

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Avoiding “The Life”

We hear words and phrases like “pimp,” “prostitute” “john,” “going on dates” and “being in the life” a lot — but what does it really mean? The more you know, the more power you have.

What is “the life?”

It is the commercial sexual exploitation of children, also known as “CSEC.” CSEC is a form of child abuse. Youth who are bought and sold for sex acts are victims of sex trafficking. Some people make being in “the life” sound glamorous – you may get your hair and nails done, wear nice clothes and drive in nice cars. But all of the things that at first appear glamorous come at a cost.



How does someone become a victim in “the life?”

WHO?

- Anyone can get caught up in the life
- Most vulnerable are youth who have experienced tough things like foster care, homelessness, physical and sexual abuse, and other problems at home
- Pimps say they target youth who they think are vulnerable or weak, who they can control

WHAT?

- Selling sex for money, clothes, food, & shelter
- Being cut-off from your family and friends and the life you knew
- Having a pimp control what you do and say, when you eat and sleep and who you have sex with
- Being abused, physically and emotionally

WHERE?

- You can be recruited anywhere
- The most common places where people are targeted are the internet (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat), school, bus stops, malls and group homes

HOW?

- Pimps complimenting you, offering to buy you things, offering to be the family you never had
- A friend at a group home trying to convince you to run away with them
- Being kidnapped while walking down the street



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Some common myths about “the life” and what survivors are saying

All quotes are from survivors of the life.

MYTH: These kids aren’t victims. They chose to sell their body. They could leave if they wanted to.

FACT: No one chooses to be in “the life.” Survivors say that it’s easy to get caught up in the life, but really hard to leave. Pimps play with your mind. They make you think you can’t do anything else and that you need them to survive.

“It’s not a choice, no one just wakes up and wants to do this. You can’t just walk away.”

“He kind of played on my emotions to get me to stay. ‘I don’t want you to leave, you’re a part of the household.’”

MYTH: I could make a lot of money being in the life. It sounds exciting and fun.

FACT: There’s a lot of money being thrown around, but it’s not going to you. Survivors say that when they finally left the life, it was only with the clothes on their back.

“The life you are tryna live is not the lifestyle you’re gonna want forever.”

MYTH: He’s not my pimp, he’s my boyfriend.

FACT: He’ll pretend to be your boyfriend at first, get you to fall hard, then tell you that if you loved him you would do this for him. It’s confusing.

“In the beginning he made me feel like I was walking on clouds. And then he started beating on me, and started making me feel bad, like low. Then when I started selling my body, I was just like, wait. I felt really dirty and stuff like that, but I mean, through all of that, I still felt like I loved him.”

Making the decision to get out of “the life”

It’s never too late to get out of the life. Many survivors struggled for years to make the big decision to leave. It is a process. It is normal to return to the life multiple times before you are ready to leave for good. You may feel confused, angry or alone, but there are people along the way who can help you. Don’t give up.

If you or someone you know is currently, or has been in “the life,” you are not alone and you can get help. Remember that no matter what happens, this is not your fault and this does not define you. Many survivors have finished high school, gone to college, found good jobs and built good lives for themselves. You can do that too.

I think I may need help. Who can I call?

- ✓ DCFS hotline: 1.800.540.4000
- ✓ Saving Innocence: 1.323.379.4232
- ✓ Children of the Night: 1.800.551.1300
- ✓ National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1.888.373.7888 or Text INFO or HELP to BeFree (233733) – 24/7

For more information, visit kids-alliance.org/csec or clcla.org.

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