

PREVENTING THE EXPLOITATION OF GIRLS: A Groundbreaking Curriculum

How was the curriculum developed?

My Life My Choice is a national leader in the prevention of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC). Our nationally acclaimed ten-session curriculum, which provides concrete, well-researched methods for reaching vulnerable adolescent girls, was created in 2003 by exploitation survivor Denise Williams and MLMC's Director Lisa Goldblatt Grace, LICSW, MPH. Since then, the curriculum has been reviewed and revised by MLMC Associate Director and Survivor Mentor Audrey Porter, and youth participants themselves. Based on their feedback, MLMC continues to maintain the curriculum as a relevant and effective tool to prevent exploitation.



Photo by MaplessInSeattle

WHO DOES THE CURRICULUM REACH?

- This curriculum is relevant for any girl between the ages of 12-18 years old, as all girls are at risk of being commercially sexually exploited.
- The curriculum is most frequently used to reach girls who are at disproportionately higher risk of being exploited, or who are already survivors of exploitation.

Girls who are at higher risk are identified as those who have **histories of abuse, neglect, exposure to family violence and addiction, or live in areas disproportionately targeted by pimps.**

MLMC Exploitation Prevention groups can be held anywhere but are most commonly found in **middle and high schools, group homes / residential treatment facilities, Child Protective Services offices, Probation departments, juvenile justice facilities, and community-based organizations.**

What are the goals of the 10-Session Prevention Groups?

The MLMC Curriculum is based on the public health model of altering behavior through a shift in participants' attitudes, knowledge, and skills.

ATTITUDES

Challenge girls' ideas about commercial sexual exploitation (including prostitution) emphasizing that the commercial sex industry is dangerous and debilitating, not glamorous

KNOWLEDGE

Share information about what makes girls vulnerable to exploitation and what tactics pimps use to recruit girls

SKILLS

Empower girls to identify and avoid recruitment tactics OR identify supports and resources in exiting the Life

“Today was great in girls' group; I remembered all the memories, and how strong I am, and how I keep my head up. I know it's not my fault and I'm not alone.” - MLMC group participant



WHO CAN FACILITATE THE GROUPS?

The MLMC model for Exploitation Prevention pairs a licensed clinician or clinically trained service provider with a trained survivor of exploitation to lead groups. Girls benefit from hearing the survivors' personal story and the expertise of two trained professionals who understand how to create a safe place for girls to share with one another.

“I like how we can talk about everything and not be judged.”

—MLMC group participant

“[The curriculum] embraces an empowerment approach and blends a variety of activities which foster self-reflection, understanding about the issue, and knowledge to help young women identify potentially exploitive situations.”

—Rachel Durchslag, founder of the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation

What information does the curriculum cover?

MLMC's 10-session Exploitation Prevention Curriculum is designed to change girls' perceptions of the commercial sex industry, as well as build self-esteem and personal empowerment; our curriculum includes interactive activities, journaling, and is infused with the authentic testimony of survivors. Some examples of topics include:

- Game recognizes game: Understanding predators and recruitment
- Do you really want to hurt me? Reducing your risk of exploitation
- Making the link: Substance abuse and exploitation
- I come first: Developing self-esteem
- Making it real: Stories from “the Life”
- I'm not alone: Finding help and safety

Our curriculum utilizes a psycho-educational model with a relational focus. Groups are designed so that girls feel comfortable connecting with the facilitators and forming community amongst themselves.

How do we know it's successful in preventing exploitation?

We use pre- and post- surveys' to evaluate group participants' progress over the course of 10 sessions. These surveys assess the curriculum's relevance and effectiveness in changing girls' attitudes and knowledge of the commercial sex industry and skills developed to avoid being recruited. Additionally, MLMC records attendance records and excerpts from journal entries to show girls' progress.

Results from these assessments show marked differences in girls understanding of exploitation:

- In one group, only 30% of girls were able to identify a pimp in a sample anecdote; **at the end of the group, 90% of the same girls correctly identified the pimp.**
- Surveys also show a noticeable difference in girls' familiarity and comfort level with seeking resources, including reaching out to police and/or social workers.