their tag and develop unique style to their written tag. The tag will be written on an object with a marker tool. Goal is fame within the graffiti culture. Taggers join crews for companionship and protection.
- c. *Gang*: Gang graffiti is used to establish recognition, create intimidation and mark their turf or area. Gang graffiti is commonly written when a new gang is formed. When gang graffiti stops, it usually means that the gang no longer exists or that it has evolved into more high profile activity and does not want to draw attention to itself through graffiti anymore.

What is a "Tag"

A Graffiti Tag is basically a signature, an individual identifier adopted by writers which the tagger will be known by in the graffiti culture. They develop an individual style to differentiate their tag.

WHY ARE TAGS UNIQUE

Choosing a tag is not taken lightly. This tag will be with you for your life in the graffiti culture. The need for fame, recognition, respect and all the other things diminishes if someone else gets the credit.

WHAT IS A TAGGER

A tagger is simply an individual who vandalizes property with graffiti without permission. For many, tagging is a sport and to others it becomes a way of life. At its

roots, modern graffiti is still about words and writing words on surfaces with various substances. Not all taggers are artists or painters and that is why most accomplished taggers call themselves *Writers*.

WHAT IS A TAGGING CREW

A group of active taggers with their own distinct name, usually consisting of 2-4 words, *The Wall Rapist (TWR)*, *One Night Standers (ONS)*. A crew will have anywhere from 2 to 12 members but on rare occasions can be just one person.

Each crew will have a leader who usually starts the crew in the first place. Tagging crews are another form of street gangs

WHY DO THEY TAG

Fame within the graffiti sub-culture, a means of expressing their opinions, attitudes, emotions and doing this outside the norm comprising of 4 main elements:

- a. Recognition:
 1. Low self esteem.
 2. Peer recognition.
 3. For recognition, a distorted view of fame.
 4. See graffiti in the community and want to try it.
- b. Anti-Authority:
 1. A way to rebel against authority
 2. To get out their aggression
- c. Artistic Ability:
 1. Some are very talented artistically and this is their way to express themselves and develop and practice their ability.
 2. Some think they are artistic.
- d. Addiction:
 1. Becomes an obsessive-compulsive disorder. They are addicted to *Getting Up* which is tagging throughout the community, as well as to paints, markers and tagging.

WHAT IS GRAFFITI PARAPHERNALIA/TOOLS

- a. Felt markers.
- b. Spray paint, Krylon is the paint of choice.
- c. Paint sticks.
- d. Wax marking stick.
- e. White Out.
- f. Glass Chalk.

- g. Shoe polish.
- h. Bingo Blotter.
- i. Lipstick
- j. Etching Tools.
- k. Painters mask.
- l. Rubber gloves



THE BROKEN WINDOW THEORY

The *Broken Window Theory* espouses that if a broken window in a building is left unrepaired the other windows will also be broken. An experiment to test this theory was performed by Wilson and Kelling (1982), whereby a car was abandoned in two neighbourhoods – one respectable and the other run down. In both of these neighbourhoods, the car was vandalized, showing that vandalism can occur anywhere once informal social controls are lowered by signals that no-one cares. The authors also suggest that untended behavior can lead to breakdown of community controls (i.e. if a place is left untended, weeds will grow, windows may be smashed, young people will congregate, public drinking may occur, etc).

This breakdown may not lead to increased levels of crime, however, it will lead to increases in resident's perceptions of crime. The level of disorder will lead them to assume that crime, especially violent crime is rising, making them feel less secure and more fearful. The suggested result of this is that people will avoid using the streets and have less contact with others, thus reducing community bonds, and installing individual's isolation. The resultant effect is that these environments also make a neighborhood more vulnerable to crime.

HOW TO READ TAGGER GRAFFITI

It is usually easiest to follow the center lines and write down each identified letter. Tags of the same person may differ slightly in spelling. For more complex (unreadable) tags, the tagger will often sign his tag legibly near the complex tag, pay attention to the style.



EXAMPLES



TAG



THROW UP/TOSS UP or BOMB



PIECE



STENCIL

DEFINITIONS OF COMMON GRAFFITI TERMS

All City: A tag that is found throughout the entire city.

Back Up: A secondary tag used if the primary tag is known by police.

Battle: A contest between two rival taggers or tagging crews to see who can tag the most in a given time or similar rules.

Bite: To adopt a similar style, tag or crew name of another tagger or crew.

Bleeder: A type of paint that when painted over bleeds through, defeating the paint over.

Beef: Disagreement or conflict between individual taggers or crews.

Bombing: the act of going out to cover a large area with graffiti tags.

Bombing Runs: When a group of taggers get together and do a tagging spree.

Buff: To remove graffiti by painting over.

Buffer: City employee who removes graffiti.

Burner: A well done mural which is designed to stand out and not as detailed as a piece.

Cap: Spray paint can tips or nozzles. *Fat caps* spray a wide line, *Testers* spray a thin line.

Crew: A group of taggers with their own distinct name, usually consisting of three words, The Wall Rapists (TWR). Crews are usually identified by their initials only. Many crew names show an acceptance for violence and destructiveness.

Cross Out: Crossing out another's tag. Meant as an insult or challenge.

Dis: To disrespect someone by writing over or on another tagger's work.

Etch: To put a tag up using etching acid instead of paint.

Fat Cap: Spray can tips that have a wide line.

Fill-In: A throw-up using two colours, one for the outline and one for the centre also called two colour throws or throw-downs.

Free Wall: A designated area where pieces or graffiti murals can be legally painted.

Heavens: Any high object to tag on, such as rooftop, large overhead freeway sign or billboard.

Hip Hop: A sub-culture that emerged in New York City in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Hip Hop is associated with rap music, break dancing, baggy clothes and graffiti.

Jack: To steal a tagger's supplies, usually by robbery.

King(s): Superior male tagger or tagging crew.

Mob: Putting as much graffiti on an object as possible and done in groups.

Paint Stick: A type of marker pen filled with paint.

Piece: Short for masterpiece. A mural, an elaborate large scale painting of one's tag utilizing different colours of spray paint. The piece can also be a caricature or statement.

Piece Book: A sketch book used by taggers to practice their own unique style of graffiti writing. These books often contain sketches of throw ups or pieces that they have done in the past, or are planning to do in the future.

Racking: Stealing, to shoplift spray paint cans, aerosol can nozzles, etching acid, liquid shoe polish applicators or markers.

Scribe: An object used to etch or scratch graffiti on glass, metal or plastic. Covering a large area with etched tags is called scratch bombing.

Slap Tags or Stickers: Pre-tagged stickers. Taggers write their tag on stickers, then put up in difficult areas and slapped on objects when walking by, reduces risk of being caught. Can be used in daylight.

Tag: the most basic form of graffiti, a graffiti writer's signature. A moniker or nickname usually consisting of three to seven letters. The basic tag is printed or scrawled, and can be either easy or difficult to read. An individual's tag can be the product of a whim or long deliberation. Some tags are meant to project the personality of the tagger while others are meant to shock or offend by the use of hateful or offensive words.

Tagger: a person who adopts a unique nickname/moniker (tag), and then paints, writes, or etches that tag on private and public property.

Tagging: The act of writing graffiti tags.

Throw-up: Larger than the basic tag, in bubble or balloon style letters, using one colour and appears as an outline.

Toy: A beginner or a tagger who writes in an amateurish manner. A term of disrespect.

Wild Style: A unique style of tagging that exhibits overlapping letters and can include arrows at the end of the lines.

Writer: Description preferred by taggers.

If you suspect that your children are involved in acts of graffiti, contact the Saskatoon Police Service. You may be asked to sign a permission to search form, but with your permission we may be able to identify the crew or the nickname of your child within the crew if they are involved. Perhaps your child is not a tagger after all, but let us identify the problem early in order to stop future problems and or expenses to the family.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding graffiti please contact the Saskatoon Police Service Anti Graffiti Unit at 306-975-1401 or email agu@police.saskatoon.sk.ca

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