

7MB – Language Matters: Avoiding Victim Blaming Language

Links to Resources

[Child Exploitation Appropriate Language Guide 2022.pdf \(childrenssociety.org.uk\)](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/Child_Exploitation_Appropriate_Language_Guide_2022.pdf)

[Guidance App Language Toolkit.pdf \(csepoliceandprevention.org.uk\)](https://www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/Guidance_App_Language_Toolkit.pdf)

Only the perpetrator is to blame

A child does not choose or consent to be exploited. **Only the perpetrator is to blame for abuse or criminal exploitation.** By challenging our own and others choice of language we will ensure a culture of appropriate language use here in Stockport.

What can we do?

Always ask yourself, what would the young person feel if they read or listened to this about themselves? Writing in this way ensures we refrain from blaming the victim - keeping the child vulnerable to being a victim means they are more likely to recognise themselves as the victim and flag concerns to us.

Staying alert and promoting alternative language when we see or hear the use of victim blaming language, allows other professionals to advocate for the young person within meetings and written reports. Managers can support by providing opportunity to discuss victim blaming language within supervision. By working as a team, we can remove victim blaming language from Stockport.

Changing our language and our thinking needs to be across all that we do. Both in the ways we verbally interact with children and families, and also within our policies, procedures, and core values. Using appropriate alternative language opens up thinking around what we are worried about in a young persons life and what is working well.

What is Victim Blaming Language?

A child cannot consent to their own exploitation, however, **victim blaming language questions what victims could have done differently** rather than laying blame solely with the perpetrator. It can be split into 3 categories:

1. Situational – where they were – e.g. an unlit park
2. Behavioural – the way they were acting – e.g. they were drunk
3. Characterological – blames their character – e.g. promiscuous

Individuals rarely intend to use victim blaming language, it is shaped and normalised by the cultures surrounding us; language that was once acceptable may not be now. Here in Stockport, we want to eradicate the use of victim blaming language.

How does it impact?

Language used **impacts the way professionals interact** with young people, with other professionals, and with themselves when making decisions. The language used may be minimising the situation or making child seem more adult-like leading to further assumptions about their capabilities, this **may influence decisions** when putting safeguards in place. **Young people may feel they are not believed** or supported, our relationships with them may be compromised, and it may change the way they think about themselves.

Misusing language can increase risk - if young people don't recognise themselves as a victim **they don't come forward to report abuse**, they may not realise they are being abused.

Changing our Language

Victim blaming languages implies that the child has made a choice to partake in the activity, by changing to appropriate alternative language, we identify the balance of power correctly and **fully identify the child as the victim.**



Examples of Victim Blaming Language	Alternative Language to consider
Putting themselves at risk	The situation could increase a perpetrator's opportunity to abuse/ exploit them
Promiscuous or Sexually Active	The child is a victim of sexual abuse
They will not engage with services	Services have not found they best way as yet to build relationships with the child
Offered drugs in return for sex	The child is being sexually/criminally exploited through drug debt
Goes missing from home	The child is being exploited and feels pressure to go missing from home
Involved in CSE	The child is being trafficked
Has been contacting adults on the web	The child is vulnerable to online perpetrators