# Language

WHAT WE WRITE MATTERS

"The language of care is so mixed up with our everyday language that it is difficult to separate the two. These words that we challenge are used by everyone: foster carers, social workers, teachers, Independent Reviewing Officers, administrators and even children and young people. We should challenge ourselves and challenge people who we hear using them." Rotherham Young People

# Language that cares (TACT 2019)

❖ Abscond

▶ We prefer: Run away; Go missing

❖ Asylum seeker

▶ We prefer: Young people

❖ Care plan

▶ We prefer: Future plans; My plan

❖ Challenging Behaviour

▶ We prefer: Having trouble coping; Distressed feelings; Different thinking method; Difficult thoughts

❖ In care

▶ We prefer: Another home away from home; Living with a different family in a different home
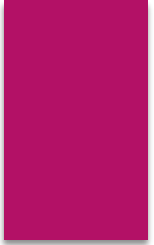
# Language that cares

- ❖ LAC/Foster child
- ▶ We prefer: Call children by their names; LA should say 'our children' or Hillingdon's children; Young People or Children

- ❖ Placement
- ▶ We prefer: Our home or home; My house or the house where I live

- ▶ Special needs
- ❖ We prefer: Additionally supported; The needs name, i.e. disabled, global developmental delay, learning need, etc

"Why we use these terms? It might be that it gives us a sense of control, reducing a complex situation into something that you can describe neatly and respond to or that it decreases our feeling regarding perceived risk, being able to name a difficulty or threat reduces the danger of an unknowable threat. It can offer a disguise for when we don't know, or we don't understand and defends us against an intolerable/unpleasant feeling."
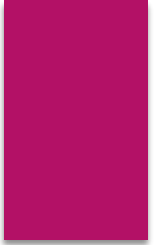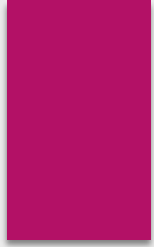
Changing the way professionals discuss and record their work with exploitation (Solihull LSCP)

Mo is a 15 year old boy and is putting himself a risk. He keeps running away from home and is having a relationship with an adult of concern. He is sending and receiving indecent images from this adult. We think they met online and started their relationship this way. Mo is also dealing drugs and is possibly committing CCE. He may even be a gang member running county lines. Despite the risks that have been explained to him on numerous occasions, he continues to be involved in this risky behaviour. His mother has a chaotic lifestyle and is an alcoholic.  She will not engage with the school.

Mo is a 15 year old boy and we believe he is being groomed. He is being coerced to leave his home at night time and is under duress not to return home. We think someone else has control over his behaviour. Mo has described sexual activity, however, concerns exist that he is being sexually abused. Mo is being criminally exploited through drug debt and it appears Mo is being forced into criminality and may be acting on behalf of an individual or group in a criminal capacity. His mother is alcohol dependent, has poor self care and lives in unsuitable temporary accommodatio. Mother appears withdrawn and unable to talk with school.

## What is victim blaming?

Victim blaming is any language or action that implies (whether intentionally or unintentionally) that a person is partially or wholly responsible for abuse that has happened to them. It is harmful and can wrongfully place responsibility, shame or blame onto a victim, making them feel that they are complicit or responsible for the harm they have experienced.

Why does this matter?

Technology is a big part of everyday life, bringing endless educational and social benefits and opportunities, for adults, children and young people. However, there are potential harms children and young people may encounter when online, including online child abuse, bullying, harassment or criminal exploitation. The consequences and impact of online child abuse can be just as severe as abuse experienced offline. For more information see NSPCC's 2018 report "Everyone deserves to be happy and safe".

# Why is victim blaming harmful?

Blaming children and young people for their own abuse is never acceptable. Professionals should clearly understand that children can never be expected to predict, pre-empt or protect themselves from abuse. Irrespective of the context or circumstance, the responsibility always lies with the person who abused the child or young person

Children and young people's experiences may not be treated as a safeguarding concern.

When victim blaming occurs, there is a risk of diminishing the child or young person's experiences, leading to a lack of, or an inappropriate, safeguarding response.

Victim-blaming language may reinforce messages from perpetrators around shame and guilt.

This in turn may prevent the person from disclosing their abuse, through fear of being blamed by professionals.

When victim-blaming language is used amongst professionals, there is a risk of normalising and minimising the person's experience, resulting in a lack of appropriate response.

# Direct and indirect victim blaming

## Direct:

- After receiving an abusive message online, a professional may say it's the child or young person's fault for accepting a friend request from someone they didn't know on social media.

- In the context of non-consensual nude image sharing, professionals may blame the child or young person for sharing the image in the first place, and say what's happening to them is their fault because they sent the image.

## Indirect:

- When speaking to the child or young person after a disclosure, telling them what they should have done differently in that situation in order to keep themselves safe.

- Inferring or suggesting that a child or young person should take responsibility for keeping themselves safe online. For example, saying a child or young person 'shouldn't place themselves in danger' or 'put themselves at risk' by doing x or using y.

# Challenging victim blaming language

## Key Principles

- Remember children lack control in abusive situations

- Focus on the behaviour of the person who abused the child

- Be open to children's lived experiences

- Explain the impact of victim blaming language and behaviour

## Key Principles

- Review policies and procedures

- Model the language and behaviour you expect from others

- Make time for learning and reflection

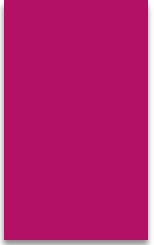GUIDANCE FOR USING APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE – can be found at Language Matters Doc v2(1) (1).pdf (procedures.org.uk)
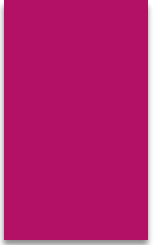
**Case Studies**

An 8-year-old boy has shared information about themselves and what they like doing, with someone they met on a game on their console. They met and talked after bedtime on a game their parents told them not to play. The person now keeps messaging them, wanting to chat and play, and offering tips on completing the game. The child is getting annoyed with all the messages and wants to talk to someone they trust about what to do.

1. If the child turned to a professional for help with this scenario, what do you think that professional might think or do?

2. What victim blaming language or behaviours should be avoided in this scenario?

3. What could professionals say and do that would be supportive?

A 10-year-old girl has created a social media account to share her passion for fashion and make up. She has posted a number of pictures of herself in the new clothes she got for her birthday – she loves her new 'grown-up' look. Other classmates have put mean and bullying comments on the posts and the girl is very upset. A friend has suggested she deletes all her social media accounts and photos, but she doesn't think this is fair.

1. If the child turned to a professional for help with this scenario, what do you think that professional might think or do?

2. What victim blaming language or behaviours should be avoided in this scenario?

3. What could professionals say and do that would be supportive?

A 17-year-old boy has been exploring his sexuality online. He has downloaded some adult dating apps, and has been looking online for advice. He got chatting to some older men in a forum who have said he will know his sexuality for sure if he performs sex acts for them online, and this has made him feel very uncomfortable.

1. If the child turned to a professional for help with this scenario, what do you think that professional might think or do?

2. What victim blaming language or behaviours should be avoided in this scenario?

3. What could professionals say and do that would be supportive?

**Scenario**

A 10-year-old tells a family member they have seen scary and inappropriate images on their phone. They didn't ask for help at school because teachers had told them again and again that they shouldn't be on social media and were clearly frustrated with the children. Staff had even been overheard complaining to parents about children and parents not following the rules and 'asking for trouble'.

1. What victim blaming language or behaviours can you identify in this scenario?

2. How could you respond to the victim blaming language or behaviours displayed in this scenario?

3. Could that happen in our setting? Do we need to do anything to change practice or train colleagues to avoid this?