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Resources

The below guides include useful information, plus inappropriate terms and suggested alternatives to support practice.

[Appropriate Language: Child Sexual and / or Criminal Exploitation - Guidance for Professionals](#)

[Appropriate Language in Relation to Child Exploitation](#)

[Child Exploitation Language Guide | The Children's Society](#)

6

The language you use matters

Watch [this short video](#) on victim blaming language created by young people. It is a focused and powerful resource for all practitioners, to help them, and others, understand the impact on young people of victim blaming language.

Examples of negative phrasing include “they put themselves in risky situations”, “they should have known better” and “they will not engage with services” – extensive examples are given in the above guidance for professionals alongside more appropriate language.

5

Listen

Listen closely to the language children and young people use. Do not change the language so that you feel more comfortable. Say exactly what the child or young person has told you to ensure you are capturing their voice.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to share alternative terminology to help children and young people understand healthy relationships and exploitation and recognise that what happened wasn't their fault. This is dependent on the situation and relationship with the child / young person.

4

Record Keeping

Practitioners should consider the influence of the language used within written information and how that may alter the perspective and practice of any professional it is shared with. Those records will remain throughout the child or young persons life.

The language used can change the responses to and outcomes for a child or person and can do so even when you are no longer supporting them.

1

What is victim blaming language?

Victim blaming language implies that a victim is responsible for the abuse they have experienced. The language we use is shaped by and normalised within the cultures we work, live, and spend time in.

Language has evolved and it is important to recognise that phrases that were once commonly accepted may no longer be appropriate. As such, professionals should maintain an open and reflective attitude to make sure that language used is supportive and respectful.

2

The importance of language

When discussing children and young people who have been abused, it is imperative that appropriate terminology is used.

Sometimes the language that is used implies that the child or young person is responsible in some way for abuse they are subjected to. This must be avoided to ensure we safeguard children and young people appropriately. It is also important to recognise that a child cannot consent to being abused.

3

Implications

The language used should reflect the presence of coercion and the lack of control children and young people have in the abusive or exploitative situation, and the severity of the impact.

Victim-blaming language may reinforce messages from perpetrators around shame and guilt. This may prevent disclosures, through fear of being blamed by professionals. When professionals use victim-blaming language, there is a risk of normalising and minimising the child's experience, resulting in a lack of appropriate response.

Victim Blaming Language

Bury Safeguarding Partnership



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