FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Girls Speak Out

SUPPORT GROUPS FOR YOUNG WOMEN WITH EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE



BC WOMEN'S HOSPITAL+ HEALTH CENTRE
An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

Girls Speak Out: Support Groups for Young Women with Experiences of Violence Facilitator's Guide, British Columbia Women's Hospital + Health Centre, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

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About Violence and BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre

Violence against women knows no barriers. Global estimates are that over their lifetime, 35% of women worldwide have experienced either violence in an intimate relationship or non-partner sexual violence.[1] In British Columbia, women experience many forms of violence in their homes, in the streets and in the workplace, while across Canada, as a result of colonization, Indigenous women experience higher rates of violence, including homicide, than the general population.

Violence can take many forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, mental, spiritual and financial abuse. Yet in spite of its prevalence, violence is preventable and its effects can and must be addressed. Every effort must be made to educate the population about violence and abuse and to work with perpetrators of violence to ensure changes in behaviour and healthy attitudes that support zero tolerance of violent actions.

Violence against women and girls is a health issue — not only because of the physical injuries that may be involved but also because of the mental and emotional toll that can arise. According to the World Health Organization, violence can result in physical, mental, sexual, reproductive health and other health problems, and may increase vulnerability to HIV. Indeed, the myriad short- and long-term health and social effects of violence are diverse and far-reaching.

As a provincial women's health service, BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre[2] provides care to women and girls who have experiences with or are currently affected by violence and abuse. BC Women's oversees the Provincial Sexual Assault Program, providing direct services to women and men, girls and boys who are sexually assaulted, and supports health care providers in their responses to patients and families with current or past experiences of violence, trauma and abuse. We also offer an Indigenous Health program, which is working specifically to address issues of violence as they affect Indigenous women, girls and communities. Hospital staff and care providers participate in provincial networks devoted to addressing and reducing violence against women and girls, and conduct research on the impact of violence and strategies to improve the health system's responses to it.

The Girls Speak Out program was developed and piloted by BC Women's with the generous financial support of Coast Capital Savings and the RBC Foundation. The program offers girls and young women with the intersecting experiences of violence, mental health and substance use the opportunity to connect with other young women who share their experiences in a series of group sessions facilitated by adult women. This Facilitator's Guide outlines the foundations of the program and provides a detailed curriculum for facilitators to follow. The voices of young women who participated in the pilot program are woven throughout, offering the reader the opportunity to learn what is said when girls speak out.

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Notes on Terminology Used in this Guide

Girls Speak Out is inclusive of any and all girls, young women and women who self-identify as such and believe they would benefit from participating in a support group. The program is intended for young women approximately aged 16-24. Throughout this Facilitator's Guide the terms **girl, young woman** and **woman** include cisfemales, transwomen, genderqueer women and non-binary individuals who are significantly female-identified. The terms **girls** and **young women** are used interchangeably, as we have found that there is no single term that all girls and young women identify with or are comfortable with. While some find the term "girls" belittling, others find "young women" overly formal. So we use both terms to be as inclusive as possible in our language.

Technically, 'abuse' refers to improper treatment and includes unjust, corrupt or wrongful practices while 'violence' involves force. Abuse can be physical, verbal, psychological and/or sexual. The World Report on Violence and Health (WRVH) [3] defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or deprivation". Violence can be inflicted physically, sexually, as a psychological attack, or through deprivation. Three types of violence are important to acknowledge:

- **Self-directed violence** (self-abuse and suicide): violence where the perpetrator and the victim are the same individual.
- **Interpersonal violence** (family and intimate partner violence and community violence): violence between individuals. Includes: child maltreatment; intimate partner violence; and elder abuse, which includes acquaintance and stranger violence and includes youth violence; assault by strangers; violence related to property crimes; and violence in workplaces and other institutions.
- **Collective violence** refers to violence committed by larger groups of individuals and can be subdivided into social, political and economic violence.

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defined **gender-based violence** as any act of violence that "results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life". It has become an umbrella term for any harm against women and girls. The term 'gender-based violence' is often used interchangeably with the term 'violence against women'.

In this guide, the terms **trauma** and **violence** are used as independent terms. **Trauma** includes responses to powerful one-time incidents such as accidents, natural disasters, crimes, surgeries, deaths, and other violent events. It also includes responses to chronic or repetitive experiences such as child abuse, neglect, combat, urban violence, concentration camps, battering relationships, and enduring deprivation. This definition intentionally does not allow us to determine whether a

particular event is traumatic; that is up to each survivor. This definition provides a guideline for our understanding of a survivor's experience of the events and conditions of his/her life. The term "trauma" by itself does not fully capture the gendered and structural nature of violence against young women and girls. Someone rescued from a car accident is out of jeopardy, but young women and girls fleeing an abuser may still be in danger, and may have legitimate reasons to be fearful and unable to make changes in their lives without risks.

Many young women and girls have not suffered just one violent or abusive event, but many forms of abuse, over a long period of time. Even after young women and girls end an abusive relationship, for example, they may continue to be at great risk of injury and other forms of violence, abuse and intimidation from abusers who stalk, harass and threaten them. Although trauma and violence are often conflated by service providers and within the literature, we feel this leads to overlooking some impacts of abuse, as well as young women and girls' immediate and ongoing need for safety and support. When **violence** is conflated with trauma, we focus on an individual or singular event and miss young women's experiences of structural violence as well as many of the structural, physical and mental health impacts of violence on areas like finances (e.g., poverty, legal costs, loss of wages), housing (e.g., insecure housing, homelessness), physical health (e.g., injuries, migraines, gastrointestinal issues), mental health (e.g., anxiety, depression, self-harm) and social condition (e.g. custody battles, isolation).

The Girls Speak Out Program

Girls Speak Out (GSO) is a 13-week support group for girls and young women who have experienced or are currently experiencing gender-based violence. Led by experienced facilitators, the Girls Speak Out program offers girls and young women a place to share their experiences, learn from others, and heal.

Girls Speak Out focuses specifically on offering girls and young women support for health and social issues arising from the intersection of violence and abuse, substance use and mental health issues. The program is designed to be led by co-facilitators who understand intersectionality and the health and social impacts of violence and abuse, which can include substance use, mental health issues, poverty and homelessness. Individual facilitators do not need extensive knowledge in all of these areas, however, we suggest that the two facilitators jointly understand and have experience with these issues, and how best to support girls and young women with these intersecting experiences.

The aim of the guide is to help facilitators establish support groups in their communities that will empower girls and young women through a shared support group experience. This Facilitator's Guide is divided into two sections. The first lays the foundations so facilitators can understand the purposes, objectives, and role support groups play in supporting girls and women with the intersecting experiences of violence, substance use, and mental health concerns. The second section outlines the 13-week curriculum for GSO and provides handouts and suggestions to facilitators as they work through the curriculum material week-by-week.

Building on research and interventions for adult women, the Girls Speak Out Program stemmed from the need to understand how to support girls and young women in BC who had experienced abuse, substance use and/or mental health challenges. Research on women's experiences of these intersecting experiences began at BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre (BC Women's) in 2007 with the Building Bridges initiative. Building Bridges: Linking Woman Abuse, Substance Use and Mental Ill Health Initiative involved conversations and educational forums with community and health care stakeholders, and a province-wide consultation process using standardized, cross-sectoral consultations and individual interviews with 460 service providers and policy leaders representing 82 BC communities. In addition, 15 focus groups (n = 102) were conducted with women across the province who had experiences of abuse, substance use and/or mental health issues.

The consultations with adult women helped form an understanding of women's experiences of abuse, substance use, and/or mental health problems as intersecting issues. Findings from Building Bridges demonstrated the need for support groups to help women understand and manage the connections between their experiences. Making Connections [4], a 16-week support group curriculum, was developed and piloted with adult women with these intersecting issues. Among other things, the findings of both Building Bridges and Making Connections highlighted the lack of supportive, harm-reducing, low-barrier services for girls and young women experiencing the same intersecting challenges, giving rise to the idea for a program of research and action tailored to younger women.

With the generous support of Coast Capital Savings and RBC Foundation, the Girls Speak Out initiative began. During the consultation phase, we undertook a comprehensive literature review of academic, informal and community-based literatures as well as consultations with young women about their understanding of violence and how their experiences of violence intersected with their mental health concerns and substance use. Girls and young women were asked for their recommendations for improving services and supports within the health system. As with the adult women we met previously, girls and young woman shared that they would benefit from more opportunities to talk about the impacts of their experience with others with similar experiences.

We then piloted and evaluated a support group intervention, incorporating findings from the literature, our experiences with the adult program, and the input we had received from girls and young women. Support group materials, group design, and the facilitation approach were further enhanced by consultations with two advisory committees, one comprised of service providers working in the areas of violence, substance use and mental health among youth and the other made up of young women with lived experience of these intersecting issues, and became the draft GSO Program Curriculum.

The draft curriculum was piloted in seven BC communities: Ahousaht, Hope, Masset, Courtenay, Vancouver, Richmond, and Kelowna. Organizations in each of the pilot communities were identified to host the program and training was provided to all community-based facilitators. The final curriculum presented in this guide incorporates findings from the pilot experience.

We wish to emphasize that GSO is inclusive of any and all girls, young women and women who self-identify as such and believe they would benefit from participating in the support group. Throughout this Guide, the terms girl, young woman and woman include cisfemales, transwomen, genderqueer women and non-binary individuals who are significantly female-identified.



Laying the Program Foundations

Laying the Program Foundations

VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS AND WOMEN IN CANADA

Recent Canadian police-reported data indicate that girls and young women between the ages of 12 and 17 were violently victimized at nearly six times the rate of younger aged girls, and almost twice the rate for women aged 18 and older.[5] Research also indicates that girls are at the highest risk of being sexually assaulted when they are young teens, aged 13-15 [6] and that girls are more than four times as likely as boys to be victims of sexual assault or other sexual offences committed by a family member.

Much of the abuse that girls and young women experience is gender-based and perpetrated by partners, acquaintances, family members, caregivers, johns, pimps, individuals in positions of authority, institutions and systems. Additionally, girls and young women may experience violence or oppression because of other aspects of their identity such as their racial identity, sexual orientation, disability, language or religion. This can include overt experiences of personal violence, racism, homophobia, or systemic violence.

Research shows there are overlapping and compounding issues of violence against specific groups of girls and young women. For example:

- Of 523 homeless BC youth (12–19 years old), 87% of girls reported having been physically and/or sexually abused [7]
- Women with disabilities are 1.5 to 10 times more likely than women without disabilities to experience abuse [8]
- In 2009, close to 67,000 women aged 15 and older living in the Canadian provinces reported being the victim of violence in the previous 12 months [9]
- 25-50% of Aboriginal women were victims of social abuse as children compared to a 20-25% average rate within non-Aboriginal population [10]
- Violent incidents are 2.5 times more likely to be committed against Aboriginal Canadians ages 15-24 than against those 35 years and older [11]
- Wolfe and Chiodo report that 13% of girls in Grade 10 reported experiencing bullying with racial overtones, while 8% were bullied due to religious beliefs [12]
- Jiwani reports that girls and young women identified racism as the most pervasive form of violence they encountered in their daily lives [13]
- Lesbian, bisexual, queer, transsexual and transgendered girls and young women face additional barriers in obtaining support in the social context of homophobia and heterosexism [14]

Violence and abuse can have both health and social effects on girls and women.

HEALTH IMPACTS OF ABUSE

Violence against young women is associated with poor mental and emotional health, self-harming behaviours (e.g., cutting), eating disorders, and substance abuse. Among teenaged girls, abuse is linked to depression, anxiety, self-harm, both over- and under-eating, and concerns related to weight control and body image.[15-20] Girls who are abused are also more likely to drink and use substances.[21-23]

Research highlights the connections between girls' and young women's experiences of abuse and mental health problems. Depression, for example, is more prevalent among young women and girls who have experienced abuse.[24] Silverman et al. have also demonstrated strong connections between young women's experiences of abuse by a dating partner and girls' substance use, unwanted pregnancies, suicide attempts and suicide.[20] These authors suggest that when compared with girls who have not experienced abuse by dating partners, girls who have are:

- 2.5 times more likely to be heavy smokers;
- 1.7 times more likely to binge drink;
- 3.4 times more likely to use cocaine at some point in their lives;
- 3.7 times more likely to use diet pills, laxatives or vomiting;
- 5.7 times more likely to have contemplated suicide in the past year; and
- 8.6 times more likely to have attempted suicide in the past year.[20]

SOCIAL IMPACTS OF ABUSE

Violence and abuse increase the risk of homelessness and housing insecurity, poverty and involvement with child protection issues. Studies from both Canada and the United States identify sexual abuse in the family home as a major contributing factor to homelessness among girls.[25-27] However, girls fleeing abusive home situations often face further abuse on the street or in precarious housing situations. A 2007 survey of 762 homeless youth aged 12–18 found that 57% of the girls had been sexually abused.[28] And in a recent study on ending homelessness among Canadian girls,[29] teen girls made up for 6-12% of all homeless people but account for 30-50% of the homeless youth in large Canadian cities.[30] Notably, 55% of GSO pilot and consultation participants reported experiences of homelessness or housing insecurity.

Current levels of income support for young women are typically too low to live on, forcing some girls and young women to 'supplement' their livelihood with unsafe options such as living with older boyfriends or pimps; providing sexual favours in exchange for food, shelter and drugs; and/or selling drugs or sex to generate income for basic needs. The risks associated with poverty and housing instability can be compounded when young women are parenting[31, 32] and may raise child protection issues.

The literature clearly shows that abuse and rates of violence experienced by girls and young women are high and the impacts of such abuse and violence can be severe. Understanding how best to support girls and young women with experience of intersecting issues of abuse, substance use and/or mental health required eliciting feedback from girls and young women themselves.

ADDING THE VOICES AND EXPERIENCES OF GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

To pilot the GSO Program draft curriculum, nine focus groups were held with 56 young women ages 16-24 who shared their experiences of accessing support for the intersection of mental health issues, substance use, and violence, and their recommendations for improving services and supports for young women with these same experiences. In the discussions, the term 'relationships' was not limited to dating, marital and sexual involvement, young women were invited to talk about their experiences from all facets of their lives including dating, familial, peer, and systems such as school, health care, child welfare and/or criminal justice.

What did young women tell us?

- 85% of young women self-identified as experiencing violence and/or abuse in their dating and social relationships;
- 67% reported the use of substances;
- 55% reported they had experienced homelessness or housing insecurity;
- 53% reported they had faced mental health challenges.

Pilot participants shared about the types of abuse they experienced. Unless otherwise specified, all quotes displayed in this guide are verbatim excerpts from discussions with the young women who participated in the Girls Speak Out pilot groups.

TYPES OF ABUSE

"You can get mentally abused or you can get physically abused, you can get the shit beaten out of you, but you can also be, like, manipulated and put down, and you can be financially abused, there's lots of different kinds of abuse".

Many of the focus group participants reported experiencing a combination of violence, mental health concerns, substance use issues, and insecure housing:

- 21% reported experiences related to two of the intersecting experiences;
- 29% reported experiencing a combination of three of the intersecting experiences;
- 32% reported they had experiences with all four intersecting experiences.

Young women described their understandings of abuse in various ways. Some participants surmised that as girls or young adults with little previous dating experience, they may have been naïve about the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships and may not have initially recognized the abuse in their relationships.

Some young women told us that the reason the abuse felt 'normal' in their lives was because of the impacts of previous abuse they experienced. These experiences in their childhood, teen or early adult years profoundly affected young women's self-esteem and feelings of self-worth, leaving them with lower expectations of relationships. As one participant described:

"Unfortunately my abuse started when I was really young, and from that, it's just that's what you believe you deserve after that, that's just it. So it screws you up so bad mentally you don't know what's what".

Based on experiences with both girls and support group facilitators, we learned that young women with abusive partners may find it difficult or impossible to discuss/negotiate contraception. Using contraception without permission from abusive partners can lead to fear or more abuse. Thus, violence can become an indirect factor contributing to unwanted pregnancies. Studies have also highlighted similar impacts of abuse on young women's sexual and reproductive health. For example, young women who have experienced both physical and sexual dating violence are more than twice as likely to report a sexually transmitted infection diagnosis as those who have not experienced abuse.[33] High school girls who were victims of violence from dating partners were 4 to 6 times more likely than their non-abused peers to have ever been pregnant.[20]

Systemic abuse, such as stereotyping and discriminatory policies and practices were described by many young women in the Girls Speak Out focus groups. Young women who had grown up in the child welfare system described feeling stigmatized and 'red-flagged' by the agencies within that system when they became mothers, resulting in what they perceived as unjustified surveillance and judgment.

"Being that I was in Ministry care, I've noticed that if you go out for help, because you were labelled as a foster child, you're 'at risk.' So everything is a thousand times worse. You have the Ministry breathing down your neck, monitoring every single last little thing you do, judging you on like the slightest move you make".

Many young women shared their insights or 'gut feelings' regarding what was appropriate or inappropriate in their relationships and described why it was often hard to follow those gut feelings. Young women explained their dependence on their abusers for money; drugs and/or alcohol; housing; and access to their children. This dependence made it difficult for young women to leave situations or relationships and to follow their own instinct to flee harmful or unsafe situations. Pilot participants shared feelings of responsibility and blame for their experiences of abuse regardless of their ability to recognize the systemic influences undermining their ability to achieve safety.

IMPACTS OF ABUSE AND COPING

Young women clearly outlined the ways in which they used substances and self-harm as coping strategies for their experiences of abuse. They also saw clear links between their experiences of abuse and their mental health concerns:

"Growing up in foster homes and group homes, and, the neglect and the abuse that goes on in there, like I don't wanna remember that or participate in what's really going on, so I check out from life. And I bang heroine all day, [...]- so I can numb myself, right"?

"If I was in too stressful situation I would shut down and then I would get depressed. And my coping mechanism was cutting [...] I was stressed and would get depressed and then would cut and then would get stressed about cutting and then would cut more".

"Like I've been with guys who have made me feel like absolutely shit and that I'm worthless, so then that obviously brings on depression and like anxiety probably for me".

Young women almost always described abuse as preceding their substance use and as a root cause of many mental health concerns that they experienced. They identified grief and loss as major contributors to their substance use and mental health concerns.

Young mothers who participated in the GSO study talked about the cycle of poverty, housing insecurity and abuse, and how it can lead to child protection involvement:

"We're definitely judged for being young low-income moms, I think. That's already a bad card being a young mom in general; they're gonna flag you as soon as you go to the hospital".

Other young women talked about the impact of having child protection involvement, including the emotional pain and ongoing worry:

"There's nothing that's going to hurt me more than taking my kids away. There's nothing. Like, give me a fucking death sentence… And that little fucking shadow on your shoulder, that you're always scared cause things get manipulated, and they don't need any good reason to take your children… — for me, honestly now that I have my daughter, I look over my shoulder the whole time".

INADEQUACIES OF SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

Many young women reported feeling they were discriminated against by providers in various health and social systems of care. Some reported feelings of not being trusted and of having their experiences discounted by service providers and other adults who expected them to "grow out" of their problems. The girls felt that assumptions and stereotypes made it difficult for some adults to appreciate their experience and to receive relevant and effective supports.

"It's just really hard to like fight for just even basic things especially in Vancouver because of the history. A lot of people assume that younger kids, like even teens our age, they assume […] we're all drunks or we're all drug users and shit. Or we have the perfect life and we still live with our parents".

Young women reminded us that negative interactions and harmful power dynamics with service providers can leave them feeling unheard and powerless.

"With the psychologist that I had seen and with a couple of other counsellors I had dealt with, it was like, you know, I was down here at the bottom and I needed help and they were up here at the top and […] and it just, it felt really like, oppressive is the wrong word, but it felt very […] hopeless".

Young women echoed what has been expressed in other studies:[29, 34] they reported encountering negative interactions with services that replicate the power dynamics they experienced in the abuse, which leaves them feeling silenced and powerless.

"And it was totally uncomfortable because she's like right off the bat [...] "oh, so you're depressed." No, I'm just tired of being hit all the time".

"One time, like last year I tried to get support from a counsellor [...] And she called social services right away. And ever since then I've never tried to get support, cause I was just scared. She was like "I'm gonna have to report this to social services", and I was like "Oh, yeah I'm pretty sure you just said everything was confidential".

We heard that very few supports exist for young women experiencing issues around violence, substance use, and mental health, as the majority of these supports are geared towards adult women. Young women also raised the issue of 'aging-out' of the supports and services that they do have, or losing them when their involvement with the justice system or child protection system ends. This sudden loss of services and supports was detrimental to their health and safety.

"When I was on probation like cause yeah, it was court-ordered, you had to go see all these people but then when I got off probation, everything stopped. You know, and I had — I lost all my supports, right, so then I was like, sure, I was so happy I was off probation, but then a year later I'm like, "well wait a minute, like I could actually like, use some help now guys, like where are you"?

Young women also regularly highlighted the fact that they were unaware of what services and supports are available to them, and/or how these services might help. This suggests that as service providers, we need to do more to reach out to young women and meet them where they are at. Outreach services are essential for this population.

"And it's usually hard to go to it [counselling], cause you kinda think, well what am I gonna do, just sit there and talk to this person about it, like I'll tell them my story, what are they gonna do, how are they going to fix me? Like, you know, you kinda have the idea, like, what difference can they make, until you get there and you realize, like, hey this kinda helps"!

Young women shared a great deal about the support and services they needed and wanted to see in their communities. They wished for more opportunities to talk to other young women with similar experiences of partner abuse and other forms of gender-based and structural violence about the impacts of these experiences.

"There can be groups for us [so] that we know that we're not the only ones in trouble, we're not the only ones who need help and we're not the only ones going through bad things".

THE NEED FOR SUPPORT GROUPS

Despite the high rates of violence against girls and young women, support services remain limited. Research shows that only 33% of US teens who have been in a violent relationship have ever told anyone about the abuse.[35] Furthermore, many outreach, mental health, addiction and victim services are not relevant or safe for teen girls with experiences of abuse because they are intended for adults, and/or are not sensitive to the unique needs of younger women and issues of gendered violence.

While some programs and support groups are aimed at violence prevention or empowerment among young women, and some individual counselling is available for young women who have experienced sexual assault or abuse, young women revealed that they feel that there are few appropriate programs and services for them. Few spaces exist where young women who are currently or who have experienced abuse in the past can obtain support and offer support to others in a group setting where they can speak openly about these experiences. Also, many services centre on individual 'trauma counselling,' rather than support groups. A trauma counselling approach separates girls and young women from others who share their experiences and who carry hope and solutions.

"Sometimes you don't need people to give you like information and stuff, you just need someone to hear you out and listen to you, and sometimes it's hard to find people who you feel comfortable doing that with. And I think it's somebody who's not going to judge you, somebody who's just gonna listen to you vent and talk about these things".

"I also realized myself why I was such an angry person all the time is because I was trying to hide that hurt. So when you try to hide that hurt, you use something else to mask it — anger. And now I'm not as angry as I was all the time before".

Young women told us they need to be able to bring their 'whole selves' to the table, and not hide the intersecting challenges they face. Because most services have a narrow focus and mandate, young women reported feeling they are forced to compartmentalize their experiences and access different services for different needs. GSO participants said they wanted to discuss their interconnected experiences, including multiple forms of gender-based and structural violence, in an open and non-judgmental environment, and in a setting where they know they would not be excluded from future services or face negative repercussions if they revealed their 'whole selves.' Young women reported that it was particularly important to be able to attend a group and talk about how their substance use is connected to coping with their experiences of abuse without fear of being asked to leave the group.

"I came into this group pretty much right after something happened. And, it really helped. A lot of times parents won't really understand, they'll try and be like Oh, well what did you do for this to happen? And, like, This is what you did wrong, and everything. But here you find out that you didn't deserve this, it's not that you did anything wrong, you know? So it really helps, especially if it's somebody that — like me, that got in right away. It really helps you. And especially when

you're taught about how to deal with things, like coping strategies. You'll recognize it in your own — and kind of stop and be like why am I doing this? is it because … and then you'll catch yourself. So it really helps in those kinds of situations. Dealing afterwards".

"For me I guess I just have to say that I'm a lot more confident having peers that notice me, and care, and want to spend time with me and are encouraging, and all of those things. 'Cause I'm going through some pretty big changes in my life right now. And it's just nice to have people care. And to have people be proud of me. So I do feel a lot more confident".

"Like before this, I was anti-social and stuff like that, and I always assumed either people wouldn't like me, or they were better than me — like they were superior. So everything I would say was insignificant, and I was just kinda insignificant to them […] And being here, it makes me feel a lot more confident about using my voice and just […] the way people react, kind of like, [I'm] learning, subconsciously, that what I have to say is important: they're listening to me, they're going off what I say, they're agreeing with me. Like suddenly I feel kind of important, and cared about".

CONCLUSIONS

Feminism introduced the 'power within' to express one's voice and to working with others as a method of people empowering themselves.[36] As Speer and Hughey suggest, empowerment is a dynamic interplay between gaining greater personal control or capacity (personal transformation/ psychological empowerment) and overcoming external access to resources (community or institutional transformations).[37]

Published literature suggests that the appeal and effectiveness of support groups can be attributed in part to the storytelling element of group work [35]. Sharing experiences with others who can relate, who will be nonjudgmental, and who can help the storyteller recognize their strength and resiliency through hardship is seen as a key strength of peer support groups.[35, 38, 39] A New Zealand study of groups found increased benefits with regards to an individual's sense of self and sense of community.[36]

While rigorous evaluations of support groups for women who have experienced violence are currently limited,[40] both the Making Connections and Girls Speak Out support groups reinforce the published literature. We have observed, and both young and adult women have affirmed, that when girls and young women come together to have shared conversations about their diverse experiences of abuse they feel heard, respected and valued, their sense of isolation diminishes, and their safety and well-being can improve.



Program Overview

HANDOUTS

Girls Speak Out Meeting Guide
Making a Support Plan
GSO Support Group Overview
Confidentiality Agreement

Program Overview

GIRLS SPEAK OUT SUPPORT GROUP MODEL

Girls Speak Out groups are designed to be a safe space for girls and young women to talk openly about their experiences of abuse, at their own pace, without encountering any preconceived agendas. It is a non-judgmental space in which they can consider the effects of abuse on their well-being and the links between abuse and experiences of substance use and/or mental health concerns (including trauma), as well as other structural and systemic impacts. Discussions, tools and activities help to shift the blame away from young women, who are often held responsible for and/or feel responsible for their experiences of violence, and towards an understanding of gendered violence and oppression as a large-scale social issue. Girls Speak Out groups also aim to help young women develop supportive relationships with service providers and other young women with similar experiences. These connections are critical to reducing feelings of isolation, responsibility and shame.

"I just felt heard and understood, and that made me feel lighter".

The Girls Speak Out model consists of a 13-week support group. We recommend each group be made up of approximately eight young women ages 16 to 24. Each session lasts 2 to 2.5 hours, at the discretion of the co-facilitators. The group format includes a check-in, core learning activities, and a check-out. Facilitators can choose which activity best suits their participants.

Girls Speak Out groups provide:

- **a platform** for young women to share their experiences and reduce some of the silence surrounding violence against young women and girls;
- **opportunities** for connection with other young women with shared experiences and with supportive service providers;
- **support and affirmation** of what girls already know about their experiences, coping and safety strategies;
- **encouragement** to tell their stories, if and when they want to;
- **understanding** of issues of violence, mental health and substance use as closely interconnected;
- **an integrated and holistic approach** through co-facilitation by service providers from the anti-violence and mental health and addictions fields;
- **gentle disruption of the dominant messages** of gender equality, and introducing the lens of gender inequity to frame young women's experiences;
- **acknowledgment and exploration** of issues of structural violence; and
- **an anti-oppressive, intersectional feminist framework**

UNDERLYING APPROACHES

Girls Speak Out groups are based on the realities of young women's experiences, which include current and previous experiences of abuse, oppression, and lack of power and autonomy. Six underlying approaches inform the program and help ensure that young women are supported. These approaches work against the danger of replicating harmful experiences in group interactions. These approaches are: feminist, girl, and women-centered;[41, 42] violence and trauma informed;[2, 43] intersectional approach;[44, 45] harm reduction and safety first approach;[46, 47] low barrier approach;[48] integrated approach.[49] These principles and approaches help groups acknowledge the realities of young women's lives and how best to help girls and young women meet their needs.

FEMINIST, GIRL- AND WOMAN-CENTRED APPROACH

"I just like knowing that there is other people out there dealing with the same stuff that you're dealing with, so it's kinda nice to have other people around you that can support you and just be there for you".

GSO support groups are rooted in the understanding that systemic gender inequality exists and carries concrete implications for young women, including vulnerability to abuse and limitations in escaping it and securing safety and well-being. As such, a feminist girl- and woman-centered approach is employed in the GSO groups.

Because feminism has always been guided by the belief that girls and women know their own reality best, as practitioners we must listen carefully to how girls and women describe their experiences, insights, needs and the context of their lives. We have an obligation to ensure that girls and women can tell us their stories in their own words and language. This starts with truly understanding young women's unique experiences and needs, and building our services around them and in consultation with them, rather than expecting young women to fit their complex lives into our restrictive mandates, narrow service criteria and rules. A feminist philosophy holds that we trust that young women are doing their best, and want the best for themselves and their families. They are working hard, often with little support. They are worthy and deserving of our support.

An important component of feminist, girl- and women-centred practice is not to assume that we know what is best for a young woman, or involve anyone in her situation without her explicit voluntary consent. Particularly important is that we thoroughly explain to young women our legal limits with respect to confidentiality and describe how they will be included in any reporting process so that they can choose what they are comfortable disclosing and in what context. If young women share information that you are legally obligated to report, ensure that the young woman is involved and directing this process as much as possible.

Ensuring a feminist, girl- and women-centred approach in the group setting

In this approach, we always:

- acknowledge young women's right to live free of violence and oppression;
- believe their experiences, feelings and needs;

- appreciate and respect their strengths;
- let girls' and young women's expertise about their lives and relationships guide the services we offer;
- respect decisions about staying or leaving a relationship (there is no agenda to have young women leave their relationships);
- validate conflicting emotions concerning their abuser(s);
- ensure that group interactions never replicate or echo power dynamics of abusive relationships, avoiding all oppression, coercion and control (e.g., avoiding giving advice, putting interventions in place, or offering solutions without dialogue and explicit consent); and
- aim to reduce experiences and feelings of isolation, responsibility, shame and blame by making space for young women to share her experiences with others.

VIOLENCE- AND TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

Violence- and trauma-informed practice draws attention to the high rates of violence against young women and girls, and places a priority on the safety concerns and impacts of abuse for young women. Service providers working from this principle recognize the harms of the abuse young women have been through, and are aware that these experiences often have a significant impact on young women's thoughts, feelings, behaviours, relationships, and coping strategies. Group facilitators should also remember that some young women are still experiencing abuse, and should consider these risks when supporting young women.

"I definitely did feel bad sometimes when we had to bring up the darker stuff, but then in the long run — like, lately I've been thinking more positively. Like it's been 6 months since I've hurt myself, it's been at least 8 months, maybe longer, since I've used drugs. I'm finally back in school... Like now I'm thinking about the good side of stuff. Whereas before, I was always just down on myself. Like 'you can't do this, you can't do that', 'you're always doing this'... And now it's just like, I think about the good side to everything. So I definitely think it did help, even though it did bring up those bad feelings".

Many young women do not tell anyone about their experiences of abuse, so it is important that our 'special services' or 'more sensitive approaches' are not only reserved for young women who disclose abuse. Instead we should ensure that our approach is safe, comfortable and adapted for all young women, especially those who have been affected by abuse.

The key to violence- and trauma-informed practice is a strong awareness of power dynamics. Power and control must remain in the hands of young women as much as possible. Since young women will have had experiences of being controlled and oppressed, it is important that we work to place control back in their hands, and prioritize their safety. At the same time, girls depend on the facilitator to create a safe space and lead the process, so it is important to acknowledge your role and be transparent about your power.

Violence- and trauma-informed practice in the group setting means that as facilitators we:

- change practices and settings to take the burden off young women to disclose abuse. All services should feel safe and respectful in order to help counter the negative effects of young women's experiences of abuse;
- ensure that interactions with all young women are informed by the awareness that they have experienced abuse;
- refrain from making assumptions about the forms of abuse a young woman has experienced or what the impacts of those experiences are;
- recognize that impacts of abuse can appear to be 'problems' within the young woman—our responsibility is to help her reframe these experiences as impacts rather than individual deficits;
- integrate young women's safety into all aspects of service delivery (i.e., do not assume that young women have autonomy and choice in their lives);
- ensure that control remains in the hands of the young woman as much as possible (i.e., explicit consent for everything, assume young women have knowledge and expertise about their lives and bodies, etc.);
- recognize young women's safety strategies (i.e., recognize substance use as a safety/coping strategy);
- acknowledge that young women know what will be safest for them, and question the safety of our own suggestions and approaches; and
- appreciate that young women may not be able to choose to leave a partner or stop using substances, and that these may be harm reduction strategies.

INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

In GSO we recognize that young women have a number of different roles and identities, and that they experience various forms of oppression that can overlap or intersect. From this perspective, we can see that all components of young women's identities and experiences have shaped, restricted and influenced their lives, including experiences of violence, power and privilege, and multiple forms of systemic oppression.

Young women in the groups will each have different amounts of power and will be marginalized in different ways. These factors will have affected, and will continue to affect their treatment by service providers and peers, as well as their sense of safety and belonging in group environments. Facilitators can help by considering participants' various social positions, roles and identities, and how these might shape the power dynamics and safety of the group.

To maintain an intersectional approach within the group setting:

- be sensitive to the fact that young women have a number of different roles and identities, and that they have experiences of various forms of oppression that can intersect;
- recognize and address the fact that young women's experiences of violence are often rooted in structural violence, such as gender inequity, poverty, racism, colonialism, heterosexism, etc.;

- try to use examples and resources that portray a wide range of experiences and identities in group so that young women are able to see themselves and their experiences reflected in the group content and messages.

"Getting to know people and stuff like that, getting to know that they all have a story and stuff like that. It makes me look at people even outside of this group differently, like at my school. Like, I just look at people and I'm like 'you know, I bet you're pretty interesting.' [...] It's kind of like realizing that people aren't just like who they appear to be and what gossip says they are. Like they all have their stories and you can't really make a snap judgment on anyone".

HARM REDUCTION AND SAFETY FIRST APPROACH

Girls Speak Out groups recognize the need for girls to have a safe place that counters the dynamics of abuse. While being part of a support group can be healing, it can also be emotional and overwhelming. Young women must not be pressured to participate or disclose more than they are willing to.

It is also important that, in addition to promoting harm reduction strategies for young women who are using substances or are in unsafe situations, facilitators acknowledge and respect that substance use may itself be a harm reduction strategy. Abusers may introduce young women to alcohol or drug use to increase their dependence and to control their behaviour. Some young women use substances to placate abusive partners and create temporary safety; others use substances to numb or escape the emotional and physical impacts of violence. Since the vast majority of young women who use substances have current experience with and/or histories of abuse, in Girls Speak Out we recognize that substance use can be a safety or coping strategy, and that violence or abuse in a young woman's life may need to be addressed before a coping mechanism can be reduced or withdrawn. Our primary concern for the young woman is her safety and providing helpful support. She may decide to reduce her use of substances, but she may not.

Harm reduction strategies must also go beyond the conventional understanding of 'safer substance use' and 'safer sex.' We must recognize and work to reduce the systemic harms that young women face, like the lack of safe and secure housing; inadequate and insecure food supply, which can lead to food-seeking, hunger and health concerns; harms emanating from services that are not gender and violence- and trauma-informed; and risks related to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation. Being an advocate for systemic change can help remove some of the harms that girls and young women face.

Key tenets of harm reduction and safety first within the group setting:

- understand that young women do not have to abstain from substance use in order to attend group;
- when developing safety and support plans, begin with the assumption that young women already have many safety strategies in place, and that your role is to affirm her plans and possibly make some additional suggestions;
- focus on whether a young woman is getting the support she needs, not on whether or not she is using;

- do not view abstinence from substances as the final goal or even the 'ideal' goal, although, of course, young women should have this option available to them if they identify this as a goal;
- create as much safety within the group setting as possible so that young women can be fully in charge of whether they speak, and how much they share;
- never pressure young women to participate or disclose more than they are willing to;
- know that the primary concern is always the young woman's safety and focus on reducing all harms wherever they exist in the young women's lives;
- advocate for, and assist young women in getting their needs met (e.g., find housing, receive income support) and reducing systemic harms; and
- avoid using language that praises sobriety or being 'clean,' as this may negatively impact other young women in the group (e.g., feel 'unclean').

LOW-BARRIER APPROACH

A low-barrier approach recognizes how difficult it is for young women to access support for experiences of violence, substance use and mental health concerns. Getting support takes an incredible amount of courage. Given the many logistical and systemic barriers they face in this process, it also takes an incredible amount of persistence.

Girls Speak Out groups are designed to make groups as accessible and safe for young women as possible. It is important to start by recognizing that anyone who self-identifies as a young woman and feels that the group is relevant to them should be welcome. Given the absence of safe spaces and relevant services for trans and queer women, it is especially important to welcome all young women into group.

There is no expectation that young women need to be sober or free of mental health conditions to participate in group; they just need to be able to be in a group setting. If young women come to group and nap, eat or sit quietly while others in the group interact, we are thankful that they are getting something from the experience, and that they are safe, fed and rested when they leave.

Young women report encounters with service providers who have explicit or implicit expectations of outcomes and/or changes in behaviour. In GSO groups it is important that participants see your hope for them, but without expectations or judgments attached.

"I think also reminders that you don't have to go and give your entire self. You can go and sit there quietly, and you can leave early, you can come in late, if you're not comfortable, you can be uncomfortable and you can step out, or you can say that you're uncomfortable. And just a reminder that also, you're contributing. [...] as well as saying that it's not all serious all the time. It's not always going to be heavy. There are going to be fun things. There will be laughs".

Elements of a low-barrier approach within the group setting:

- Young women can self-refer. They do not have to prove abuse or have a clinical diagnosis (nor will they be turned away from the group if they do have a clinical diagnosis);

- The process for engaging young women in group is minimal. There is no assessment or intake process. Facilitators simply meet with women to discuss hopes and needs for support. (see Week One);
- Young women are not required to abstain from using substances or alcohol to participate in the group;
- Young women can arrive late, leave early or miss weeks without consequence, recognizing that while support is valuable, they may be leading complex and chaotic lives;
- Assistance with transportation and childcare are available, and substantial food and drinks are provided;
- It is not necessary for young women to participate in the group discussion and exercises. Silent participation is still participation;
- Young women can always 'pass' on an invitation to participate and leave when they need to. If a young woman needs to leave, facilitators ensure that she has safe transportation and a safety plan;
- If a young woman is having trouble during a session, facilitators can privately ask her what she needs (e.g., food, sleep, safe housing) and do their best to help meet that need.

INTEGRATED APPROACH

GSO aims to address the fact that, while young women's experiences of violence, substance use and mental health concerns are often intricately linked, they are often required to separate their issues or address one before the other in order to access services. Girls Speak Out groups provide an integrated approach that meets young women where they are at, and provides support for the many interconnected challenges they experience.

Using an integrated approach within the group setting, co-facilitators should:

- recognize and support young women's experiences of violence as these are linked to their mental health and substance use, as well as to social inequities, such as poverty, homelessness and housing insecurity;
- build relationships with providers from mental health and addictions, anti-violence, youth and other sectors to better ensure that all services are reflecting girls and young women's need for integrated service approaches;
- bring complementary skills and backgrounds to their role, ideally, with one facilitator coming from the anti-violence sector, and one from the youth mental health and addictions sector.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF FACILITATING GIRLS SPEAK OUT SUPPORT GROUPS

As facilitators whose work it is to support young women with experiences of abuse, marginalization, exploitation and oppression you have an incredibly important responsibility. While planning and facilitating a Girls Speak Out group, there are seven guiding principles to keep in mind. First you must create a safe space, then understand the complexities of girl and youth culture, engage and support young women, foster supportive and trusting relationships, be flexible and adjust to the group's comfort and needs, support girls who are experiencing multiple oppressions and challenges, and finally, communicate your availability between groups.

CREATE A SAFE SPACE

As facilitators, you have the considerable responsibility of creating a safe space and demonstrating your trustworthiness, credibility and connection with young women. This means that you must:

- **Demonstrate trustworthiness.** Give girls lots of information and choices. Ask for informed consent for all actions along the way. Ensure that young women never feel pressured to talk or participate in activities and are respected for their experiences and/or coping strategies.
- **Take time to acknowledge young women's concerns about coming to a group.** They may be worried about being in a group, having to share their experiences, feeling judged by other girls, and/or not trusting adults with their experiences.
- **Ensure that young women are in control of their experiences and information.** They can share as much or as little about themselves and/or about how they are feeling as they want. They can 'pass' on any invitation to talk or share.
- **Balance relationship building with delivering module content.** Both relationships and content are essential ingredients for the support groups. It can be challenging to find the balance between building and maintaining trust in relationships and delivering content and key messages.
- **Freely share information.** The experiences of other young women, your professional expertise, your personal experiences, and what you are learning in this curriculum can all help establish commonalties and build trust.
- **Set the tone for the group.** Show respect, mutuality, equality and care in your relationships with one another as co-facilitators. Spend time talking about how to balance your roles and model equality.
- **Carefully balance confidentiality and reporting responsibilities.** Some participants might share information that requires child welfare involvement. Ensure that girls are aware ahead of time of how you will respond and that you have a plan for when this happens (e.g., obtaining consent and including the young woman in the action(s) taken).
- **Learn about crisis services and other safe places** before young women request those kinds of supports. Provide resources and lists of additional relevant services.

UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEXITIES OF GIRL AND YOUTH CULTURE

The Girls Speak Out group model is designed to be co-facilitated by women from the anti-violence sector and the mental health and addictions sector. More importantly, the young women that we spoke to strongly emphasized that facilitators should be relatively young and/or be very involved with, and have a strong understanding of, youth and girl culture.

ENGAGE AND SUPPORT YOUNG WOMEN

Engaging young women with experiences of gender-based violence and the health and social impacts of abuse (e.g., substance use, mental health issues, poverty and homelessness) can be a challenge, and there is no step-by-step guide for how to do this. Many young women have reservations and concerns about coming to group for the first time. They may have had previous experiences of being pressured to talk in an unsafe environment, they may feel nervous or apprehensive about who else will be there and fitting into the group, or they may assume that the group will be uninteresting or irrelevant. Additionally, many marginalized young women may lack stable housing, adequate food, safety, etc., and may have busy, unpredictable and often precarious lives. Finding the time and stability to regularly attend a group can be a challenge. Acknowledging these concerns and helping to mitigate these barriers is part of engagement, as it helps young women attend group as often as possible.

Our experience in the pilot phase of Girls Speak Out was that young women were far more likely to attend a Girls Speak Out group when they already had positive relationships with at least one of the facilitators. Engaging young women without existing relationships is a challenge, and facilitators may need to find a way to develop relationships with young women first in a safe setting (for example, a craft group, yoga drop-in, or informal get-together, and including food, screening films or holding workshops in schools). If this is not possible (and even when it is), the best strategy may be to advertise the group through people who do have existing relationships with young women. Once the group has run once or twice, word of mouth from GSO participants is also very effective in engaging other young women to participate.

- Try offering a craft group, yoga drop-in, informal get together, pizza party, film screening or workshop in schools to engage girls and young women prior to beginning a Girls Speak Out group.
- Young women should ideally have an existing positive relationship with one of the facilitators.
- Offer group as an option to young women, but do not pressure young women to attend.
- Remind young women that they have so much to contribute to groups. They have skills and life lessons to offer others.
- Reassure young women that it's okay and normal to be apprehensive.
- Ask young women about their perceptions/ideas of support groups. Their perceptions of groups may be influenced by reality TV support groups, which may not be accurate.
- Assure young women that they don't have to give their entire self in group — it is okay not to share all their stories/experiences and to not participate very much.
- Let young women know that it is not all serious all the time. There will be lots of fun, friendship and laughter!!

FOSTER SUPPORTIVE AND TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS

> *For someone who has been abused... experiencing equality, safety, mutuality and empowerment are essential to the process of healing and reclaiming one's sense of self and place in the world.* — Dr. Carole Washaw [50]

One of the most important objectives of the Girls Speak Out groups is to help young women build supportive, trusting and safe relationships with other young women and with service providers. No guide or content can guarantee that those relationships are built. Rather, the success of many of the activities and recommendations in this guide depends on these positive and safe relationships being in place.

Earn trust. It is up to you to help create a warm, welcoming and safe environment and respectful relationships with young women, and to foster supportive relationships between young women. Without those relationships, it may feel too risky for young women to comfortably participate in many of the activities. Asking them to participate in a setting and in activities before they feel comfortable may deter or harm young women by echoing other experiences where they did not have the power or control to say no. You must ensure that young women do not feel pressured to participate in ways that are not safe for them. Remember, **silent participation in a group is still participation**. Affirm for young women that their presence in the group is valuable, no matter what their level of participation.

"The trust thing for the group is kinda like having a scale, where you put a story onto it, and it's kind of tilted into your area, but then somebody else puts it on [their story] and it's like equal ground. Where you both kinda understand what's going on and it's equal scale, rather than if you're just sharing everything and no one has said a word".

BE FLEXIBLE AND ADJUST TO THE GROUP'S COMFORT AND NEEDS

This guide and material were developed to help service providers facilitate Girls Speak Out support groups. However, this guide is just that — a guide. Some days, girls may need to spend a lot of time on check-in, or some activities might not resonate with girls unless you explain them or alter them to be more in tune with their life experiences. As you get to know your participants, you will likely make adjustments to the group based on the needs, interests, experiences and cultures of the young women.

SUPPORT GIRLS WHO ARE EXPERIENCING MULTIPLE OPPRESSIONS AND CHALLENGES

It is important that facilitators are skilled and experienced in working with vulnerable young women experiencing multiple challenges and oppressions. While the group structure and materials aim to create safety for young women, the subject matter is heavy, and talking about abuse is difficult and can bring up many emotions. Facilitators must be comfortable supporting young women through this process and available, in some capacity, between group sessions to offer support and advocacy if young women choose to access it.

"For me, the more I learned that the person I'm talking to isn't just who they appear to be — like they have an underlying story — the closer it helps me feel to them".

COMMUNICATE YOUR AVAILABILITY BETWEEN GROUPS

One facilitator (or both) must be available between groups for young women to connect with individually (ideally, for a total of 3 hours per week). Be clear with young women about who is available, when they are available and how they can be reached.

WEEKLY ROUTINE

We suggest providing a core set of materials and supplies every week to give participants something tactile to play with and/or tools to use to help express themselves. Provide what you can within your budget constraints. If you have materials, we suggest handing them out at the very beginning of each week. If you can provide journals to participants, explain they can keep and use the journals anytime, and that 'fiddling' or 'doodling' can be a positive way to manage in a new situation.

In addition, we suggest you prepare the following each week:

TO PREPARE FOR GROUP EACH WEEK:

- ☐ Make reminder phone calls or texts
- ☐ Set up room
- ☐ Review material from previous week and attach relevant flip chart paper to wall
- ☐ Prepare food, snacks and beverages
- ☐ Check condom and lube supply and have them available

  Materials:
  - Computer, projector, internet access
  - Candle (and matches) for centre of circle
  - Folders with each participant's handouts
  - Journals for each participant
  - Clay (i.e., Das, Sculpie or Femo) in a Ziploc for each participant
  - Flip chart
  - Flip chart paper
  - Kleenex
- ☐ Prepare Check-out word list on flip chart paper
- ☐ Prepare closing affirmation

CHECK-IN

Check-in is an opportunity for participants to share worries, experiences and/or successes of the past week, or just have a few minutes to vent and feel heard. Facilitators should also check-in. Until the group builds up some trust, check-in may be quick, with girls and young women sharing

little. However, as the weeks' progress it will likely become more comfortable and a highlight of group.

One facilitator leads the group through check-in after the group has gathered in a circle. Establish early on if the group is interested in lighting a candle to symbolize the establishment of the space as a safe and healing space and for grounding, celebration, reflection and renewal. Lighting a candle also can act as a ceremony at the beginning of each group in order to set the atmosphere. Facilitators are invited to make modifications and integrate meaningful local culture or customs into the opening, like songs and/or stories. Be aware that rituals can be re-harming for some young women, so be sure to have everyone's agreement prior to implementing such practices.

Remind participants that they can say as much or as little as they want about how they are doing. If facilitators choose, they can ask the group specific questions to get the conversation started: "how has your week been?" or "what is something that stands out for you from your past week — good or bad?" Check-in can also be an opportunity for participants to share a piece of artwork, writing or music that expresses how they are doing and what has been going on for them.

Once everyone has checked-in, briefly remind participants of what was discussed in group last week. This will allow anyone who was not able to attend to get a sense of what went on. It is also an opportunity for participants to share anything additional that came up during the week as the result of, or related to group discussions.

CHECK-OUT

Check-out is an opportunity for participants to process emotions that can rise to the surface along with other strong positive thoughts and feelings. Explain to participants it is normal in support groups to have many emotions. Some may feel happy or excited to finally feel connected. Others may feel overwhelmed with feelings that come up. Turn to the flip-chart pad with this prepared list of words and ask participants if they want to name what they are feeling. Make sure there is space on this page or on subsequent pages for the group to add to this list.

I feel...

☐ relieved	☐ misunderstood
☐ overloaded	☐ disconnected
☐ positive	☐ overwhelmed
☐ understood	☐ embarrassed
☐ numb	☐ connected
☐ connected	☐ sad
☐ proud	☐ worried
☐ hopeful	☐ angry
☐ lonely	☐ bored
☐ intimidated	☐ checked out

CLOSING

To close each group, invite each participant to find a comfortable position/chair, lie down on their back, close their eyes. One facilitator will read out the weekly positive affirmation/quote of personal strength to the group (see Examples of Affirmations and Rights in Week 10). The affirmation or quote can change each week. Participants can be encouraged to bring in their own examples of positive affirmation/quotes of personal strength or poetry they have written. Participants can volunteer to bring something the following week, or it can be left as an open invitation. Some participants might not feel comfortable doing this type of closing and can choose not to participate. Ensure that participants know that, as with all parts of group, closing is voluntary.

Remind participants which facilitator is available during the week for support, and provide contact information and hours of availability. Ask participants to try to call or text if they are unable to make group. In our experience, if a young woman does not show up and does not call to send her regrets, other participants in the group will be concerned about her safety.

Allow yourself some extra time after group as participants may not feel comfortable sharing in the group but may have questions or concerns they would like to ask you privately.

GROUP LOGISTICS

Ensure all participants are aware of the following practical logistics of the group:

- ☐ Facilitator names, contact information and days/hours of facilitator availability for extra support between groups.
- ☐ Food and drinks will be provided during group. Participants are welcome to bring their own food and drinks as well.
- ☐ There will be a break partway through the group every week. Participants are also welcome to take a break as needed at any point during group.
- ☐ Inform young women that you hope they will try to attend every week, but that you understand that this can be difficult. Remind participants that you are available to help them problem-solve barriers to attendance (childcare, transportation, partner interference, parking). Invite participants to discuss these barriers and challenges with you at any time. You might also suggest that other young women share these challenges and that getting ideas from the group could be helpful.
- ☐ If a participant knows she is going to miss group, ask her to please do her best to let one of the facilitators know, so that the facilitators know she is safe and supported. Let participants know that if they miss group, one of the facilitators would like to follow up via phone or text to check in and see how they are doing. Make sure this is okay and safe for them, and find out how (if) they prefer to be contacted.
- ☐ Ask young women their preference for communication (e.g., phone calls, texts, emails).
- ☐ If young women are actively using substances, encourage them to come for the support, food and safety of the group. Even if it is difficult to actively participate, there are benefits to attending group. Young women do NOT have to be sober to attend group.
- ☐ Identify location of bathrooms, exchange cell phone numbers, provide office phone numbers (if available), review public transportation routes and/or parking options.

BEFORE THE SUPPORT GROUP SESSIONS BEGIN

PRIOR TO THE FIRST MEETING

Prior to the first Girls Speak Out support group, facilitators should meet with prospective participants individually. Meet each young woman in a location she finds convenient and comfortable and invite them to bring a friend or support person with her.

The purposes of this initial meeting are:

- to introduce the tenets of the Girls Speak Out program;
- to review the general logistics and expectations for the weekly support groups;
- to review the Confidentiality Agreement and discuss its implications.

Facilitators can use the GSO Meeting Guide found at the end of this chapter to enable this conversation. However, we've heard from young women that they often prefer an informal, natural-feeling conversation over a structured meeting guide or formal intake procedure.

TENETS OF THE GIRLS SPEAK OUT PROGRAM

Facilitators should explain to potential participants that GSO groups are:

- an informal, safe, and non-judgmental opportunity for young women with similar experiences to come together and talk about violence against girls and women, its impacts, and how young women have coped with these experiences; and
- opportunities for connection, healing and reframing messages young women may have encountered in relation to their experiences of violence.

Facilitators should explain the basic tenets of the GSO support group experience. First, there is no pressure or requirement for young women to share their own experiences. Silent participation is still participation. Second, if a young woman is actively using substances, she will be encouraged to come for the support, food and safety of the group. Even if it is difficult to actively participate, there are benefits to attending group. Young women do NOT have to be sober to attend group.

PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS

Facilitators should recognize that each young woman will bring her own expectations of the group setting to the first few sessions. It is important to establish how each participant can help to keep themselves and others safe (physically, mentally and emotionally) while participating in group, and how facilitators can support them.

- Share your hope that the young woman will try to attend every week, but that you understand that this can be difficult. Explain that you are available to help them problem-solve barriers to attendance (childcare, transportation, partner interference, parking). Encourage a discussion about any barriers and/or challenges to participating. You might share that other young women will also experience similar challenges and that a support group environment could be helpful overcoming or managing the challenges.
- Explain the importance of the young woman communicating if she is going to miss group.

Explain that her safety is important to you and providing support beyond the weekly support group times is part of being involved in the group. Let participants know that if they miss group, one of the facilitators would like to follow up via phone or text to check in and see how they are doing. Make sure this is okay and safe for them, and find out if and how they are willing to be contacted.

- Discuss how sharing or hearing others' experiences of violence and abuse can be very helpful but may sometimes also bring on feelings of being overwhelmed, sad, anxious, wanting to use drugs or alcohol, or to self-harm. Let them know that all of these responses are totally understandable and that you are there to help support them and, if they are interested, to explore alternate coping strategies.
- Ask young women if they have strategies that they might be able to use if they are feeling any of these strong emotions or desire to use or to self-harm when they don't want to. Validate their strategies, and if they seem open to further discussion, ask if they would like to explore some additional options. If it feels appropriate, you can give young women the Making a Support Plan handout to take with them, which can help them think ahead about some strategies for coping before they start attending group, and which could be a resource for them throughout the 13 weeks.
- Let young women know that, as a group, you will revisit this conversation about coping strategies each week. Assure the young woman that part of your job as a facilitator is to help make sure they feel comfortable and that they have someone to talk to between groups when needed.

It is common for young women who are currently involved with an abusive partner to be interrogated about where they are when they are attending group. Discuss with program participants whether this is a concern for them and, if they would like, help them come up with a plan for what they will say to that person. Remind her that if she feels safe doing so, she can choose not to tell the abuser where she is going (e.g., she can say she is going to yoga class and bring her yoga mat with her).

PROGRAM LOGISTICS

It is helpful prior to the support group to review the program logistics to help prospective participants feel safe and confident about what to expect at sessions and to understand what they can expect from the GSO program.

- The group is 13 weeks long and each session runs approximately 2 1/2 hours. Provide the location and start and end time.
- Provide facilitator names, contact information and days/hours of facilitator availability for extra support between groups.
- Remind program participants that food and drinks will be provided during group. Participants are welcome to bring their own food and drinks as well.
- There will be a break partway through the group every week. Participants are also welcome to take a break as needed at any point during group.

- Ask young women their preference for communication (e.g., phone calls, texts, emails).
- Girls Speak Out groups will cover diverse topics using a variety of methods, including group discussions, film, YouTube videos and art activities.

CONFIDENTIALITY ISSUES

Before the support groups start, it is important that you, as a facilitator, ensure the young women understand what has been put in place to assist them to feel safe. Confidentiality is extremely important in order for participants to share openly.

It is important that facilitators commit to keep anything that is shared in group confidential and ask all young women to agree to do the same. Facilitators should understand that girls and young women starting the group will have different feelings about the experience. Some will feel unsure and anxious and others will feel comfortable and safe. For example, one participant in the pilot groups said:

"I definitely had second thoughts about joining the group in the beginning. I was just like 'I don't know who's gonna be there,' 'I don't know if they're gonna judge me.' And like, I've been through so much stuff in my life, I don't know if anybody else could handle that".

Discuss that there are limits to confidentiality, however, and your duty to report in certain circumstances.

Use the Confidentiality Agreement to guide your discussion on confidentiality with each young woman. Each individual should receive a copy of the Confidentiality Agreement at your initial one on one meeting to keep.

Validate the fact that, particularly for those young women under 19, and for those who have children, sharing experiences can be a 'Catch 22' situation. On the one hand they are encouraged to break the silence about experiences of abuse, but if they do, in certain situations, the law requires reporting to child protection services. Make Duty to Report clear.

DUTY TO REPORT

Explain that the duty to report abuse involving a child to a child protection worker means that you, as the facilitator, must act on information about the following:

- a participant or another person seems at risk of harming herself or another in a life-threatening manner, or
- a participant shares that a child is being abused or neglected, or
- a participant under the age of 19 shares that she is being abused by an adult.

Should the duty to report arise, facilitators should always talk to the young woman before taking any action, and facilitators can help the young women make the call themselves if they want to disclose the abuse.

Let participants know that you will respect their choice to share what they feel comfortable with at any given time. In cases where there is a legal requirement to contact child welfare services, the mother or another family member will be invited to make the call herself, and the facilitator can be present to support her during the call, ensuring that she has some support and control in the reporting process. Answer any questions or concerns and let the young woman know that you will be reminding everyone of the limits to confidentiality throughout the 13-week support group.

Should you feel that a situation you learn about warrants reporting, you can call 1-800-663-9122 at any time, day or night, in BC or visit http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/public-safety/protecting-children/childabusepreventionhandbook_serviceprovider.pdf for more information. However, if a girl is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1 or your local police to intervene.

WRAP-UP

Ask the prospective program participant the following questions to close your meeting:

- Do you have any questions for me/us?
- Is there anything specific that you hope to get out of being in this group?
- Is there anything that you are nervous or worried about, related to being in this group?
- Would you like any help with transportation to get to group and/or with childcare?
- Is there anything else you would like me/us to know about you?

Thank the young woman for meeting with you and for her interest in the group. Let her know you look forward to seeing her at the first session.

Confirm date/time: _____

Confirm location: _____

HANDOUTS TO SHARE WITH PROSPECTIVE PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

- ☐ Girls Speak Out Meeting Guide
- ☐ Making a Support Plan
- ☐ Girls Speak Out Support Group Overview
- ☐ Confidentiality Agreement

Girls Speak Out Meeting Guide

Girls Speak Out groups are an opportunity for girls and young women to meet up in an informal, safe and non-judgmental environment and talk about violence and its impacts on young women. Participants are welcome to share as much as they want about their experiences, but there is no requirement to talk about your own experiences of abuse if you are not comfortable doing so.

WHO CAN ATTEND:

Anyone who self-identifies as a girl or young woman between the ages of 16 and 24, and who believes she will benefit from attending the group is welcome to attend.

WHAT TO EXPECT:

You are invited to come to group for the full 13 weeks and take part by listening to others and sharing your own perspectives, learnings and experiences if you want to do so. It is totally fine for you to come to group and not share.

Each week there will be lots of time to talk or vent about things that are going on in your life, as well as time to talk about the impacts of abuse, coping strategies, and maybe new ways of understanding your experiences. We spend some time looking at media (like film and YouTube clips) and talking about how media influences our society, and we use some art and other activities throughout group as well. Overall, we focus on the strengths and positive characteristics of girls and young women.

Snacks will be provided every week.

This is a low-barrier group, which means we are trying to make it a place where anyone who wants to attend is able to come, especially girls and young women who might have mental health concerns and who are using (or have used) drugs or alcohol. If you are currently using substances (drugs, alcohol, etc.), we ask that you do your best to come to group able to manage in the group environment. (Note this does not necessarily mean girls and young women have to be sober.) We ask that you be respectful of other participants' differences, needs, and concerns.

If you know you are going to miss group, please try to let one of the facilitators know. If you do miss group, one of the facilitators will follow up with you via phone or text to check in and see how you are doing. If you are having challenges coming to group or while in group, the facilitators can problem-solve with you (such as around transportation and childcare — subsidies are available).

As facilitators our role is to help make group feel comfortable and non-judgmental, and to help guide you through some activities and new ideas.

Safety and support: We are also here to support you if anything that you share or hear, or anything that we do in group, impacts you negatively. This is okay and totally understandable. It is hard to

talk about and hear about others' personal experiences of abuse. Please let us know if there is something that we can do to help you. If you are interested, we can also help you get connected to other people who can support you.

There might also be other things that you can do for yourself if you feel stressed or unsafe while you are in the group or afterwards. Are there things that you do or can think of that might be useful for you in these situations? (Examples might include leaving the room for a few minutes to take some deep breaths or to think about some of the positive benefits of healing; asking one of the facilitators to talk; leaving for the evening; or writing down/drawing your thoughts.)

If you are currently involved with an abusive person, he or she might interrogate you about where you are when you are at group. We usually suggest that people don't tell their abusers about the support group.

If this is a concern for you, let's talk about some ideas for what (if anything) to tell the abuser about the group or where you are during group. (Examples might include saying you are at a class, with a friend, at yoga, or getting mental health support, etc.) Each young woman should think about her own situation and decide what is best for her.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality is one of the most important components of the group. As facilitators we commit to keeping everything that is discussed in group confidential, and we ask that all participants do the same. However, there are a few specific cases where, legally, we are required to make a report to Child Protection Services.

Girls Speak Out Confidentiality Agreement

Confidentiality is one of the most important rights that girls and women seeking group support have. Information revealed by you during group sessions and related conversations will be kept strictly confidential by facilitators and will not be revealed to any other person without your permission.

There are two exceptions to this:

1. The facilitators of the group, _____ and _____, may consult with other colleagues in order to gain assistance and insight in providing helpful, relevant support. Facilitators will do this anonymously — that is, without revealing any information that could identify you, unless they get your permission to reveal personal or identifying information.
2. There are also a few circumstances in which, according to the law, group facilitators are required to reveal information obtained during group sessions or related conversations to other persons or agencies. These situations include:
   - Children in need of protection:
     - if facilitators have reasonable cause to believe that a child is being abused or neglected, or
     - if a participant under the age of 19 shares that she is being abused by an adult.
   - Duty to report if facilitators have reasonable cause to believe that a participant or another person is at risk of harming herself or another in a way that would be life-threatening.
   - Legal proceedings: if facilitators are asked to give evidence upon a court order or are subpoenaed.

If these concerns should arise, facilitators will speak with you privately about their concerns. No action will be taken without your full knowledge. Before any action is taken you will be invited to make the call to child protective services yourself or to be present when the call is made.

_____

Signature

_____

Date

_____

Girls Speak Out Support Plan Guide*

Acknowledging our experiences of violence and their impact on our lives takes strength and is a sign of courage. Sometimes sharing our stories and hearing those of others can be overwhelming. This handout helps you to think about ways you can support yourself through this process. It also helps you think about whom else may be able to support you while you are attending group.

What are some signs that you are feeling very overwhelmed, anxious and/or might use substances or self-harm when you hadn't planned to?

- ☐ Racing thoughts?
- ☐ Overwhelming hopelessness or sadness?
- ☐ Overwhelming anger?
- ☐ Feeling restless or agitated?
- ☐ Being preoccupied with thoughts of using, drinking or cutting?
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

While it can be healing and empowering to share stories and hear those of others, at times it also might make some people feel upset, overwhelmed, anxious, like they want to use when they hadn't planned to, or like they are going into a crisis. What can you do if you feel stressed or unsafe while you are in the group?

- ☐ Leave the room for a few minutes? (When out of the room it might help to take some deep breaths; think about some positive benefits of healing.)
- ☐ Ask one of the facilitators to talk?
- ☐ Leave for that evening? (Please try to check in with one of the facilitators so we know you will be okay.)
- ☐ Write down (or draw a picture about) your thoughts?
- ☐ _____

Some participants might find it helpful to have a plan for what they are going to do when they leave the group each week, especially if you are feeling overwhelmed or worried about feeling like using when you hadn't planned to, or that you are unable to manage your mental health symptoms. What might you do when you leave the group to help you feel safer?

- ☐ Always leave the group with a friend? (Some participants might want to think about having a "buddy system" for themselves.)
- ☐ Go for a coffee?
- ☐ Make an appointment to be somewhere directly after the group is over?

- ☐ Take a few minutes to write down (or draw) your thoughts?
- ☐ Check out individually with a group facilitator?
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

You might find it helpful to have a plan for what you are going to do throughout the week, between groups. What might you do during the week to get additional support if you need it? Are there people in your life that you can set up a plan with in case you are feeling overwhelmed or in need of some additional support?

- ☐ Call the facilitator who is available during the week?
- ☐ Connect with another service provider you like and feel comfortable with?
- ☐ Make a plan to get support from a peer?
- ☐ Call VictimLink, a 24-hour/ toll-free support and crisis line: 1-800-563-0808 or text 604-836-6381
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

For young women who are still involved with their abusers: that person may interrogate you about where you were today. As abusers may try to sabotage your efforts to get support, we suggest that you do not tell the abuser that you are in a support group. You may want to take a moment to think about what you will tell them about the group or where you were today.

- ☐ Can you talk to one of the facilitators to create a bit of a 'script' about where you were or what you were doing?
- ☐ Can you tell your partner you were at a class, with a friend, at yoga, or getting mental health support, etc.?
- ☐ Think about your own situation and decide what is best for you.
- ☐ _____

*Adapted with permission from A. Salmon, D. Badry, D. Rutman, S. Payne, D. Clifford, S. Lockhart, and M. Van Bibber (n.d.), Healing Ourselves: Mothers recovering from grief and loss in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.



Girls Speak Out Program Curriculum

Week One	Creating a Welcoming and Safe Space Together
Week Two	Exploring Power in the Media
Week Three	Understanding Power and Control in Relationships
Week Four	Introducing the Cycle of Violence
Week Five	Identifying Sources of Power and Protection
Week Six	Exploring the Impacts of Violence
Week Seven	Exploring Coping Strategies
Week Eight	Reframing the Problem – Part 1
Week Nine	Reframing the Problem – Part 2
Week Ten	Developing Media Literacy
Week Eleven	Finding My Voice
Week Twelve	Finding Hope
Week Thirteen	Celebrating the Journey



WEEK ONE

Creating a Welcoming and Safe Space Together

HANDOUTS

A Letter from Katie

Interviewing a Star

WEEK ONE

Creating a Welcoming and Safe Space Together

OBJECTIVES FOR FACILITATORS

1. To create and foster a safe and welcoming space.
2. To review confidentiality.
3. To begin building relationships with young women.
4. To create guidelines the group would like to respect without developing 'rules' for participating that might exclude young women.
5. To begin building relationships between facilitators and participants and to come together as a group.

OBJECTIVES FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. To meet other young women who will participate in the Girls Speak Out support group.
2. To review the terms of confidentiality for the group.
3. To begin to share their hopes and fears about participating in the Girls Speak Out group.

TO PREPARE

Handouts

A Letter from Katie
Interviewing a Star

CORE ACTIVITIES

1. Fears and Hopes
2. A Letter from Katie
3. Getting to Know Each Other
    a. Art Collage
    b. Interviewing a Star
    c. Move Your Butt

GROUP OPENING

Begin the first session by checking in, lighting a candle, and setting the stage to create a welcoming, safe space for participants. Beginning the group with a ritual like lighting a candle as facilitators introduce themselves can symbolize many things, including setting an intention for a safe and healing space, grounding, celebration, reflection and renewal. Participants in the Girls Speak Out pilot groups found it important to light a candle or have some sort of short ceremony at the beginning of each group in order to set the atmosphere. Facilitators are invited to make modifications and integrate meaningful local culture or customs into the opening like songs and/or stories. Be aware the rituals can be re-harming for some young women, so be sure to have everyone's agreement prior to implementing such practices.

Once the opening of group is complete, facilitators should participants to briefly introduce themselves, including their name and, if they feel comfortable, one simple fact about themselves. Let participants know 'getting to know you' activities are planned for subsequent weeks. Review the GSO expectations and tenets covered with individuals prior to the first session to ensure everyone is in agreement about how the support group will work. Ensure young women understand they do not have to share anything about themselves if they choose not to.

REVIEW CONFIDENTIALITY GUIDELINES

Although the confidentiality agreement and duty to report is reviewed in details prior to the support group starting, it is important to review it briefly at the start of the first session to ensure everyone is on the same page. Review that:

1. Facilitators should commit openly to the group that they will keep anything that is shared in group confidential, and ask all young women to agree to do the same. Repeat for the benefit of the young girls to hear as a collective that confidentiality is extremely important in order for participants to feel free to share openly. Have the duty to report written somewhere for all to see so the terms of confidentiality are known and understood. Explain to the girls that it is fine for each person to have different feelings about participating in the support group, and fine if some feel unsure and or anxious and others feel comfortable and safe.

"Everybody is so nice and open, because everybody knows that everybody's gone through something. And so it's almost like, since we all have been there, we're never going to turn on each other or have somebody spread it around or something, it's really like — it makes you feel more open because you know you can trust everybody, because they have to trust you too, you know"?

SETTING THE STAGE

The first night of sharing requires extra-special attention and care. It is normal for young women to be nervous. Focus on ensuring that they feel welcomed and not overwhelmed with too much information.

Repeat the check in and opening group routine established in week one. Taking time to appropriately

create the setting each week is an important way to foster the group as a safe and welcoming space.

"Another thing that I think helped me feel comfortable is the atmosphere and the environment. So having good food to eat, and having just a little ceremony at the beginning where we light a little candle, and we have those things that make it a little more homey and so we can feel more comfortable. I think that's really helpful".

Take time to acknowledge young women's courage and that their fears are normal. Reiterate that the group is open to and welcomes young women with a range of identities and backgrounds, and that it strives to be a respectful and welcoming space for everyone. Share with participants that you are aware of the judgment and numerous barriers they may have faced in the past and that, together, you can create a non-judgmental space. This can help them feel comfortable enough to decide to share their experiences without fear that they will be judged or excluded from the group.

"I felt pretty uncomfortable at first coming to group, didn't really know what to expect or who was gonna be here, so I was kinda walking just like on eggshells at first, kinda nervous".

"I had a lot of misconceptions about people I was going to group with and I was like, kinda nervous, like "I don't really know if I'm gonna fit in" and stuff like that".

Journals, clay or other craft supplies give young women something tactile to play with and/or tools to use to help express themselves. Provide what you can within your budget constraints. If you have materials, we suggest handing them out at the very beginning of group. Explain to young women that these are for them to keep and use anytime, and that 'fiddling' or 'doodling' with these things can sometimes be a positive way to manage in a new situation.

1. FEARS AND HOPES ACTIVITY

The Fears and Hopes Activity is an opportunity for the group to discuss their fears and hopes for the group in an anonymous way. This activity can help young women recognize that they are not alone in feeling nervous or uncomfortable about being at group. It can also help them to connect with others and start to feel like part of the group.

Past GSO participants shared how they felt about group when they first started attending. If young women seem to be having difficulty with this, you may want to share these, however, it may be more empowering for young women and may make it easier to connect with each other if they are able to identify their own fears and hopes without prompts.

1. Hand out several sticky notes to each participant and invite them to write down:
    a. what they are nervous or worried about regarding being in group; and
    b. what their hopes for group are – i.e., what they hope it will be like, what they want to get out of it, and/or what they want to accomplish.
    c. Facilitators are also encouraged to write down their own hopes and fears on sticky notes.
2. Collect finished notes and place them on the wall or a flip chart organized by 'hopes' and 'fears'. Review the sticky notes together as a group, making sure the notes stay anonymous.

3. Ask if participants have any ideas about how to create a space and group that respects the fears and discomfort that people and builds on their hopes.
4. Lead the group to create guidelines the group would like to respect without developing 'rules' for participating that might exclude women. Tell the group that you would like to keep guidelines to a minimum. You may want to write these ideas down on the flip-chart paper and save them to post at every group session.

Examples:

- to not require anyone to participate or share more than they want to;
- to encourage people to listen carefully without interrupting;
- to keep phones on vibrate and/or take phone calls outside

5. Invite participants to describe their understanding of confidentiality in relation to sharing experiences of abuse.
   a. Do they have any fears or concerns about coming to group and sharing?
   b. Validate the fact that, particularly for those under 19 or with children, sharing is often a 'Catch 22' situation: they are encouraged to talk about experiences of abuse, but if they do, in certain situations, a call.
   c. Reiterate that facilitators and participants need to keep what is shared in group confidential.
   d. Review the limits of confidentiality and duty to report.

Let participants know that facilitators will respect their choice to share what they feel comfortable with at any given time, and that facilitators will talk to the young woman before taking any action. In cases where there is a legal requirement to contact child welfare services, the mother will be invited to make the call herself, and a facilitator can be present to support her during the call, ensuring that she has some support and control in the reporting process. Answer any questions or concerns and let the young woman know that facilitators will be reminding everyone of the limits to confidentiality throughout the weeks.

2. A LETTER FROM KATIE ACTIVITY

Share A Letter from Katie, a young woman's letter describing her experiences of abuse and its impacts on her life, her safety and coping strategies, and her words of hope and support. Share with participants that when Katie was younger, she felt that she didn't have very many positive stories or role models to help her realize that she would get through her difficult experiences and eventually feel a lot better than she did at that time. Share that, by writing her letter, Katie hopes to help young women realize that other people have been through similar situations, and feel more hope and optimism for the future.

a. Invite participants to read the letter on their own, or read it together as a group.
b. Encourage participants to write or draw their thoughts and responses to the letter in their journal focusing on their hopes (short term and/or long term) and on appreciating themselves for their strengths.
c. Discuss the letter and their thoughts or feelings about it as a group if participants feel comfortable.

3. GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

The chance to get to know each other is an important building block for moving forward as a group. The following activities offer opportunities to play and have fun together which cannot be underestimated when building a strong group dynamic.

Based on your earlier meetings with participants and your general sense of the group's interest, select one of the following three activities: Suggestion A: Art Collage; Suggestion B: Interviewing a Star; Suggestion C: Move your Butt. Remind participants they can pass on any invitation to talk or share.

Suggestion A: Art Collage

Participants are invited to create a collage, using magazines and/or other available art supplies, that shares more about who they are and how they are feeling about being in a group. Facilitators are encouraged to create collages as well, and may wish to share a bit about their work background and experience, as well as some things about their personal lives and why they are interested in and committed to this kind of work. Once the group has finished making collages, invite participants to share as much or as little as they want about their collage, themselves and/or how they are feeling about coming to group.

Suggestion B: Interviewing a Star [51]

Part 1 – Pairs

1. Hand out copies of the Interviewing a Star work sheet to each participant.
2. Ask participants to pair up.
3. Explain that there are two roles. The first role is a 'journalist,' the second role is a 'star.'
4. Let participants know they do not have to answer any questions that make them feel uncomfortable.
5. Ask participants to decide between them who will be the journalist and who will be the star.
6. Invite participants to play a role and act as a 'star,' but to provide real answers, not pretend ones, when answering the questions from the 'journalist,' because this activity is about having fun while getting to know each other.
7. Ask them to complete the questions on the Interviewing a Star handout. Once the first 'star' has answered all the questions she wants, tell them to switch roles.

Part 2 – Group Meeting

- When the interviews are complete, ask each pair to choose which person will go first, then ask them to be the 'journalist' again and introduce the other person, 'the star', by sharing the answers to three or four of the questions asked. Suggest that they begin with question one or two and continue from there.
- As facilitator, try to highlight the connections you notice among the participants based on their answers.

SUGGESTION C: 'MOVE YOUR BUTT' ACTIVITY

This icebreaker helps energize people while moving around and learning new, different, common or unique things about the participants.

1. Participants move their chairs to form a circle, preferably not around a table. Leave out one chair so there is one less chair than there are participants.
2. Someone volunteers to be 'it' (or one of the facilitators can be 'it' the first time.) This person stands in the middle of the circle and says, "If you (or, you can try, "If you have never) _____ (e.g., are wearing white socks, have long hair, eaten an insect, like basketball, etc.), move your butt"!
3. All participants to whom the statement applies must then stand up and move to an empty chair. The chairs to their immediate left and right are off-limits.
4. Whoever is left standing without a chair becomes 'it' and starts from the top: "If you are _____, move your butt"!

CLOSING

To complete the session, thank everyone for coming and participating in group, and let them know you look forward to seeing them the following week.

Before closing, let participants know that next week you will be focusing on how girls and women are portrayed in the media. This will involve watching a movie that talks about girls and women in the media, and you will be having food along with it. You may want to ask them for food suggestions (pizza, sushi, etc.). Invite participants to bring in media clips (YouTube videos, magazine pictures, ads, etc.), poems, or anything else that they would like to share that relates to the group topic.

A Letter from Katie

I experienced abuse throughout my childhood, and witnessed my mother's abuse. I moved out as a teenager, and straight into an unhealthy relationship. I developed and maintained unhealthy coping strategies like starving myself and other forms of self-harm. I had every type of emotion to the extreme, sadness that made me want to stay in bed forever, anger that I could barely control, and a terrible feeling of hopelessness nagging at me and undermining all my efforts to make things better for myself.

This lasted for years, and to my surprise years after I was safe and free from abuse. I had dreams about drowning and watching no one come to help me. I pictured myself as being filled with black tar and I felt like I had to work very hard to prevent people from seeing it, sometimes I was so upset I felt like I was physically being choked. I think it dragged on longer than it needed to because I didn't have very much information about abuse, or very much help.

When I first left my abusive parents' home, I didn't fully understand that what I had experienced was abuse. Even the physical violence didn't completely register because I compared it to the violence my mother experienced and the violence my grandmother experienced and I thought that it was nothing compared to that. I was also physically isolated from other families so I couldn't really compare. So I just felt scared, sad, mad, and crazy. All the bad things I was always told I was anyway.

Eventually I moved out, and my boyfriend was better than the past so again it seemed like a good idea. Even when I wasn't supposed to wear my hair down because that meant I was trying to attract other boys or I wasn't supposed to hang out with my friends anymore because my boyfriend didn't like them. At least I felt better than before.

Eventually things got worse, and I moved again. There were quite a few difficulties along the way, many things I would do differently looking back now, but with the help of friends, and even some strangers, I eventually found a safe place to live and start my life on my own.

I've shared this much of my life with you because I felt like I had no examples of girls or women who experienced what I did and went on to have safe and happy lives. At different points in my life I just couldn't imagine anything better really being possible for me. I still think about my past, sometimes I still cry about it, I get really defensive if I feel threatened, and I still flinch sometimes.

Sometimes shame sneaks up on me, mostly shame about things I wish I would have done differently once I was on my own. The point is that now I'm strong enough to deal with these moments, and they really are moments, and not life consuming like they used to be.

I will share with you what I have shared with other girls and women I care about. First, there is no point wasting time trying to figure out how bad what you experienced was or continue to experience is. When any form of violence happens to you it is wrong, and how you feel about it is right. I really couldn't get anywhere until I stopped trying to justify how bad I felt.

I spent a large part of my life keeping secrets, I kept secrets out of fear and out of shame. This took a huge amount of energy. Letting go of those secrets and telling people I trusted took a lot of weight off of my shoulders.

Again, I didn't tell anyone in time to stop the violence, but talking about it after helped me to at least get rid of the burden of keeping it secret. Eventually I talked to people who helped me to understand I didn't need to be ashamed about it, but this was a slow process.

If I had it my way, every girl and woman who experienced violence would feel safe enough to find help right away, and would be trusted, protected, and cared for from the moment she disclosed. This is not what I experienced, which makes me feel like other girls and women may also not experience this.

So I end my thoughts with the hope that you will be persistent about what you want and need, and be kind to yourself along the way. Regardless of what happened to you, choices you have made, or what anyone has told you, you deserve kindness and sometimes it has to start with being kind to yourself.

— Katie

Interviewing a Star*

1. What's your name?

_____

2. What's your nickname?

_____

3. If you've ever lived out of the city or province, where did you live?

_____

4. If you've ever been on vacation, where have you been?

_____

5. What language(s) do you speak?

_____

6. Do you have any brothers and sisters? How many? Are they younger or older than you?

_____

7. What's your favourite music?

_____

8. What's one thing that you are really good at?

_____

9. What's one thing you want to learn how to do?

_____

* Gender Specific Resource Manual: North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; n.d. Available from: http://test.ncdjjdp.org/community_programs/gsr_manual.html.



WEEK TWO

Exploring Power in the Media

HANDOUT

Deconstructing Media

WEEK TWO

Exploring Power in the Media

OBJECTIVES FOR FACILITATORS

1. To begin the conversation about power — who has it, how it is used, and how it encourages violence against certain groups, including women and girls.
2. To discuss how women, girls and other groups are portrayed in the media, and how this condones violence against women and perpetuates a 'rape culture.'

OBJECTIVES FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. To learn how to critically think about and deconstruct the messages we receive from the media.

TO PREPARE

Movie

Miss Representation: While Miss Representation is easily accessible through library systems and the Internet, for the purposes of showing this film in a group setting, technically, you should obtain a license from ro*co films educational. To obtain this license, see http://www.rocoeducational.com/miss_representation.

Handout

Deconstructing Media

CORE ACTIVITIES

1. Watch (the selected portions of) Miss Representation and debrief
2. Deconstructing Media

1. MISS REPRESENTATION

A. WATCH THE MOVIE

We recommend that facilitators introduce this film to group participants by talking about how it helps us understand the 'big picture' of violence against women by showing how women are not often valued in a healthy way in our society. The film focuses on how women are portrayed in the media and how harmful messages about women shape our ideas of what is expected and what is possible in our world. The film reminds us of how powerful media is and how it influences so much of our lives and our thoughts. Let participants know that throughout the next 12 weeks, you will often come back to talking about the media, and how it influences our experiences and feelings.

This film has generally been a very popular piece of the Girls Speak Out group content. However, watching the entire film takes a significant amount of time, and may not be needed. We recommend showing selected parts of the film (see below), but if young women are very interested and you have time, you may also choose to show the whole thing. Either way, it is important that there is adequate time to debrief the film afterwards (we recommend at least 30 minutes), and connect it back to the main theme of violence and gender inequality.

The general breakdown of Miss Representation is as follows:

First 17 minutes: Introduction to the how women and girls are represented in the media. Lots of great images and good discussion.

17 – 25 minutes: Discussion focused on the lack of women in politics, especially in the United States.

25 – 37 minutes: Returns to a more explicit focus on media, especially the limited role of girls and women in TV and film.

37 – 52 minutes: Fairly political discussion of news media and prominent figures in the United States.

52 – 1:00: Discussion of the lack of women producers in media and the impact of this.

1:00 – 1:11: Brief look at the women's rights movements over the last century and the ties to labour and capitalism. American context and policy focus.

1:11 – 1:21: Discussion of how media is explicitly linked to gendered violence.

1:21 – 1:30: Conclusion

If you cannot watch the whole film but would like to watch approximately one hour's worth of content, we suggest watching the first 37 minutes (first three sections described above), and then from 1:11 to the end (last three sections).

If you have less time available, we suggest watching just the first 17 minutes of the film, and then from 1:11 to the end.

B. DISCUSS AND DEBRIEF THE MOVIE

- After watching selected portions of the film, use the questions below to guide a debrief/ discussion.
- How do you feel after watching this part of the film? Are there ideas that you agree with? Disagree with? Anything that has affected you in some way?
- How do you feel you are represented in the media? Are you represented at all? How does this affect you?
- Who or what is missing from the film? Are there people or perspectives that we don't hear from, or don't hear enough about (e.g., Indigenous women, women of colour, women with disAbilities, women who are queer)?
- What are the messages from media about violence towards girls and women?
- How are you left feeling after watching the film?

2. DECONSTRUCTING MEDIA

If time allows, distribute the Deconstructing Media handout.

"I love it [focus on media]. I think it was awesome. It definitely has helped me change a lot too, like I was one of those girls who was like 'I gotta have my weave in, I've gotta have my make-up'...now I'm just like, I don't care. I'll go out with my hair still not straightened, and I'll go out with no make-up on now. It's just like, I'm comfortable with myself. So it definitely helped a lot to bring that empowerment".

Invite participants to keep this critique as a tool for future use. Briefly review its main points, which are to:

- make observations about a media piece;
- determine its purpose (e.g., to sell something);
- determine its assumptions and the hidden messages it conveys; and
- consider the possible consequences of these messages.

Mention how 'deconstructing' media can help us to look at media pieces in a different way and be more aware of media messages and impact.

INVITATION FOR NEXT WEEK

Thank everyone for coming and participating in group, and let them know you look forward to seeing them the following week: understanding power and control in relationships. Invite young women to bring in media clips (YouTube videos, magazine pictures, ads, etc.), poems, or anything else that they would like to share that relates to the group discussion.

Deconstructing Media*

Step 1: Make observations

- Think of five adjectives that describe the image, video, ad, TV show, etc.
- Evaluate its aesthetics:
  - If people are depicted in it, what genders are represented? What races or ethnicities? What do the people look like? What are their facial expressions?
  - Where are people positioned, and how are they positioned in relation to each other?
  - Are certain parts highlighted by colours or lighting, while others are not? If there is text, which parts of the text are emphasized? Why do you think this is?

Step 2: Determine the Purpose of Media

Remember that the purpose of media is to sell a product or an idea

- Who created this media and what product are they trying to sell?
- Who is the target audience?
- Do you find it appealing? Why or why not?
- What feelings or emotions are evoked?

Step 3: Determine the assumptions the image, video, ad, TV show, etc. makes and the messages it sends

Assumptions may not be contained in the media themselves, but in the messages that are conveyed through them.

- What messages does the media piece sell about different genders? Are these assumptions realistic? Why or why not? Do these assumptions reinforce or challenge stereotypes about gender identities?
- What messages does the media piece sell about race? Are these assumptions realistic? Why or why not? Do these assumptions reinforce or challenge stereotypes about racial identities?
- What messages does the ad sell about money and income? Are these assumptions realistic? Why or why not? Do these assumptions reinforce or challenge stereotypes about income, money and social class?
- What are some additional assumptions the media piece makes about beauty, sexual orientation and identity, ability, age, Indigeneity and religion?

Step 4: Consider the Possible Consequences of this Message

- Would the messages in the media piece contribute to some people or groups feeling more central, superior or deserving than others?
- What do the messages contribute to violence against girls and women?
- Would the messages in this media piece contribute to some people feeling inferior or peripheral to others? Why or why not? Which ones?

- Do the messages create unrealistic expectations for people? Why or why not?
- What are some possible consequences of the message(s) you've identified (short- and long-term)?
- Is this media piece socially responsible? How or how not?

*Deconstructing an Advertisement: Media Education Foundation; 2005. Available from: http://www.mediaed.org/handouts/DeconstructinganAd.pdf.



WEEK THREE

Understanding Power and Control in Relationships

HANDOUT

Sample Power and Control Wheel

WEEK THREE

Understanding Power and Control in Relationships

OBJECTIVES FOR FACILITATORS

1. To further explore and understand abuse and its various forms.
2. To help participants understand the dynamics of power and control in violence against women and girls.

OBJECTIVES FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. To further understand abuse in its various forms.
2. To further understand violence against women and girls.

TO PREPARE

Handout

Sample Power and Control Wheel

CORE ACTIVITIES

1. Connecting Activity
2. Exploring Abuse, Power and Control
   a. Group brainstorm
   b. Power and Control Wheel
3. Images of Power and Control in the Media

KEY MESSAGES

1. Abuse is a pattern of power and control. It can be carried out in various ways against young women, in a whole variety of relationships (partners, family members, social circles, services or systems). An abuser intentionally uses tactics and strategies (e.g., violence, threats and intimidation) to gain power and control over another person.
2. There are many forms of abuse perpetrated against young women, including emotional, sexual, financial, physical, cultural, verbal and psychological. All forms of abuse are detrimental to young women's health and social well-being. One form of abuse is not necessarily worse than another. What matters is the young woman's experience of the abuse and the impact it has on her.
3. Single abusive incidents or acts may not always seem obviously violent or abusive right away. When girls or women experience many of these acts over time, however, the impacts accumulate and compound.

CONNECTING ACTIVITY

If you feel like the group could benefit from an activity that is primarily about having fun and connecting to each other before moving on to the other content of the session, an icebreaker activity can be included here. You can use one of the Getting to Know Each Other Activities from Week 1, use your own, or ask the young women in the group for a suggestion.

EXPLORING ABUSE, POWER AND CONTROL

Violence and abuse can be and have been defined many ways. In the Girls Speak Out groups we want to honour and reflect all forms of abuse experienced by the participants. This can include, but is not limited to sexual, physical, emotional, financial, spiritual, religious, psychological and social abuse. These forms of abuse can be perpetrated by boyfriends/girlfriends, friends, peers, parents, family members, religious leaders, strangers, community members and service providers (individual and systems). As facilitators, you may want to prompt discussion about some of these forms of violence.

GROUP BRAINSTORM

a. Ask participants: "what is violence against girls and women"?

b. Invite participants to name the kinds of abuse and violence they see (on TV, movies etc.), as well as what they or their friends or family members have experienced.

c. Mention that some participants may have noticed or experienced violence related to specific aspects of a girl or woman's identity. For example, they may have observed or experienced violence that they feel is related to sexual orientation, Aboriginal identity, race or ethnicity, language or religion.

If they are having a hard time getting started, you can share some examples (below) of how participants in the Girls Speak Out research project focus groups talked about violence and abuse:

"Abuse to me is like a power trip. Like the other person wants power because they didn't have power and they'll like do anything to get it, even hurt people".

"Anyone who makes you insecure about yourself or makes you feel bad about who you are and what you believe in".

"Anybody who puts you down. Makes you feel worthless. And also at the same time it's someone who makes you co-dependent on them".

"Making it so that you don't feel safe without them".

"Making you do something against your own will".

"Anytime someone makes it so you're not able to do what you want to do. Or how you want to live. Or making you feel inferior. Or just mistreats you in any way".

"I think it's like any time someone does harm to you, whether it be emotionally, mentally, physically, as long as it's causing some kind of harm to you, then it's abuse of some form".

If participants are receptive, write ideas down as young women list their definitions and examples. Remember that some young women prefer more informal conversations without the more 'classroom-like' use of the flip chart.

At the end of this exercise, participants will see that there are multiple and varied experiences and definitions of abuse/violence, all of which are legitimate and have emotional, physical, mental and social impacts. The group will explore these impacts further in a couple of weeks.

POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL

Visually show participants the many forms of abuse by leading them through the Power and Control Wheel. Use this exercise as a way to encourage participants to talk about the many tactics that abusers use to maintain power and control. Participants often find that the Power and Control Wheel helps to clarify why they were uncomfortable with some of their abuser's seemingly acceptable behaviours. They may not have realized how extensive and pervasive their abuse has been. While this can feel overwhelming, it can also be validating.

Emphasize that abuse is primarily about power and control. Whatever the behaviour or tactic of the abuser, their goal is to have power and control over the other person. Be sure to acknowledge that individual experiences of abuse and violence are often seen as somewhat acceptable in our society and systems. (Example: the normalization of physical and sexual violence against women and girls in the media is so commonplace that many viewers have become desensitized to it).

Once you introduce the Wheel, start working with participants in the following way:

1. Distribute copies of the Power and Control Wheel.
2. Emphasize the themes of the Power and Control Wheel are the same.
3. Discuss what participants think about the Wheel:
    - Can you relate to these categories?
    - Are you surprised by any examples or kinds of abuse on the Wheel?
    - Is it clear that all the examples are about one person wanting to get or keep control and power over another? Why is this clear, or not?
    - Is anything missing from the Wheel?
4. Draw the Power and Control Wheel by putting two flip charts side by side and drawing one big circle.
5. Divide the circle into 12 equal sections with the following titles around the outside: Physical Abuse, Verbal Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Spiritual Abuse, Using Children, Isolation & Social Abuse, Using Culture, Emotional Abuse, Using Male Privilege, Financial Abuse, Pets & Property Abuse, and Psychological Abuse.
6. Write the words 'Power' and 'Control' in the centre of the circle.
7. Ask the young women about the different types of abuse they have experienced or witnessed. A

young woman might say she has something to share, but does not know what type of abuse it is. Encourage her to tell her story and then ask her what type of abuse it seems like to her, offering her a suggestion if she is stuck. What might seem like sexual abuse for one woman might feel like psychological abuse to another. Each woman's perspective and experience is what matters. Some types of abuse are easier to talk about than others. Once women understand what is meant by psychological abuse, they usually share many experiences in the group about this type.

8. If young women seem hesitant, mention some common examples of physical abuse: choking, kicking, punching and restraining. Threats to a woman's physical well-being, like driving recklessly, have a truly negative impact on them, even if they are never actually physically injured. Sexual abuse is often more difficult to talk about.

Note: Facilitators may have to start the discussion about sexual abuse. Do not encourage young women to over-disclose before they feel safe in the group.

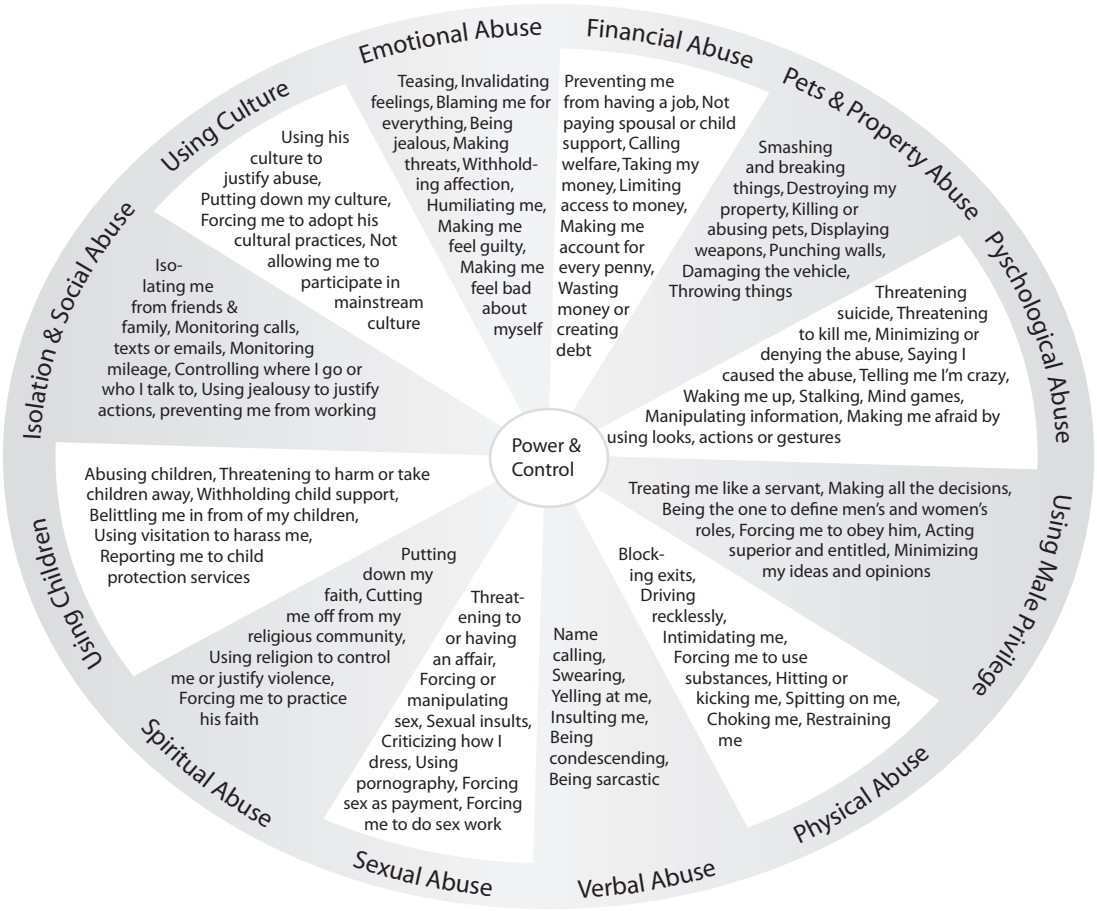
IMAGES OF POWER AND CONTROL IN THE MEDIA

Think back to images or messages that you saw in the film (Miss Representation) last week. Talk about how these images promote the idea that one person (usually portrayed as male) deserves to have power and control over another (often portrayed as female). Guiding questions for a discussion might include:

- How might these images contribute to the idea that violence against women is okay in our society?
- What other characteristics ('race', body type, sexuality, style of clothing, etc.) do you notice about the people who are often portrayed as powerful in the media?
- How are those who are less powerful or less important portrayed?

If the group needs or wants something more uplifting or comical after a heavy discussion, you may want to check out some clips and images that point out or contradict harmful gender stereotypes towards girls and women. You may want to ask the same questions as above, about how these images expose and contradict gender stereotypes and the idea that one person deserves to have power and control over another. How might counter-images help to 'push back' against the idea that violence against women and other groups is okay?

Power and Control Wheel*



* Godard L, Cory J, Abi-Jaoude A, McAndless-Davis K, Armstrong N. Making Connections: Supporting Women with Experiences of Violence, Substance Use and/or Mental Health Concerns Vancouver, BC: BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre, Canada Post Foundation for Mental Health; 2013. Available from: http://www.bcwomens.ca/Population-Health-Promotion-Site/Documents/MakingConnections_2013_March.pdf.



WEEK FOUR

Introducing the Cycle of Violence

HANDOUTS

Cycle of Violence

Cycle of Violence Case Study

WEEK FOUR

Introducing the Cycle of Violence

OBJECTIVE FOR FACILITATORS

1. To explore the different phases and patterns of power and control that can occur in abusive relationships.

OBJECTIVE FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. To begin to shift some of the blame away from young women who think they are responsible for the violence they experience.

TO PREPARE

Handouts

Cycle of Violence

Cycle of Violence Case Study

CORE ACTIVITY

1. Cycle of Violence
    a. Review the Cycle of Violence
    b. Case study

KEY MESSAGES

1. All phases of the cycle are part of the abuse, including the manipulative kindness/honeymoon phase, which can feel like a reprieve from the abuse;
2. All abuse has a pattern and intention;
3. The abusive partner/person is responsible for the abuse and is in control of that pattern; young women do not have control over changing or stopping that pattern.

Let the group know that today you will be discussing some of the common patterns of violence in relationship. It can be a difficult conversation, but note that many young women find it very therapeutic to recognize a pattern in their experiences, and to know that they are not responsible for the abuse.

Note to facilitators: The Cycle of Violence is a mainstream way of explaining the pattern of violence and has been used for many years. It is important to note that as our understanding of both personal and systemic experiences of violence broaden as well as the lens expanding to include diverse cultures, the Cycle is only one way of understanding the pattern of violence. There are number of other tools such as the coiled spiral of domestic violence [53]that may resonate with others or for young women who have been sexually assaulted by a stranger or by a date. It is also important to note that none of these tools might resonate with young women who have experienced or witnessed abuse. Facilitators must use their judgment as to whether the Cycle of Violence, or another tool fits with the groups' experiences and needs.

CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

ACTIVITY

1. Draw the Cycle of Violence on a flip chart and lead the group through the stages of the Cycle of Violence, focusing on the abuser's behaviour.
2. Explain that the diagram offers examples of what abusers might do at these stages.

Many women describe this Cycle of Violence [4], but it is important to note that there are also many individual experiences that don't fit into this pattern of abuse. The phases in the Cycle of Violence are not always predictable or "neat," especially if it is a long-term relationship where abuse is ongoing.

MANIPULATIVE KINDNESS/HONEYMOON PHASE

The manipulative kindness/honeymoon phase in the Cycle of Violence abusers may exhibit 'positive behaviours generally making the young woman feel very special. Once the abuse has started, the manipulative kindness/honeymoon phase may give young women hope after an escalation of abuse in the other phases. Facilitators should highlight how attractive the abuser's behaviour can be during the manipulative kindness/honeymoon phase. In this stage, the abuser shows his or her best qualities and may give gifts or make promises that make themselves seem truly interested and invested in the relationship.

For some young women the language of 'honeymoon' does not resonate in describing this phase, and prefer 'manipulative kindness', particularly once they start to see that promises to change on the part of an abuser are empty and are actually a strategy to keep her invested in the relationship. Some young women prefer the language of honeymoon and so we offer both to participants.

ACTIVITY

1. Draw the Cycle on a flip-chart paper and ask women if they would like to describe some manipulative kindness/honeymoon behaviours they have observed or experienced.
2. Once young women have described the positive behaviours that characterize this phase, facilitators can suggest that these seem like behaviours that anyone would be attracted to.
    - Acknowledge that this behaviour seems positive at first;
    - Acknowledge the abusive person may appear attentive and considerate;
    - He or she may give gifts or make promises, or might simply behave in a way that seems acceptable or normal, instead of abusive;
    - In a dating situation, this stage often creates the illusion of intense attraction;
    - Emphasize that the manipulative kindness/honeymoon phase does not last;
    - Explain abusive partners, family members, caregivers and other adults of authority employ this behaviour as a way of 'grooming' young women and other supportive people around her.

Young women may feel reassured that they were attracted to positive behaviours and not 'attracted to abuse', as they may have thought or been told by others. Understanding this phase will help young women understand why this phase is so 'crazy-making': what appears as loving, positive behaviour is really a form of power, control and manipulation, and is intended to attract and draw them into the relationship. For many young women, recognizing that they are attracted to positive qualities and behaviours, but that they are not inherently attracted to abusive people, as they may have been led to believe, can be very affirming.

TENSION-BUILDING PHASE

This phase varies in length. Some abusive people may be sullen, silent, unpredictable or moody for a period of minutes, hours, weeks or months, creating unbearable tension. The abuser's behaviour during this time may also be angry or hostile. Young women often describe their partners as being very critical during this time. Some abusers withdraw from the relationship and appear disinterested and distant. They may explain their behaviour by blaming their partner or children for creating problems. Sometimes young women describe feeling like they are walking on eggshells during this phase. It usually creates a lot of fear for young women as they anticipate what will come next. Like the manipulative kindness/honeymoon phase, young women may have described this phase as "tension," but through the discussion, they might see that it is characterized by fear and unpredictability.

ACTIVITY

Invite young women to share some examples of the abuser's behaviour during the tension building phase and add them to the Cycle on the flip chart.

- Validate that they are not responsible for the abuser's behavior.
- Acknowledge that there is nothing they can do to change the abuser's behavior, despite the abuser telling them otherwise.

- Validate the feelings of fear and anxiety that arise during this phase.

Acknowledge that this phase in particular can be "crazy-making" for young women as it seems that no matter what they do it is wrong and results in further negative behaviours on behalf of the abuser.

EXPLOSION

During this phase, the abuse escalates. This is often a more threatening and dangerous period for young women. The first few experiences of explosion may not seem that significant, but they are usually upsetting. Examples of explosive behaviour are yelling, swearing, aggressive verbal assault, slamming doors, punching walls, hurting pets, banging pots and throwing things, hitting, punching and sexual assault. Some abusers also employ the "silent treatment" during explosion. Abusers can also threaten young women during this phase. Usually this part of the Cycle becomes more dangerous and frequent over time.

ACTIVITY

Invite young women to share some examples of the abuser's behaviour during the explosion phase and add them to the Cycle on the flip chart.

- Validate the level of fear that young women experience during this phase
- Remind participants that if abuse does need to be physical or sexual assault. There are many forms of abuse. Validate their experiences of abuse. Let them know you believe them.
- Affirm that often after the explosion the abuser will blame the young women for provoking the abuse by saying such things as: "it's your fault. You made me so frustrated"; or, "If only you hadn't had done X, I wouldn't have had to do what I did". Remind young women that it is not their fault. The abuser is in control of their behaviour.
- Validate that abusers use these explosions as a way to instill further fear in the young woman, which contributes to his/her ability to manipulate and control her in the relationship.
- Affirm that whether it is one incident or many over a long period of time that young women's mental and emotional health is affected by all of the abusive behaviours and phrases inflicted by the abuser.

PHASES REPEAT, BLEND AND SKIP

After the explosion, the abuser usually returns to the manipulative kindness/honeymoon phase, stopping the more negative and dangerous-looking behaviour he/she used during the tension-building and explosion phases, and behaving in a way that seems more positive or normal. The abuser might apologize and promise not to act that way again, or might just go back to behaving in a way that is more acceptable. This behaviour may create hope and reassurance for young women that their abuser is trying to change. However, young women may also be scared to 'rock the boat', in anticipation of another escalation of abuse.

The tension phase may last longer at the beginning of the relationship, and sometimes the abuse

may move back and forth between the tension and explosion phases, skipping the manipulative kindness/honeymoon phase completely.

> **Girls and young women who have experienced abuse from an adult or authority figure are instilled with fear of what may happen if they disclose the abuse. Some young women might be told by abusers or others that she has not really been abused because he/she has never been hit. However, the young woman may know she has been mistreated and may feel the fear associated with abuse.**

After completing the discussion of the Cycle of Violence, note to the group that they may want to re-label the phases in the cycle. Just as some young women find it more accurate to shift from the word "honeymoon" to "manipulative kindness" or "entrapment," they may also find it helpful to shift from the term "tension-building" to "fear," and from "explosion" to "escalation," in order to accurately reflect an abuser's intentions and her own experiences.

Three key messages are important to reinforce after going through the phases of the Cycle of Violence:

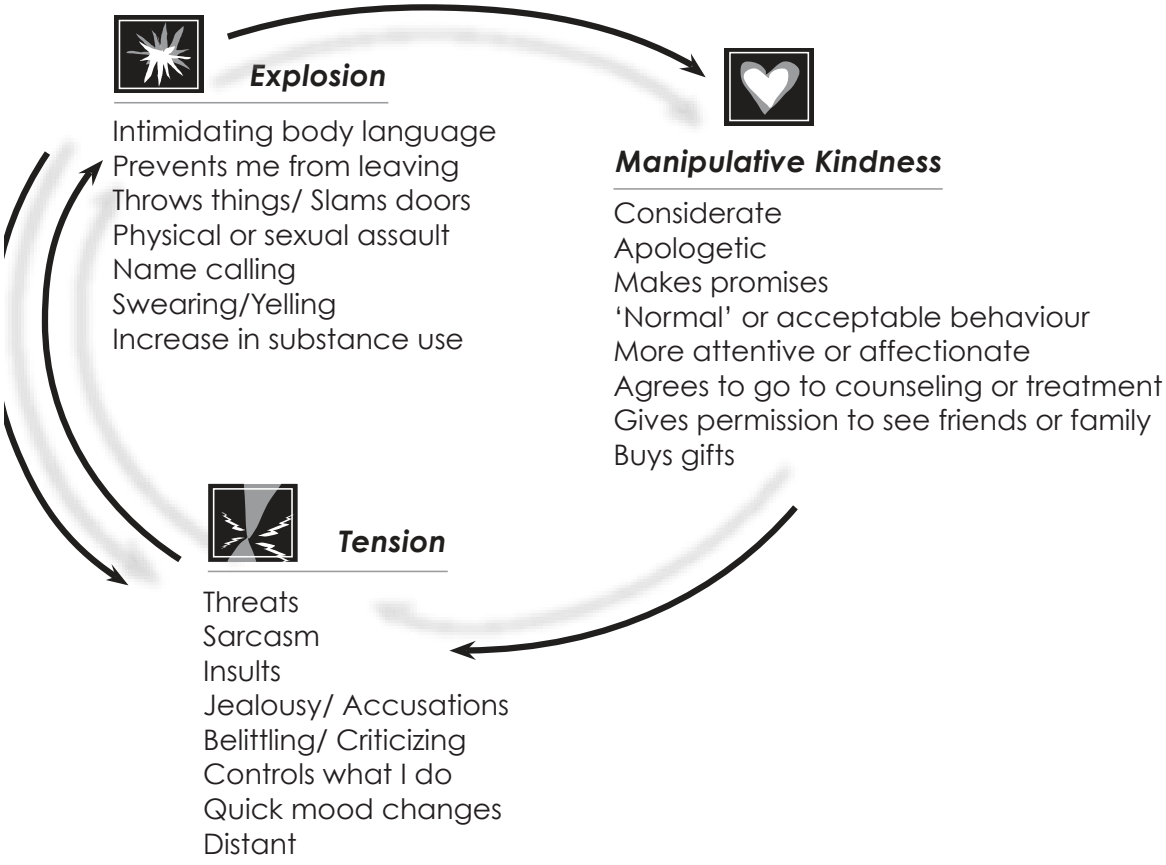
1. all phases of the Cycle are part of the abuse, including the manipulative kindness/honeymoon phase, which can feel like a reprieve from the abuse;
2. all abuse has a pattern and intention; and
3. the abusive partner/person is responsible for the abuse and is in control of that pattern; young women do not have control over changing or stopping that pattern.

Allow time for discussion and for young women to share their experiences of the various phases of the cycle.

CASE STUDY

If young women do not seem comfortable sharing experiences, you may want to go through the Cycle of Violence Case Study. Review the case study situation and guide a discussion around which phases of the Cycle of Violence Anna is experiencing during different parts of her story. You may also want to talk about what she might expect might happen next, and what the potential impacts might be at each stage.

Cycle of Violence*



* Reprinted with permission from Godard L, Cory J, Abi-Jaoude A, McAndless-Davis K, Armstrong N. Making Connections: Supporting Women with Experiences of Violence, Substance Use and/or Mental Health Concerns. Vancouver, BC: BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre, Canada Post Foundation for Mental Health; 2013. Available from: http://www.bcwomens.ca/Population-Health-Promotion-Site/Documents/MakingConnections_2013_March.pdf

Cycle of Violence Case Study

Anna meets a new guy through some mutual friends. The night they meet, they talk a lot and have fun partying together. He tells her that she is gorgeous, flirts with her a lot, and seems pretty sweet.

They start texting a lot, going out, and sleeping together. He texts Anna all the time, and Anna mostly likes the attention and is excited that he is so into her. He says that he really likes her and seems to always want to hang out. He tells her that some of her friends are lame though, and says that she should ditch them and they should hang out more with his friends.

One day he sees her talking with one of her guy friends after school and sends her a harsh text accusing her of hitting on other guys. She replies saying that she has been friends with this other guy forever and doesn't like him that way. His reply is "whatever, bitch" and he ignores her texts and calls for the rest of the day.

They see each other at a party that night and he ignores Anna as she watches him hit on other girls. Anna decides to take off, and he follows her outside and grabs her arm and tells her not to go. She tells him she just wants to go home and that they can talk tomorrow when they are sober, but he doesn't let her leave and they argue. He grabs her and pushes her against the wall behind the house, trying to make out with her and force her to fool around with him. Anna tells him to get away from her. He slaps her in the face and calls her a prude, telling her he has lots of other better options tonight anyway. Anna runs to find her friends and leaves the party.

The next day she wakes up to 10 text messages and a bunch of missed calls from him telling her that he was really wasted last night, that he loves her, and asking her to hang out. She tells him she doesn't feel like hanging out. He sends several more texts saying that she's the only good thing in his life and that he can't be without her.



WEEK FIVE

Identifying Sources of Power and Protection

WEEK FIVE

Identifying Sources of Power and Protection

OBJECTIVES FOR FACILITATORS

1. To provide unstructured time for group participants to connect with each other and process some of the material that the group has discussed so far.
2. To encourage young women to consider what supports them and gives them strength.

OBJECTIVE FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. To gain perspective from the heavy topics covered in previous weeks by engaging in art activities, journaling or hanging out with support group mates.
2. To continue learning about their support systems and avenues to gain strength.

CORE ACTIVITY

1. Options
   a) Power Shield
   b) Mask
   c) Journaling or Sculpting
   d) Informal Chat

KEY MESSAGES

1. Connecting with each other provides opportunities to build trust in the group, provide support to each other, and reflect/digest heavy and difficult content of the previous weeks.
2. It is important to also think about what is positive in our lives, and what gives us strength when things are tough.

ACTIVITY OPTIONS

The purposes of these relaxing activities are to:

a. think about what helps us to feel comforted, protected and stronger, and to create a piece of art that honours those things.

b. to take part in a light hearted activity that encourages group bonding and provides a mental break from the heavier topics covered in previous weeks.

While the group is working on their projects, this is a good time to have informal conversations about some of the topics that have been addressed in group so far, or just to allow young women to talk in a more unstructured way about what is going on in their lives.

Introduce the four options for activities for the week: making a power shield or mask, taking some time and write or draw in their journal, sculpt, or chat informally with other group participants. Participants have creative freedom to create whatever they like. Each option is detailed below.

A. POWER SHIELD

A shield can be something that defends or protects us from things like negative ideas about ourselves, and/or a badge or emblem representing the truth of who we really are. It may be useful for participants to see an example of a power shield. We suggest that facilitators make or start one in advance to show young women and help them better understand the idea, including the meaning behind the different pieces included in the power shield.

Invite participants to create their own power shield.

If participants are looking for direction, the piece of paper can be cut into a shape (circle, shield, heart etc.) and divided into 4 quadrants. Participants can think about their beliefs, their cultural background, positive people in their lives, things that they like to do, things that are important to them, and things they draw strength from. Participants can draw, write or collage these things into each quadrant.

B. MASK

> Masks are worn for performance, entertainment, disguise, concealment, or protection. They have been around since ancient times and have been used in ceremony, storytelling, and dramatic enactment. Making a mask invites participants to explore the persona they reveal or conceal from the world. — *Psychology Today* [54]

Participants can cut a shape out of cardboard, or facilitators can provide pre-formed masks for young women to decorate. Participants can use both sides of the mask, decorating the inside with how they feel inside, and decorating the outside with how others see them.

C. JOURNALING AND SCULPTING

Invite participants to write or draw in their journals or sculpt something with their clay.

D. INFORMAL CHAT

Participants may not feel creative and prefer to just hang out and take part in the conversation or snacks with the rest of the group.

Participants may want to share their shield, mask or journal entry during check-out and closing, but they are welcome to keep it private, too. Invite participants to think about the components of their power shield, mask or journal (that is, the things that give them strength, confidence and/or hope) in the coming weeks, months and years, when life is challenging and they need a reminder of their own strength and wisdom.



WEEK SIX

Exploring the Impacts of Violence

HANDOUTS

Grief Diagrams

Stages of Grief

WEEK SIX

Exploring the Impacts of Violence

OBJECTIVES FOR FACILITATORS

1. To name the various impacts of violence and abuse on young women.
2. To help young women reframe what they have been told is "wrong with them" as impacts, and what has happened to them as abuse.
3. To discuss the grief, losses and rebuilding process associated with experiencing violence and abuse.

OBJECTIVE FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. To begin to understand the impact of violence in their lives.

TO PREPARE

Handouts

Grief diagrams

Stages of Grief

Materials

Flip chart paper

Two markers for each participant

CORE ACTIVITIES

1. Brainstorm
2. Phases of Grief and Rebuilding

KEY MESSAGES

1. Violence impacts and affects young women's physical and mental health, as well as their spiritual, cultural and social well-being.
2. Impacts of violence should not be defined as 'problems' or maladaptive behaviours to be 'treated', but rather, should be viewed as natural responses to harmful experiences of abuse.
3. Some of the impacts of abuse involve grief, loss and mourning. While some of these losses or reasons for grief are accepted by society (i.e., death of a family member), many are invisible and

unrecognized by society.

4. All losses and feelings of grief should be viewed as legitimate, real and acceptable.
5. The healing process is complex and lengthy for young women who have experienced abuse. Healing involves both grieving and rebuilding. It is normal to bounce between grieving and rebuilding for a long period of time.
6. Begin to help young women make an important shift from "What is wrong with me?" to "What has happened to me?"

1. BRAINSTORM

Many young women experience additional shame, blame and judgment that compound the impacts of abuse. When the context of a young woman's life is not taken into consideration, and when links between coping strategies, mental health and substance use are not understood, misdiagnoses, incorrect labels and judgments can result, harming her even more. For example, a young woman who presents as anxious, agitated and withdrawn may be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder or depression, when in fact she is coping with the impacts of past or present violence.

Young women in the Girls Speak Out research focus groups discussed the impacts of violence and abuse in many ways:

"Like I've been with guys who have made me feel like absolute shit and that I'm worthless, so then that obviously brings on depression and like anxiety probably for me".

"Like I used to smoke weed and then say I get in, like, a fight with said person, I'd smoke tons more and just get really stoned and just like mellow out. Just forget, and then everything would be, like, fine for a bit. And then it goes like shit but doing drugs and coping is easy... its [the] trying to stay sober and, like, get help [that is the] hard part".

"I started self-harming because of abuse. I started self-harming because of the fact that I lost my best friend, and that was emotional trauma, and then on top of that... all the domestic abuse made me just want to self-harm even worse. And so it is all connected, all together, well a lot of the stuff that I suffer from now when it comes to mental illnesses came from all that abuse and all that stuff that I had to go through".

"I know a person that went through such a crappy relationship she started using heroin because of that and, like, a downer just to forget everything, yeah and that's, like, depressing feeling they need to go so far to forget".

"Well what I find like what abusers do is they're like ... they use all these like belittle[ing] things, 'no one is going to give a crap about you if you're gone,' like all these things, and then after a while you start like believing it. You start believing that you're this horrible horrible person and like no one cares about you. No one likes you. And then you just feel like nothing, you're just like a shell of a person you used to be. And it takes a long time to get out of that and get back to normal after an experience like that I find".

In this brainstorm activity we invite participants to think about the impacts of experiences of abuse and violence in their lives. This can help participants recognize that some things that they have previously thought were 'wrong with them' are actually normal impacts of abuse. For some young women this realization can be very affirming and empowering.

The brainstorm can be facilitated in two ways depending on group preferences:

1. Place several pieces of flip-chart paper on a wall and invite each young woman to take a few markers. Brainstorm by collectively writing all kinds of impacts of violence on the papers; or

2. If your group prefers informal discussions to flip charts and writing, have a verbal discussion without any 'recording' of what participants share.

To started, you may ask:

- How have experiences of abuse or violence affected you?
- How has it affected your health?
- How does it show up in your body?
- How has it affected your desire to use drugs and/or alcohol?
- How has it affected your mind, thoughts and feelings?
- How has violence affected your relationships or ability to function?
- How has it affected your involvement with systems or services (for example, schools, the Ministry of Child and Family Development, health care providers)?

Think about the different aspects of a young women's life—physical and mental health, financial, social, intellectual, sexual, emotional and spiritual well-being, involvement in the justice system or other systems—and ask leading questions like, "Have you been affected financially? Emotionally?..."

Some impacts young women may describe include:

poverty	sadness	always worried
exhaustion	feeling overwhelmed	homelessness/ housing insecurity
depression	anger	decreased access to children
anxiety/ panic attacks	feels like I am going crazy	self harm/ cutting
isolation	low self-esteem	miscarriages
using drugs or alcohol	unwanted pregnancies	losing friends
weight increase or loss	racing heartbeat	disruption in menstrual cycle
concerns around eating	nausea or vomiting	guilt
nightmares/ sleeplessness	STIs/HIV	headaches/migraines
lack of concentration	feeling stupid	involvement with systems
stomach aches	injuries	suicidal thoughts
problems at school	Not eating	shame

Discussing types of impacts will likely flow easily with young women. Participants are usually quick to name the ways abuse has hurt them emotionally; they can often identify concrete impacts, like loss of family, friends or support networks. Young women will be challenged by identifying impacts in other areas of their life and may need extra guidance to think more holistically about the abuse they experienced.

When young women are finished sharing impacts, let the group know that the purpose of this

activity was to help them see that some of what they may have previously thought was wrong with them (or what others may have said was wrong with them) is actually a normal set of reactions to experiencing abuse. Point out similarities between the impacts that various participants have shared. This helps them to see that there are patterns, and that they are not alone in their experiences. Remind young women that the seriousness of the abuse should be judged by the impact it has on them, instead of by the type or tactic of abuse, or by how others see the abuse. Some young women might be told by abusers or others that they have not really been abused because they have never been hit, but they may know they have been mistreated and feel the impacts of abuse.

This exercise helps young women make an important shift: instead of asking themselves "What is wrong with me?" as they might have done previously, participants will be encouraged to think about the problem instead as "What has happened to me?" Sharing this idea with young women can be powerful.

2. PHASES OF GRIEF AND REBUILDING

As you are talking about the impacts of violence, you will likely notice that some of the impacts that young women mention involve grief, loss and mourning. Healing from abuse involves periods of intense grief and sadness, as well as periods of rebuilding and hope.

GRIEF & REBUILDING FIGURE 8

1. Draw the Figure 8 diagram using the handout as an example. These tools help young women recognize that there is no 'right' way to deal with the impacts of abuse and/or to grieve, since everyone's journey is different. There are, however, some common patterns, and it can be helpful to young women to know that they will not always feel as badly as they do now. Things can get better, and grief and rebuilding are both part of the healing process.
2. Invite the group to share what happens to them when they are having feelings of loss or grief.
    - How does the silence surrounding violence and abuse impact how they feel about their losses and grief?
    - Does society see them as legitimate impacts or losses? Is support available? Do young women feel like they are allowed to grieve? And if so, how long are they 'allowed' to grieve?
3. For this activity, invite the young women to explore grieving and rebuilding as they both relate to the healing process.
    - Ask the young women to name what happens to them when they are grieving. What do they feel?
    - Ask participants how this process impacts their substance use and mental health. How do their feelings affect their habits and moods?
4. List what they say on the bottom half of the flip chart next to the lower half of the Grief and Rebuilding Figure 8 and/or the low points in the Grief and Loss Graph, beside the word 'grieving'.
5. Invite participants to explore the top part of the Figure 8 and graph, entitled 'rebuilding'. This is the part of the healing process when they are moving forward and feeling more hopeful about their future.

- Ask the young women what they do or feel when they are in the rebuilding part of the healing process, and write what they say on the flip chart.
- Ask what helps them to rebuild (i.e., nurturing, trust, respect, safety, to be believed, rituals).

Young women can list their responses on the top half of the Figure 8 and/or graph, around the word 'rebuilding'.

Some young women may also ask about how long they can expect to feel the impacts. You may want to talk about the stages of grief outlined in the handout.

Grief and Rebuilding Figure 8 [55]

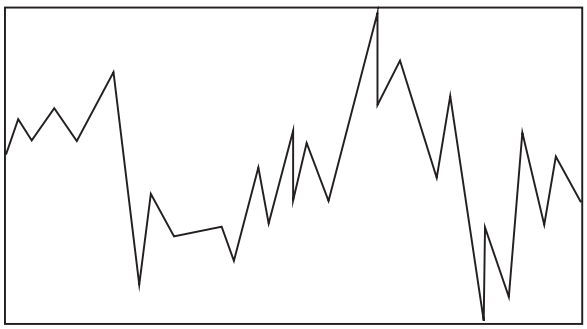


GRIEF AND LOSS GRAPH

The Grief and Loss Graph illustrates the erratic nature of grief and loss. It is just one woman's example of her process. If each young women were to graph their process, the graph would likely look very different. The purpose is to show the ups and downs and the diversity of how individuals cope with the impacts and grief associated with abuse.

Go through the Stages of Grief handout, with the group. It is written for sexual abuse survivors, but the stages are also relevant for those who have experienced other forms of abuse. Facilitators can give examples of how each stage can be experienced by young women who have lived with other forms of abuse. Ask the young women if it resonates with them.

Grief and Loss Graph



Remind young women that, throughout group, they are always welcome to talk about any of these experiences and their journey. It is also important to remind young women that one of the facilitators is available for extra support during the week if young women want to talk more about this.

INVITATION FOR NEXT WEEK

Let young women know that next week you will be discussing coping, and invite them to bring in examples of things that comfort them and help them cope.

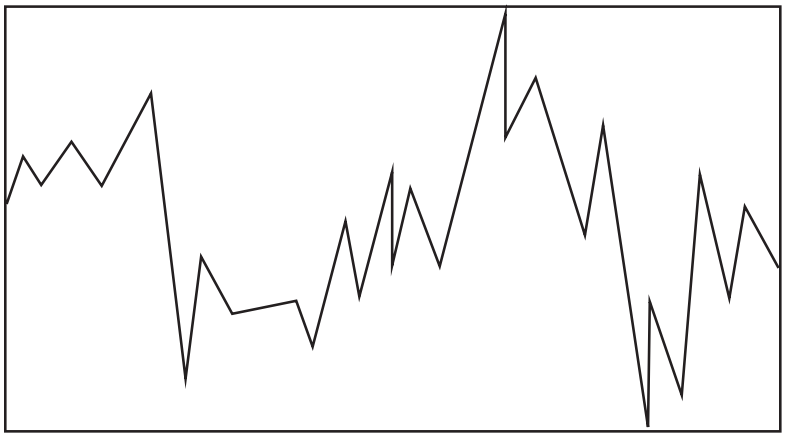
Diagrams of the Grieving Process*

Figure 8



Participants may relate to one of the diagrams more than another. The Figure 8 diagram presents the grieving and rebuilding process as a fluid experience, where sometimes we are feeling more positive and are in the rebuilding phase, while, at other times we are in the lower part of the diagram, grieving, feeling low and pessimistic about the future. We can fluctuate between grieving and rebuilding multiple times in one day. As we begin to heal, we will spend more time in the rebuilding phase. However, there will most likely still be days when we are grieving.

Grief and Loss Graph



The line graph illustrates the erratic nature of the grief and rebuilding process. It also highlights that, for most women, even when they are feeling like things are not improving, there are moments or days where they feel more positive about the future. Experiences of abuse destroy so much. A great deal of rebuilding needs to happen. It can feel like a rollercoaster ride. The healing process is complex and lengthy for girls and young women who have experienced abuse. These diagrams can help give language to describe their healing process.

* Reprinted with permission from Cory J, McAndless-Davis, K. When Love Hurts: A Woman's Guide to Understanding Abuse in Relationships. 2nd ed. New Westminster: WomanKind Press; 2008

Stages of Grief*

There are stages common to survivors of sexual violence and all those experiencing grief. While the below focuses on sexual violence, it is relevant to all experiences of violence. You may not experience all stages, and you might not experience them in this order. You might even go back a stage or two as new memories surface or you deal with new emotions. Knowing these stages can help to identify where you are in the process of recovery and to see each stage not as a conclusion, but as a step on the journey to recovery.

1. Shock and Denial – "It can't happen to me"!

After experiencing sexual violence, there is such total confusion and disbelief that a person often goes numb; the mind-body system has to shut down. It is common for young women to deny that what happened was rape or sexual assault, and/or to downplay it — "it wasn't so bad".

2. Fear, Panic and Shame – "What do I do now"?

Once the shock wears off, you are no longer numb. Some predictable next steps: profound anxiety and vulnerability: "how will I survive this?", the violation, "how will I face my friends and family?", "how will I live my life again?" There is a mounting sense of being out of control, which for many young women also evokes feelings of shame and inadequacy. This lack of control can make the memory of the sexual violence even worse. A survivor may feel like her life is over, like her spirit has died. The effects of sexual violence are long-lasting.

3. Rage and/or Helplessness – "How dare someone do this to me"!

Often young women in this phase swing between rage and profound sadness. Both states can be induced by underlying vulnerability or helplessness. You've been wounded, feel exposed and just want to lash out; or you turn the rage inward.

Though the only person responsible for sexual violence is the perpetrator, many young women are likely to blame themselves for what happened. It is often easier to blame yourself than to understand why someone else would hurt another person the way the young woman has been hurt. The next phase, while often maddening, is essential for moving through the grief process.

4. Guilt and Ambivalence – "Damned if you do, damned if you don't".

In this stage feelings and old voices of guilt and shame can become louder and more incessant. Self-directed rage keeps taunting you for shortcomings, unworthiness, etc., and can ultimately drain you. Many survivors wonder if the pain will ever end. You might be part of a support group, seeing a counsellor, journaling about your assault, but feel like nothing is helping. At this point, it is important to reach out: hold onto hope — it does get better!

5. Focused Anger and Letting Go – "Finding the good out of the bad".

To reach that powerful, purposeful and passionate state of focused anger a young woman must often blend rage and sadness. If you have worked hard to integrate the previous stages, then the reward is "focused anger": "What happened to me was terrible and wrong...but is there another side?" You are ready to loosen the knot of hurt and pain. You are ready to see that while you might never be the person you were before, you are now stronger and capable of reclaiming your voice

and your life. At this stage survivors might start using their experiences to help others (for instance, speaking out or volunteering at a rape crisis center).

5. Exploration and New Identity

Letting go is often unnerving. You have invested so much into simply surviving, you might feel like being a survivor is the only thing that defines you. At this stage, you understand what happened to you is not who you are, but just part of who you are. You'll likely find that you think about what happened a lot less, and feel more like a stronger version of the 'old you'.

This vulnerable yet fluid state provides the opportunity to get to know yourself, to assess your true individuality — strengths and weaknesses — and not only as it relates to sexual violence. Ask yourself: How healthy or toxic are seemingly vital relationships and friendships? How is your overall health? Do some of your coping strategies — habits of drinking, smoking, substance use, eating, exercise and limited socializing or spiritual support — need to be challenged? What do you need to truly move forward?

* Permission granted from Shannon. Sexual Violence and Grief: Pandora's Project; 2007. Available from: http://www.pandys.org/articles/sexualviolenceandgrief.pdf



WEEK SEVEN

Exploring Coping Strategies

HANDOUT

Identifying Coping Strategies

WEEK SEVEN

Exploring Coping Strategies

OBJECTIVES FOR FACILITATORS

1. To explore, without judgement, the different ways young women cope with their experiences of violence.
2. To share, if young women are interested, additional ideas and tools that they and other young women have found, or may find positive and useful in helping them to cope.

OBJECTIVES FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. To learn how varied ways of dealing with experiences of violence can be.
2. To discover positive and useful strategies for dealing with experiences of violence.

TO PREPARE

Handout

Identifying Coping Strategies

KEY MESSAGES

1. Young women develop various coping strategies to deal with the impacts of abuse. In our society, however, we tend to see some coping strategies as acceptable and others as unacceptable. Therefore, young women may experience shame and guilt about some of their coping strategies.
2. Some techniques offered by service providers focus on helping young women to make changes in their lives, but they do not always recognize the dangerous and controlling contexts in which some of them live, which limit their choices, freedom and autonomy. In these cases, some alternative techniques and coping strategies can set young women up to feel like they have failed.
3. All coping strategies should be viewed in a non-judgmental manner. The focus is best placed on how young women feel about their coping strategies, and how the particular strategies have helped them cope with, and navigate the impacts of abuse.
4. Continue to help young women make an important shift from “What is wrong with me?” to “What has happened to me?”

CORE ACTIVITY

Coping Strategies

COPING STRATEGIES

Coping strategies are things we do to get by, to get through, or to survive stressful and unsafe situations or circumstance. Lead the young women through a brainstorm and discussion about coping skills and strategies. The Identifying Coping Strategies handout (Handout 8.1) provides participants a resource to use later if they want to.

Many young women use their various coping strategies as a result of abuse in response to something outside their control, an external problem, an abuser. This critical part of the conversation is sometimes minimized or entirely overlooked by service providers and society in general, and this, in turn, contributes to young women turning to coping strategies that numb or dull the physical and emotional impacts of abuse, as well as towards strategies that give them a sense of control.

Help reduce young women's feelings of shame or guilt by normalizing all coping strategies and linking them to young women's experiences of violence and abuse. Group participants need to recognize that their strategies serve a purpose and help them to survive and cope. This module is not intended to focus on stopping behaviours or coping strategies, but young women need to have developed new strategies before they can or will choose to stop using certain coping strategies. Without these changes, stopping a coping mechanism could be dangerous, and even trigger suicidality.

Ask yourself: "Who am I to decide that this young woman can manage without this behaviour?"

If some participants say they are interested in addressing or stopping some of their coping strategies, let them know:

- talking about their experiences and getting support is a great starting place;
- it takes time to shift the many mental and emotional impacts of abuse, including feelings of anger, isolation, shame and blame;
- facilitators can offer to meet with individuals outside of group and/or refer them to other relevant supports so they can explore what is at the root of their current coping strategies;
- discuss alternate strategies if they want to;
- it is likely not realistic to expect young women to stop using some of their coping strategies throughout the course of this short group;

If it feels appropriate, facilitators can also gently question the safety and usefulness of some of the coping skills and strategies that young women may have previously been told to use. This can remove some of the feelings of failure held by participants who have tried to use these techniques but found that they weren't able to do them, or that they didn't help them feel safe.

Here is what some of the participants in the Girls Speak Out focus groups have said about coping mechanisms:

"... growing up in foster homes and group homes. And, the neglect and the abuse that goes on in there, like I don't wanna remember that or participate in what's really going on, so I check out from life, and I bang heroine all day, [...] so I can numb myself, right"?

"If I was in too stressful of situations I would shut down and then I would get depressed. Um and

my coping mechanism was cutting [...] I was stressed and would get depressed and then would cut and then would get stressed about cutting and then would cut more".

Activity

Encourage a discussion about young women's ways of coping with abuse. The following questions can help guide the conversation:

1. What are some of the ways you have coped with your experiences of abuse?
2. How and when did these coping strategies develop?
3. How do (or did) these strategies help you survive or feel safe?
4. What coping strategies do you find most useful? Why?
5. What coping strategies do you find least useful? Why?
6. What concerns, if any, do you have about your current coping strategies?
7. What are some additional coping strategies that you could use? (e.g., buddy system, harm reduction when out partying, eating really spicy food or getting a piercing when you have the urge to self-harm)

You may want to go over the Identifying Coping Strategies handout and encourage young women to add to the list if a coping strategy is not listed.

Identifying Coping Strategies*

No two people use exactly the same set of coping strategies. The list below reflects many of the common ones. Are there any that you identify with? Do you have ideas of coping strategies that you or others use that could be added to this list?

denying	trying to stay in control	avoiding intimacy
numbing	rationalizing	staying super alert
fantasizing/ day dreaming	minimizing	avoiding sex
sleeping a lot	yelling	self harm/ cutting
not sleeping	avoidance	suicide attempts
isolating	dissociating/ leaving your body	drinking alcohol
perfectionism	zone out /space out	using street drugs
taking care of others	humour	using prescription drugs
eating more/ bingeing	staying busy	cutting/ self harm
exercising	running away	shoplifting/stealing
having lots of sex	piercing/ tattoos	talking to someone you trust
eating less/ not eating/ purging	suppressing/ hiding feelings	being super responsible

What are some additional coping strategies you might be able to use?

_____

_____

_____

* Adapted from materials used by the Victoria Women's Sexual Assault Centre Soul Survivors Group.



WEEK EIGHT

Reframing the Problem – Part 1

WEEK EIGHT

Reframing the Problem – Part 1

OBJECTIVES FOR FACILITATORS

1. To offer participants a way of understanding their experiences of abuse that does not blame them and recognizes the harmful impacts of abuse.
2. To help participants reframe the negative thoughts they have about themselves.

OBJECTIVES FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. To begin to understand the abuse they have survived was not their fault.
2. To further understand the impacts of their experiences of abuse.
3. To reframe some of the negative descriptions young women have of themselves, or that others have labelled them with.

TO PREPARE

Flip Chart

Draw Negative Descriptors Table on a flip chart

CORE ACTIVITIES

1. Reframing Negative Descriptors Discussion
2. Reframing Activity

KEY MESSAGES

1. Many times, people, systems and the society fail to connect impacts (on behaviour, mood, etc.) to young women's experiences of abuse, substance use and mental health concerns, resulting in these coping strategies and impacts often being viewed as 'flaws' or 'bad behaviours' coming from within the young women rather than as responses to experiences of abuse and/or important coping strategies for survival.
2. Young women often feel blame and shame in relation to their experiences of abuse, mental health and substance use. Family and friends, service providers, media and society in general often impose these feelings, either intentionally or unintentionally.
3. Reframing negative descriptors can help reduce young women's feelings of shame, responsibility and inadequacy, and help them shift to an understanding of their responses as impacts of the abuse they have experienced.
4. By giving young women the chance to deconstruct some of the labels they are given, we offer them more accurate and positive language to describe their experiences, and assist them in resisting these negative labels.

REFRAMING NEGATIVE DESCRIPTORS DISCUSSION

The purpose of this discussion is to introduce participants to the idea of reframing negative descriptors before doing the activity.

Start by talking about the fact that young women often wonder if they are partly responsible for the abuse they experience. Abusive individuals may impose this idea by blaming young women for their behaviours (e.g., 'she pushed my buttons,' 'she's a drunk,' 'that outfit she was wearing was like asking for it'). Society tends to reinforce these ideas. Friends and family may ask a young woman what she did to provoke the abuse, while professionals may suggest that she can improve the situation by having 'better boundaries,' reducing her 'problematic behaviours' or working on her 'co-dependency'.

The suggestion that young women are responsible for the abuse implies that they have, or are a problem that needs to be 'fixed.' But, in fact, the problem is abuse. As we have seen in past group sessions, abuse is a pattern of power and control that exists at individual and systemic levels and can really only be changed by the abuser/systems. Nevertheless, because many girls and women are interested in making their relationships work, and because they may have heard these negative labels throughout their lives, they will often take on these negative descriptors and try to fix what is 'wrong' with them.

Abusers often purposely instil guilt and shame in the young women they abuse. This reinforces silence about the abuse. Abuse thrives and is often made possible because of this silence. This is especially true for childhood abuse and abuse by a partner.

The Reframing Exercise helps take apart the blame and negative labels that young women are given and helps young women see themselves in a new and more positive light.

REFRAMING ACTIVITY

Am I Responsible for the Abuse? Through the Reframing Activity, negative ideas that participants may have come to believe about themselves are reinterpreted through the lens of violence and abuse. We provide 'reframes', which are different, more accurate and positive explanations for women's reactions to and impacts of abuse. Past Girls Speak Out participants liked thinking about these as the 'lies' about themselves (negative descriptors) and the 'truths (reframes).

Negative descriptors can usually be reframed as:

- a coping or safety strategy that the young woman has used to stay safe or survive;
- a strength within that young woman; and/or
- an impact that the abuse has had on the young woman.

As the facilitator you will assist participants in taking negative descriptions and reframing them to more accurately describe their own motives or behaviour. This reframing recognizes the impact of abuse and helps affirm to participants that they are often doing the best they can.

Throughout the weeks of group, when interacting with participants, facilitators should regularly use the concepts built into this exercise. From the first intake meeting to the last session, and particularly during check-in time, these concepts can gently offer young women a less self-blaming way to look

at their experiences. For example, if a young woman says that she has "poor boundaries with her partner," you might want to wonder aloud "whether it is safe to set boundaries in her relationship" or ask her what has happened if she has tried to set a limit or have her needs respected.

To lead the exercise, have the young women brainstorm negative descriptors of themselves. These might include negative labels they feel about themselves, negative descriptors that others have used when describing them, or negative descriptions that they have heard about young women with experiences of violence, mental health concerns or substance use in general.

Draw the table below on a flip chart:

NEGATIVE DESCRIPTION "Lie"	REFRAME "Truth"

Once you have generated a list of negative descriptors in the left-hand column, encourage the group to work as a whole to reframe these into more positive and accurate understandings of these feelings and behaviours, which you can write in the right-hand column.

The following table provides some examples of reframing of common negative descriptors:

Negative Description "Lie"	REFRAME (Coping Strategy, Strength or Impact) "Truth"
You don't know how to set proper boundaries	• It is hard for me to set boundaries because I am dependent on others for things I need • The boundaries I set are not always respected by others • I know it is sometimes unsafe for me to express my needs or set boundaries
You always go for the 'bad' guys/girls	• My previous experiences of abuse have decreased my expectations of relationships • The guys/girls I am attracted to usually display their positive qualities early on • My abusive partner(s) offered me something I needed (e.g., protection, shelter, access to drugs)
You have low self-esteem	• Being treated poorly has hurt my levels of confidence • I live in a society that makes me feel invisible or inadequate • The abuse has lowered my self-confidence and left me feeling dependent
You just want attention	• I am having a hard time and am trying to receive the acknowledgement and support I deserve • The abuse has made me feel silenced and invisible
You drink too much	• I drink because it helps me cope with the pain of my current and/or past abuse • I drink because my partner or peers expect or pressure me to • When I drink I feel less stressed out
You avoid conflict	• I am watching out for my emotional and physical well-being • My experiences of abuse have made me afraid of conflict • I try to negotiate and compromise in my relationships
You are crazy	• I have natural responses to fear The abuse is crazy-making • I keep getting mixed messages from service providers, friends and family

When the group has finished, close the activity by having participants reflect on what it was like, and whether it made them think or feel any differently about themselves.



WEEK NINE

Reframing the Problem – Part 2

WEEK NINE

Reframing the Problem – Part 2

OBJECTIVES FOR FACILITATORS

1. To continue to offer participants a way of understanding their experiences of abuse that does not blame them and recognizes the harmful impacts of abuse.
2. To continue to help participants reframe the negative thoughts they have about themselves.

OBJECTIVES FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. To continue to understand the abuse they have survived was not their fault.
2. To further understand the impacts of their experiences of abuse.
3. To continue to reframe some of the negative descriptions young women have of themselves, or that others have labelled them with.

TO PREPARE

Chart paper
'Lies' and 'Truths' charts created in Week 9
Art supplies
5 pieces of plain fabric (cotton works best) cut into 5" x 11" inch rectangles
Glue
Paint, sewing materials, or craft supplies to make collages
Journals

CORE ACTIVITY

Resisting and Reframing Art Activity

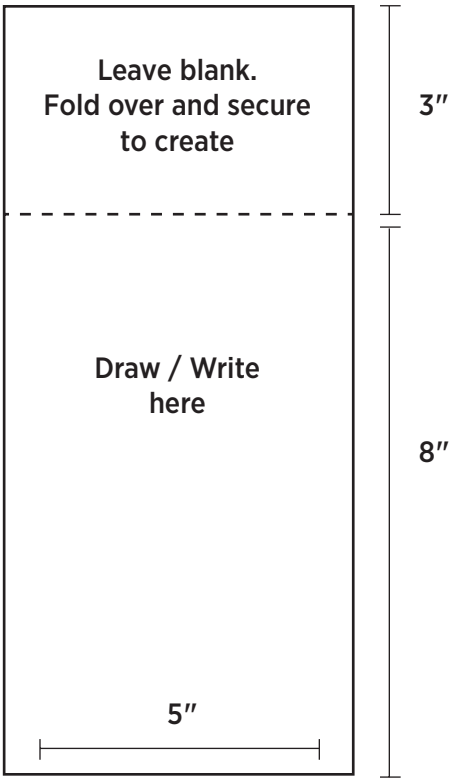
RESISTING AND REFRAMING ART ACTIVITY

The purpose of this week is to allow some relatively unstructured time to create positive art pieces in an informal way. The activity provides participants with an opportunity to express resistance to the negative descriptors or ideas of themselves or other young women with experiences of abuse, substance use or mental health concerns. Facilitators are encouraged to provide materials and samples they have created themselves.

SUGGESTION A: PRAYER OR WISH FLAGS

Explain to participants that Prayer or Wish Flags have been used in Nepal and Tibet as a symbolic means to promote peace, compassion, strength and wisdom. Traditionally they are hung outdoors, where the wind passes through the flags, carrying the message and blessings to all people. The words and symbols dissolve into the wind and are spread to all whom the wind touches. In this group the purpose of prayer flags is to claim positive descriptions of ourselves, to remind ourselves of these, and to send them out into the world. You can follow these steps:

- Provide each participant with 5 pieces of plain fabric (cotton works best) cut into 5" x 11" inch rectangles. If possible, use multiple colours (old bed sheets work well).
- Ask each participant to fold the top down on each piece of fabric and stitch or glue in place to create a 3" sleeve. This will make the flag surface approximately 5" x 8" inches.
- Instruct participants to use the art supplies available to decorate their flags (e.g., paint, stitch or collage).
- Encourage participants to add words or symbols as desired. Depending on what is available, they may use stickers, stencils or just write with a marker.
- One side of each flag may represent a negative descriptor, thought, feeling or label participants have of themselves (or that others have projected onto them). The other side of each flag should represent the reframing of those negative descriptors into strengths or coping strategies. For example, on one side of the flag a young woman might write the word 'Addict,' and on the other side of the flag she might write the word 'Survivor.'
- Once participants have decorated all their flags, have them thread the flags onto a piece of string or twine. Ensure that all the negative descriptors are on one side, and that the positive reframes are on the other side.
- If it is safe to do so, encourage participants to hang the flags with the positive side facing outwards, in their home or outside, to remind them of all of their strengths and coping strategies. They may also want to see this as a way of releasing their shame and blame into the wind, while sending their strengths and resiliency into the universe.
- Give participants the option of sharing the meaning of some of their flags, but reassure them that they do not need to share if they don't feel comfortable doing so.



SUGGESTION B. POETRY OR WRITTEN EXPRESSION

As an alternative form of expression, participants may choose to write a poem, short story or rant. Participants are encouraged to think about the "reframing" that has happened over the past few weeks and to use some of these ideas in their writing. Here are some guiding ideas for this exercise:

- For inspiration, find examples of poetry from sources such as DSC Master/Group/Soul Survivors/Handouts/Project Respect/"The Power to Respect" — Sept 2006
- Provide an opportunity for participants interested in sharing their writings to do so.
- You can also suggest this as an activity they might want to work on in their journals during the week. Ensure you provide some space during check-in the following week(s) for young women to share any writings they have produced outside of group if they wish.

INVITATION FOR NEXT WEEK

Let participants know that the topic next week is on deconstructing harmful media messages and sharing and creating more accurate, positive and empowering ones. Invite the young women to bring in any examples of media they like and that provide an alternate and more empowering message for young women, including videos, written word and visual art.



WEEK TEN

Developing Media Literacy

HANDOUT

Examples of Affirmations and Rights

WEEK TEN

Developing Media Literacy

OBJECTIVES FOR FACILITATORS

1. To continue exploring how the media perpetuates issues of gendered violence and harmful social norms and inequalities.
2. To continue reframing negative messages about young women, including their responsibility for their experiences of abuse, and to assist participants to come up with more positive and accurate messages.

OBJECTIVES FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. To continue understanding how the media portrays gendered violence and creates harmful social norms.
2. To continue understanding their experiences of abuse including reframing negative descriptors of themselves.

TO PREPARE

Handout

Examples of Affirmations and Rights

Video

"Who are You?" public service announcement http://www.whoareyou.co.nz/

CORE ACTIVITIES

1. Positive and Subversive Media Messages
2. Support Plan Group Brainstorm

KEY MESSAGES

1. The media and popular culture generally objectify young women and portray men and boys as more central and powerful.
2. Messages in the media can blame and shame young women who have been abused or sexually assaulted, and often condone or trivialize acts of violence, abuse and harassment against women.
3. By deconstructing these messages and creating more accurate and positive media messages, we can start to challenge these harmful ideas with our friends, family, and social networks.

1. POSITIVE AND SUBVERSIVE MEDIA MESSAGES

This week's focus will be on media that reframes negative messages about abuse to be more positive and empowering.

To kick start the discussion, facilitators should share some examples. Starting with 'conventional media' to help participants remember the previous discussions of the harmful and negative messages in the media is helpful. Once you have reviewed these, share some examples of more positive media that resists these negative messages. See handout Examples of Affirmations.

We suggest including 'Who Are You?', a Public Service Announcement (PSA) from New Zealand. This PSA helps to shift the blame off of individual girls and women by highlighting the roles of bystanders in preventing sexual assaults. The majority of previous GSO participants found the video to be valuable and 'real'.

> **Note that this video shows a near sexual assault. Please let participants know this before showing the PSA so young women can decide if they watch or not.**

Discuss this piece and what is says about victim-blaming and the role of bystanders in our culture, as well as any parallels that young women see between this clip and their lives. Note that some young women may not be able relate to the bar or party scene. If that is the case, discuss how similar situations could arise in other settings.

If participants seem interested, invite them to discuss how we can affect or create media with more positive or messages that push back against violence or unhealthy messages, like this clip does.

You may also want to share the blog entry below with girls, as it helps counter media messages that objectify girls' and women's bodies or lay blame and responsibility on girls and women in cases of sexual assault.

From Melissa McEwan, on the Shakesville blog.[57]

> **"Rape culture is 1 in 6 women being sexually assaulted in their lifetimes. Rape culture is not even talking about the reality that many women are sexually assaulted multiple times in their lives. Rape culture is the way in which the constant threat of sexual assault affects women's daily movements. Rape culture is telling girls and women to be careful about what you wear, how you wear it, how you carry yourself, where you walk, when you walk there, with whom you walk, whom you trust, what you do, where you do it, with whom you do it, what you drink, how much you drink, whether you make eye contact, if you're alone, if you're with a stranger, if you're in a group, if you're in a group of strangers, if it's dark, if the area is unfamiliar, if you're carrying something, how you carry it, what kind of shoes you're wearing in case you have to run, what kind of purse you carry, what jewelry you wear, what time it is, what street it is, what environment it is, how many people you sleep with, what kind of people you sleep with, who your friends are, to whom you give your number, who's around when the delivery guy comes, to get an apartment where you can see who's at the door before they can see you, to check before you open the door to the delivery guy, to own a dog or a dog-sound-making machine, to get a roommate, to**

take self-defense, to always be alert always pay attention always watch your back always be aware of your surroundings and never let your guard down for a moment lest you be sexually assaulted and if you are and didn't follow all the rules it's your fault".

Participants may also want to share media pieces they have brought in or seen.

2. SUPPORT PLAN BRAINSTORM

Group brainstorm: Invite participants to discuss some ways that they look out for their girl friends and how they get support from their friends when they are feeling unsafe in a situation. Give the example of the 'Circle of 6' app found at http://www.circleof6app.com/ as one option.

Examples of Affirmations and Rights

- Nothing or no one can make me less than who I am.
- My life's purpose is more important than this, so I must do what's important for me.
- Be careful how you are talking to yourself, because you are listening. — *Lisa M. Hayes*
- I am willing to see the beauty in me.
- I wish I could show you, when you are lonely and in darkness, the astonishing light of your own being. — *Hafiz*
- I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become. — *Carl Jung*
- You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it. — *Maya Angelou*
- We need to accept that we won't always make the right decisions, that we'll screw up royally sometimes — understanding that failure is not the opposite of success, it's part of success. —*Arianna Huffington*
- I am patient with my painful emotions. I am compassionate with myself and my heart.
- Stress is an alarm clock that lets you know you're attached to something not true for you. —*Byron Katie*
- The most authentic thing about us is our capacity to create, to overcome, to endure, to transform, to love and to be greater than our suffering. —*Ben Okri*
- I love my: (name part of female body you wish to honour).

Rights in a Friendship, Romance, or Sexual Relationship*

It is my right in a relationship to:

- Express my opinions and have them respected
- Change my mind
- Choose if and when I want to have sex or fool around
- Have my needs be as important as my partner's needs
- Not have sex if that is my choice or to use safer sex practices
- Not be emotionally, physically, or sexually abused
- Choose to stop having sex or fooling around at any time, even during
- Not take responsibility for someone else's actions and words
- Choose my friends and/or partner(s) without discrimination or pressure from others
- Fall out of love or end a friendship and/or a relationship without fear of negative repercussions and/or violence

* Used with permission from: Rights in a Friendship, Romance, or Sexual Relationship: Reference Sheet: Girls Action Foundation; 2016. Available from: http://girlsactionfoundation.ca/en/amplify-toolkit-/workshop-guide/healthy-relationships/my-rightsmy-relationship/rights-in-a-friendship-romance-or-sexual-relation.



WEEK ELEVEN

Finding My Voice

11

HANDOUT

Examples of Affirmations and Rights (from Week 10)

WEEK ELEVEN

Finding My Voice

OBJECTIVES FOR FACILITATORS

1. To continue discussing dominant and harmful messages in society regarding abuse and violence.
2. To encourage participants to begin to notice and have more trust in their own voices.

OBJECTIVES FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. To continue to understand harmful messages in society regarding abuse.
2. To begin to learn to trust their own voices and 'gut instincts'.

TO PREPARE

Flip Chart

My Voice/Dominant Voice Table

Handout

Examples of Affirmations and Rights (from Week 10)

CORE ACTIVITIES

1. Tackling Rape Culture and Victim Blaming in the Media
2. My Voice/Dominant Voice

KEY MESSAGES

1. Many young women feel blame, shame and responsibility for their experiences of violence. It is important to emphasize that it is never the victim's fault, and the abuse and resulting impacts are wrong and unfair.
2. Young women's voices or 'gut instincts' are often silenced by louder, 'dominant' voices that minimize or trivialize abuse and blame women and girls.
3. Dominant messages in the media and society also hold young women and girls responsible for preventing their abuse and/or sexual assault.
4. Young women face many other barriers to trusting or acting on their gut instincts, including: guilt, the need for drugs or alcohol, the need for shelter, not feeling that they have other options, and not being able to legally make their own decisions (because they are underage, are labelled as having a mental health issue, etc).
5. Young women should be encouraged to recognize their gut instincts and to trust their own voice.

1. TACKLING RAPE CULTURE AND VICTIM BLAMING IN THE MEDIA

This week we will continue shifting some of the blame off of ourselves for experiences of abuse or violence. While many young women hold strong feelings of blame, shame and responsibility for their experiences of violence, it is important to remember that it is never the victim's fault, and what happens to young women is wrong. Revisit Examples of Affirmations and Rights from Week 10 to find examples of media exploring rape culture and victim blaming.

Discuss and debrief these media examples with participants. If participants are really roused by a particular clip and are engaged in the discussion around rape culture or victim blaming, you may want to share more examples, either at this point or after the next activity.

2. MY VOICE/ DOMINANT VOICE

Set up this activity by discussing with participants how, in abusive or violent situations, young women's 'guts' or instincts almost always tell them "this is not okay". In this activity we help young women to think about their responses to abusive or violent incidents, and how societal messages or messages from an abuser often override young women's gut instincts.

Young women who participated in the Girls Speak Out focus groups described their 'gut feelings' or 'voices' in the following ways:

"You can feel that pit in your stomach, just like that pulling, where you're like "why am I doing this"? You feel it in your chest, you feel it everywhere and you're breathing, just about to walk into the room and you know you're in trouble cause of something".

"I remember [...] like I met this guy and I just knew he was bad ever since the moment I met him, but I was like an alcoholic back then and... he would always drink me up [...]. I talk to people and they say like, it's not my fault, but like, you know, I feel almost as it is, because you know, I knew from the very beginning".

Remind participants that deciding something by instinct or intuition is not always a respected way of knowing in mainstream North American culture. We get a lot of messages to ignore our feelings and only pay attention to things that are 'logical'. Violence can also create a setting where the woman may feel like something is wrong, but the external or outside messages are saying that what is happening is not problematic and/or that if it isn't okay, that it is her own fault. In either scenario the additional message is that she should stay silent about what happened or face shame and blame from her family, peers and/or society in general. These internal and external messages conflict with each other and can teach the young woman to ignore or silence her own feelings or beliefs.

Several of the young women who participated in the Girls Speak Out groups also shared that they felt responsible for their experiences of assault or abuse because they did not follow their gut/ inner voice and keep themselves safe. It is important for girls and young women to recognize that in addition to the dominant Voices that may oppose their own voices, there are also many

other barriers that can prevent them from following their voices. Some of the examples that young women shared with us include:

"I was an alcoholic back then and depended on him for alcohol".

"I had this feeling in my gut that it wasn't safe for me to go to his house, but he had something of mine that was valuable and that I needed back".

"My mother moved out when I was young and I was living alone, I needed someone for company and to help me get by. I was just a kid".

"She treated me so badly and I knew I needed to get out of that relationship, but she was in the hospital for her mental health issues and I just couldn't break up with her in that situation. I would feel so guilty".

MY VOICE/ DOMINANT VOICE TABLE

Write the following headings on flip-chart paper. Participants may also want to create a similar chart in their journals so that they can fill it out with their own experiences.

What happened	What happened before the incident	My Voice	Dominant Voice	What prevented me from listening to my voice

a) What happened – The Incident(s)

- Ask participants to think back to an incident in their lives in which they feel that they were treated badly. Participants may label the incident as an experience of abuse or violence, but it is not necessary to place such a label. You may want to ask participants to think of a time when someone did something, or something happened, and your gut told you "this is not okay".
- The example incident might be a negative or harmful action or comment from a partner, parent, friend or other acquaintance; it might be a remark, look or action from a stranger; or other relevant incident. For example, a dating partner may have shown up drunk and uninvited to the young woman's house while she was sleeping and demanded to come in, or a stranger on a bus might have stared at a young woman's body and made a sexist and/ or sexual comment to her.
- The incident may also be something that happened due to systemic racism, heterosexism or another 'ism' and might not have a specific abuser. For example, a young woman who identifies as Aboriginal may have noticed several racist "Indian" Halloween costumes in the

store, or a young trans woman may have needed to change for gym class but had nowhere safe and private to change.

- If participants are comfortable sharing incidents that they have experienced, write them in the appropriate column of the flip-chart paper. If initially no one is volunteering, or if participants are having a difficult time getting the conversation flowing, facilitators can provide examples. The video "Who am I?" can be used as an example, and the group can collectively discuss what happened, what they think 'her voice' might have been saying, and what the dominant voice would have said.

b) What happened before the incident? – Context

- This column might not apply to everyone. However, it will apply to most participants.
- It is important that young women are able to see the context of what happened. For example, if the incident involved an abusive partner, family member or person in a position of power, answering this question might help acknowledge that the nature of the relationship, their initial attraction towards their partner, or their feelings towards a family member were an influencing factor in their initial experience and interpretation of the incident.

c) My Voice – What did your gut/inner voice say?

- Ask each young woman who has shared an experience to try and remember what her 'voice' said about the situation.
- Ask young women to think about what their gut reactions to abusive or violent incidents were. Begin to talk about this 'gut reaction' as 'her voice'. This 'voice' may have been her thoughts or things that she told a friend, or it may have been a combination of sensations and feelings. An example of our inner voice is when we get an uncomfortable feeling in our gut.
- Write gut reactions down in the second column of the chart, naming them as young women's voices. Some examples might include:
  - knot or sick feeling in stomach, fear rising in body, feeling cold and/or shaky, face flushing, no appetite
  - "Wow, that hurt"! (emotionally or physically)
  - "I don't like this. I want this to stop".
  - "I do not deserve that".
  - "That person is overreacting".
  - "That is not fair".
  - "What the hell was that"?
  - "This is not right".
  - "This person is creeping me out".
  - "What a jerk".

c) Dominant Voice – What did the dominant voice say?

- Ask participants to think about the 'voices' or messages that silenced their own voices. These voices may have come from a partner, a friend or family member, the culture, media, or ideas

she was raised with. Participants may also want to think back to some of the messages promoted in the film or media clips that you have looked at in group so far. Some examples of a "dominant voice" can include:

- "It was only a joke; you need to relax".
- "I'm his/her girlfriend, I should do that for him/her".
- "Boys will be boys".
- "He is just immature; he doesn't mean to be hurtful".
- "She is just really stressed out and doesn't mean it".
- "He was just really drunk and doesn't mean it".
- "I must have sent messages to him/her that I wanted/liked it".
- "This set-up works for most people; you are just being difficult".
- "He/she comes from a bad family/ doesn't know how to deal with anger".
- "This wouldn't happen if you were skinnier/prettier".
- "This wouldn't happen if you were straight".
- "She is struggling with mental health concerns".
- "My expectations are too high".
- "No one else will want to be with me, I should just put up with it".
- "He's just trying to protect me".
- "It's better than not having a girlfriend/boyfriend at all".
- "I shouldn't have... (gotten so drunk, gone to his house, etc.)".
- "At least he/she didn't hit you".
- "She just gets jealous because she loves you so much".

Encourage participants to share these with the group, and flip chart the responses. People may find it difficult to tell the first voice and the dominant voice apart. Sometimes, young women have heard, or thought, the dominant voice for so long, they have come to see it as their own voice. **A good guide is usually that the first voice says that the abuse is not okay; while the dominant voice justifies it.** If a participant says her voice said the abuse was okay, encourage her to think back to her first gut reaction. Another voice may have spoken very quickly and tried to overpower her voice.

d) What prevented her from listening to her own voice?

- Help participants identify some other barriers that might prevent them or other young women from following their instinct or gut feelings about a situation. These might include logistical barriers, feelings that they have about themselves, lack of control over their decisions and lives, and many other things. This part of the chart is intended to be completed as a group brainstorm, but special importance should be given to the ideas of whichever young woman shared a specific incident, as these are her experiences.
- Debrief the activity once participants have shared as much as they are comfortable with.

No matter how dominant and loud the dominant voice is, the young woman's voice is still there. **Learning to trust their inner voices and wisdom is one of the most valuable things a young woman can take away from the Girls Speak Out support group.** Group is a good place for young women to

try and hear their voice and express it. Abuse has made young women doubt their voice and their instincts; learning to listen and trust their voice is a process that takes time.

INVITATION FOR NEXT WEEK

Invite participants to find a stone (no bigger than the palm of their hand) to bring to group next week. Facilitators should also each bring in a stone.

Also, remind participants that next week is the 2nd last week of group. Start a discussion about what you want to do as a celebration in the final week, as well as what it will be like for group to end. If possible, and if they are interested, help young women with the transition out of group by starting to help them identify other resources, supports and coping strategies they may want to use once the group has ended.

When everyone has 'checked-out,' invite young women to think about what they may be able to do for themselves during the week if they are feeling down, such as "What are some ways that you can cope with emotions that may have surfaced throughout the group session, or related to other challenges"?

After participants are comfortable in their closing position, one facilitator will read out the positive affirmation/quote of personal strength to the group (see Examples of Affirmations and Rights in Week 10). The affirmation or quote can change each week. This is a good place to invite participants to bring in their own examples of positive affirmation/quotes of personal strength or poetry they have written that can be shared with the group for closing. Participants can volunteer to bring something the following week, or it can be left as an open invitation.



WEEK TWELVE

Finding Hope

WEEK TWELVE

Finding Hope

OBJECTIVES FOR FACILITATORS

1. To teach participants how to reflect on and gain strength from positive relationships and events.
2. To help participants recognize and honour their individual strengths, capacities and ability to self-heal.

OBJECTIVES FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. To reflect and gain strength from positive relationships and events.
2. To recognize and honor their individual strengths, capacities, and ability to self-heal.

TO PREPARE

Create flip chart for brainstorm
Bring extra stones
Supply note cards or pieces of paper

CORE ACTIVITIES

1. Talking circle with stones
2. Support, connection and safety – Group brainstorm
3. Preparation for the final week

KEY MESSAGES

1. Finding and maintaining hope while still in an abusive situation, or navigating the many emotions and obstacles after an abusive incident or relationship can be very difficult. Young women will be processing many conflicting emotions as they try to rebuild their lives or achieve safety.
2. It is important to recognize and honour without judgment the various coping and safety strategies young women have used to cope, survive and rebuild.
3. Discussing strategies for support, connection and safety will reinforce their strengths and positive things they are already doing for themselves, and will allow young women to brainstorm new strategies they can use.
4. Facilitators are encouraged to use this discussion to assess what services and supports participants may benefit from as the group comes to a close.

TALKING CIRCLE WITH STONES (59)

Invite participants to decorate the stone they have brought. Have extra stones on hand for young women who may have forgotten or who did not attend the previous week.

a) When participants are ready, begin this activity by leading three brief brainstorms about what contributes to:

A nourishing relationship with ourselves	A nourishing relationship with all other living things	A nourishing relationship with the earth
a strong sense of self/healthy self image	A special pet or favourite animal (for example, playing with their first pet)	A special place of beauty, comfort, good memories, inspiration, relaxation
an aspiration (for example, to impact positive social change	Special relationships in our lives (for example, mother, special friend, etc.)	Contributing to helping the environment (for example, recycling, planting a garden, etc.)
a great joy in life (for example, snowboarding)	Healthy and positive relationships with other young women or facilitators in group	Time spent in nature

b) Invite participants to form a circle where they are close enough to one another to hand off and receive stones easily.

c) Explain to participants that they are sitting in a Talking Circle with Stones.

d) Tell them that the idea of a Talking Circle is to provide a safe space for them to share their stories about nourishing and positive experiences, or moments with themselves or in relationships with others.

e) Explain that once the first person finishes speaking, they pass their stone to the person on their left. Everyone in the group hands their stone to the person on their left at this time. This is the process followed after every sharing. By the time the exercise is finished, the participants' stones will have come full circle back to them and will have been touched by everyone in the group. The stone represents the personal healing that each participant has done in group, as well as the healing power of the group as a whole.

- Ask a participant to volunteer (it can be one of the facilitators) to begin the sharing circle.
- A volunteer begins by sharing a story/example of a nourishing and positive experience, or moment with themselves or in relationships with others. Something and/or someone who/that has brought them, or continues to bring them happiness, strength, etc.

e) After the activity, participants might want to keep their stone in their pocket, purse or backpack, or perhaps on their desk or on a shelf. It is meant to serve as a reminder of each person who shared and with whom they connected with during the exercise and throughout the weeks in group. The stone can serve as a reminder of this group and of all the things that they have learned from it. It can also be a "touchstone" to rub when they are feeling stressed or down.

SUPPORT, CONNECTION AND SAFETY — GROUP BRAINSTORM

Encourage the group to talk about how they are feeling as group comes to an end, and invite everyone to think about ideas for what they can continue do for themselves that will foster ongoing support, connection and safety.

Ask young women how confident they feel about their ability to self-nurture once group is done, and problem-solve as a group about how to continue to remember what they have learned and gained through group in the coming weeks and months.

PREPARATION FOR FINAL WEEK

Remind the group about the celebration next week and finalize the plan and details together — i.e., where to meet, what to bring etc.

Hand out small note cards or small pieces of paper to each participant (facilitators included) and invite everyone to take some time during the week to write a short note about each participant on each card. What participants write can be simple. It can be something that is admired or appreciated about each individual participant. At the end of next week's group everyone will give their notes to each other.

When everyone has 'checked-out', invite young women to think about what they may be able to do for themselves during the week if they are feeling down, such as "What are some ways that you can cope with emotions that may have surfaced throughout the group session, or related to other challenges?"



WEEK THIRTEEN

Celebrating the Journey

WEEK THIRTEEN

Celebrating the Journey

OBJECTIVES FOR FACILITATORS AND PARTICIPANTS

1. To celebrate and share in each other's accomplishments over the 13 weeks of group.

TO PREPARE

1. Prepare for celebration/outing
2. Materials as needed depending on the chosen activity such as note cards, post it notes, etc.

CORE ACTIVITY

Outing/celebration/activity

KEY MESSAGES

1. Honouring each young woman's strengths and accomplishments throughout the group will help reinforce feelings of belonging and connection.
2. Facilitators should encourage participants to stay in touch with them and with the other young women after the group is over.
3. This is a time to talk about ideas for continuing to access support and build on the connections made in group. Some suggestions might include: continuing to offer a program/space for young women to meet regularly (second stage support group, or informal drop-in), monthly coffee dates, one-on-one support, accessing other services, setting up a private Facebook group, etc.

OUTING/CELEBRATION

Based on feedback from participants, you will have organized a group outing and celebration together. For example, a potluck at the beach or park; dinner at a restaurant; bowling, visiting an exhibition or cultural centre, going to a movie etc.

POSSIBLE COMPONENT OF CELEBRATION: GROUP ART ACTIVITY

Invite group members to create a group collage or book that reflects their collective experiences in group (i.e., empowerment, knowledge, struggles, healing).

Participants may wish to create this art piece by each selecting some individual images and bringing them together and then collectively adding any other art materials they like.

Once it has been completed, take some time as a group to talk about any final thoughts or feelings that the compilation brings up or represents. If possible, and if group members are interested, take a photo or photocopy of the compilation for group members to keep as a reminder of their journey.

NOTE CARDS/MESSAGES

Invite participants to give the cards/messages that they wrote to one another.

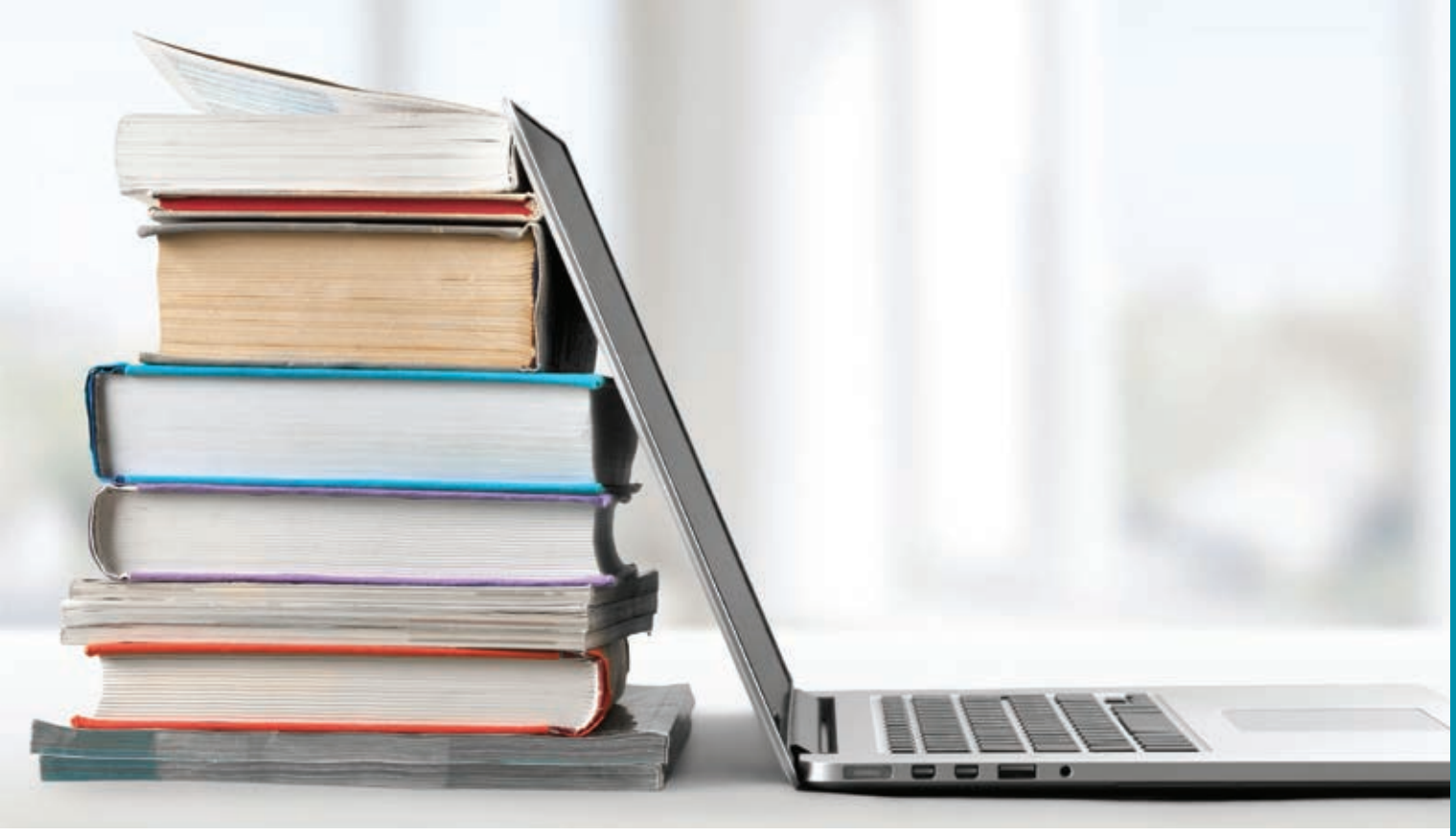
Have some extra cards/pieces of paper available for young women who may have forgotten, or who were not at the previous week's group.

Facilitators are encouraged to also hand out the cards/messages they wrote at this time along with envelopes for participants to store their cards/messages. These messages can be taken home and kept in a safe place so that participants can read them on challenging days as a source of encouragement.

This is a good opportunity for facilitators and participants to thank one another for the connections they have made.

FINAL CLOSING

Thank everyone for coming and participating in group, for their strength, courage and commitment. As it is the last week, facilitators are encouraged to pick one or two powerful quotes that reflect all of the work, courage and strength demonstrated by the young women over the course of the 13 weeks as well as setting a tone of hope for the future.



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RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

http://bellejar.ca/
A Canadian blogger, Anne Theriault, who writes about a wide range of topics, including feminism, her experience of depression, rape culture and pop culture, and always has a great analysis of violence against women and girls.

http://bitchmagazine.org/
Bitch Media is the non-profit organization best known for publishing the magazine Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture. Bitch Media's mission is to provide and encourage an engaged, thoughtful feminist response to mainstream media and popular culture.

http://www.feministfrequency.com/
Feminist Frequency is a video web series that explores the representations of women in pop culture narratives. Anita Sarkeesian created the video series in 2009 as an educational resource to encourage critical media literacy.

http://feministing.com/
Feministing is an online community for feminists and their allies. The community aspect of Feministing — its community blog, campus blog, comment threads and related social networking sites — exist to better connect feminists online and off, and to encourage activism.

http://www.rookiemag.com/
This publication by and for teenage girls provides a feminist alternative to traditional teen magazines.

http://www.womensmediacenter.com/blog/
The media plays a major role in shaping perspectives on of a woman's place in society, and this blog and website acts as a watchdog for any signs of sexism or exploitation. It also seeks to promote better visibility of female media figures.

http://www.bust.com/
An unapologetically feminist read covering anything and everything related to the rights and role of women in society. This website presents a female perspective on pop culture — BUSTing stereotypes about women since 1993.

http://www.feministe.us/blog/
A number of diverse contributors weigh in on women's rights issues and feminism, also paying close attention to the marginalization of minorities and the LGBTQIA community as well.

http://youngfeministtaskforce.blogspot.ca/
The US-based National Organization for Women's first ever virtual chapter is called Young Feminists and Allies (YFA). Their purpose is to help bring young women, men and non-gender-conforming individuals into feminist activism and give a greater voice to young feminists.

http://kickaction.ca/
An online community of young women who think for themselves, take a stand and act creatively to bring positive change to their communities and across the globe!

http://seejane.org/

Founded by Academy Award®-winning actor and advocate Geena Davis, the Institute is the only research-based organization working within the media and entertainment industry to engage, educate and influence the need to dramatically improve gender balance, reduce stereotyping and create diverse female characters in entertainment.

http://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/media-issues/gender-representation/women-girls
http://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/media-issues/violence

MediaSmarts is a Canadian not-for-profit charitable organization for digital and media literacy. Their vision is that children and youth have the critical thinking skills to engage with media as active and informed digital citizens.