

Be aware of the impact that trauma may have on a victim		
Inappropriate Term	Implication	Suggested Alternatives
“Their behaviour is manipulative” “They are aggressive with staff and refuse to account for their absence” “They are rude and dismissive to police”	Whilst it is important to explore the voice of the person by describing their behaviour, it must be put into context, without adultifying¹ any children and take into account the causes of the behaviour. A person’s actions may be a response to trauma due to past abuse, exploitation, fear, and/or due to previous experiences/cultural beliefs around services which have reduced their trust in us.	“[name] shouted at staff when asked where they had been. They then went up to their room.” “[name] appeared upset, which could be a result of the trauma they are experiencing from being exploited...” “when I asked [name] where they had been during the missing episode they did not reply”
“Returned home safe and well....” “Returns without having come to any physical or emotional harm.”	This minimizes any physical or psychological harm the child might have come to during a missing episode and does not take account of the context of any push/pull factors that may include harm done to the child inside or outside the home. Care should be taken not to make assumptions, the absence of information that someone has come to harm does not mean that they have not come to harm. A lack of disclosure should never be interpreted to mean that nothing took place. Officers are to ensure they are professionally curious, considering and recording any behaviour exhibited by the child on their return along with any known visible signs of injury or distress.	“[name] has returned home, care home staff report that they do not have any visible injuries that staff could see at this time. [Name] is still in the clothes they were wearing when they left. He/she/they was/were calm and quiet on their return, and appeared withdrawn and subdued.”
“The victim is unable to provide a statement at this time as they appeared under the influence of substances.”	Whilst it is important to explain why evidence has not been collected at the soonest possible time, this phrasing implies judgement on the victim for taking substances: an implication that the alcohol or drugs have increased their vulnerability and that if they are responsible for the drinking/using they are then responsible for being assaulted. Furthermore, the choice to take substances is now the reason why there is not the required evidence to progress the investigation. This phrasing does not take account of the impact of trauma on a victim's memory.	“A statement/VRI will be completed on [date] in order to ensure the best evidence is gathered and to give the victim time to recover from the assault.” “The victim had consumed substances prior to the assault and it is likely that the suspect has exploited this during their offending.”

¹ [Adultification bias within child protection and safeguarding \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/adultification-bias-within-child-protection-and-safeguarding/)

	Officers should consider other lines of enquiry where possible, such as CCTV or witnesses.	
Survival strategies to manage perpetrator's behaviour		
Inappropriate Term	Implication	Suggested Alternatives
"They will not engage with services." "Refuses to provide a statement/support police." "Victim refused to hand over their phone for examination."	There are many reasons why a victim of crime or exploitation may not be able to engage with services or support a prosecution of their abuser: fear; self-protection tactics; trauma; and lack of trust. Using language that implies the victim has full agency but is refusing to provide the information required does not take account of the context of the abuse. Instead it is important to try to identify barriers and recognise challenges for the victim so that over time they can be broken down	"Due to the trauma they have experienced, the child/victim finds it difficult to trust unknown adults." "Victim is not ready to provide a statement, and based on officer/my observations.... (appeared afraid, agencies have not yet found a way to engage victim)." "[name] has said they will not provide a statement at this time because... In my opinion the victim appeared afraid etc" "Victim needs their phone for contact with their children and is unable to hand it in at this time." Use the AFRAID mnemonic to assist you in identifying and recording the barriers.
"Victim won't leave the relationship." "The victim says they love the suspect and that they had been verbally abusive prior to the incident."	This type of language suggests some fault on the victim or implies there is some blame that lies with them. Be mindful that choice and consent are only true when it is informed and there is no fear or duress involved. Leaving a relationship is often likely to put the victim at increased risk. Children cannot consent to exploitation or abuse.	Consider using simple and direct language that is written in the 'active voice' – "I am still concerned that Pete is abusing Abby including [type of abuse] because [summarise reasons for concern]" "[name] has groomed the victim who now sees them as a person of trust and/or is too fearful or repercussions to engage with police."

"Continues to smoke cannabis daily which increases their vulnerability." "Accepting drugs in return for sex." "Drug Addict/Alcoholic"	This language mutualises any abuse that the victim may be experiencing by making him/her the agent of increased risk. In many cases, substance misuse is a coping mechanism or a control tool used by perpetrators. It is therefore more important to examine why the victim is using alcohol/drugs and consider what criminal justice action we can take against anyone supplying drugs or abusing children along with referrals to partners for substance misuse.	".... is being targeted by perpetrators who are supplying them with drugs as part of the grooming process." "Child is being criminally/sexually exploited." "Child is being raped" "Their vulnerability regarding drug use is being exploited by others to abuse them."
--	--	---

Convey fact and do not minimize or mutualise abuse		
Inappropriate Term	Implication	Suggested Alternatives
"Sexual activity with.... "	This implies legally consensual sexual activity has taken place by "mutualising" the action and it is not appropriate if occurring within an abusive or exploitative context. Consider whether an imbalance of power or grooming of the victim has impacted on their ability to identify and/or take action against, any abuse. Before conviction we are unable to state that the perpetrator has raped the victim, but we also need to minimize any suggestion that the allegation is not believed, so where possible we should use factual information to be clear about what is being investigated. Sometimes abusers force children to participate in sexual acts with another child, including those younger than them. Officers/staff must be aware to not make assumptions that such sexual activity is consensual or that the child is themselves the abuser and consider the complexity of coercion and control.	"The offence under investigation is that the suspect has raped the child/victim." "A known/unknown suspect has been/may have been sexually abusing the child/victim." "There are concerns that the child/victim has been coerced, exploited, raped, or sexually abused."

"In a relationship with..."/ referring to the perpetrator as a "boyfriend/girlfriend" "Consensual sex" "Actively seeks out adult men/women" "Engaged in sex work" Referring to the victim as "Promiscuous"	This implies that the child is in a legally consensual relationship and does not reflect the abusive or exploitative context including the use of coercion and control by the perpetrator. The use of "mutualising" language and suggestion of agency is not appropriate where the child is being abused. A victim cannot consent to abuse. Be aware about the legal ages of consent in relation to sexual violence crimes.	"The child says that they are in a relationship with a person and there are concerns about that person's age, the imbalance of power, exploitation and/or offending." "The child has been/is being groomed, exploited, and controlled." "The perpetrator has manipulated the child to believe they are in a relationship."
"Involved in CSE/CCE" "Engaged in criminality" "Associates with a gang"	This mutualising language implies that the child has agency/choice over their abuse. The use of the word "gang" minimizes the harm caused to children by organised crime.	"The child is a victim of exploitation, likely by an organised crime group." "The suspect(s) are criminally exploiting the child to distribute drugs/hold weapons/store money." "They are a victim of modern day slavery."
"...regular misper..." "... breaches curfew" "Comes and goes as he/she pleases" "Tends to come back in the morning..." "Normal behaviour for him/her/not out of character"	This phrasing is both minimizing and potentially mutualises abuse. It suggests a degree of agency whilst not taking account of the context of abuse and exploitation by not addressing why the child is experiencing frequent missing episodes. Rather than describing the event solely in relation to the child's agency, consideration of push pull causes and a lack of protective factors would be more appropriate.	"The child has been reported missing X times over X months, and it has not always been possible to locate them before they return, there are concerns that this pattern of missing episodes indicates that they are at risk of exploitation/harm." "Subject has been missing previously, X times in X months"
"It was a low-level assault." "It was a minor argument/injury." "Stormy relationship/acrimonious separation."	By adding the subjective word: it minimises the impact of the abuse on the victim. Instead, be factual to describe the level of injury. Also be aware of minimising the impact of verbal abuse which can have a significant psychological impact on victims and contribute to coercive control. Often a perpetrator will present as a victim or seek to apportion blame on a victim's actions and this type of language perpetuates that blame and reduces	"The victim suffered a 5cm cut below her right eye" "There was a battery without noticeable visible injury." "the Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment (DARA) rating is standard." "There is a history of domestic abuse incidents reported over 12 months, without any charges to date."

“Both parties have been in a stormy relationship for some time.” “This is the first time it has occurred.”	perpetrator accountability for the abuse. Be factual as to what has been reported, understanding that what might be the first reported incident is unlikely to be the first actual incident.	“This is the first incident that has been reported to police.”
“money mule” “plugging”	Dehumanising phrases are sometimes used to name or describe processes within exploitation. They do not adequately describe the acts the child is being coerced/forced into, and they minimize the risks to the child. Objectively describing what has occurred is less likely to minimize the harm caused.	“The victim is being exploited into moving the proceeds of crime for the criminal network by moving cash through their bank account.” “Drugs have been inserted into the Child’s rectum/vagina so that they can be hidden and moved.”
Identify the power holder		
Inappropriate Term	Implication	Suggested Alternatives
“Drug running” “working” “dealing drugs”	This implies that the child has the capacity to make a free and informed choice without taking account of the exploitative context and abuse. Note that some people involved in exploitation are also victims.	“The child is being trafficked for the purpose of criminal exploitation.” “The suspect(s) are criminally exploiting the child to distribute drugs/hold weapons/store money.”
"Putting themselves at risk" “Choosing this lifestyle” “Associates with gangs”	This implies that the victim is responsible for the risks presented by the abuser and that they can make free and informed choices without recognition of the victim's age, lived experience or the realities of abuse, coercion and control. Instead we can concentrate on the risks posed by the suspect and use a trauma informed approach to consider what push/pull factors are impacting on the victim.	“The suspect is believed to have groomed/be exploiting the child.” “There are a lack of protective factors around the victim.” “There is a power imbalance.” “The child is being criminally exploited.”
“...has been contacting adult males/females by phone or internet.”	This implies that the child is responsible for the communication and does not explore the power imbalance, grooming or exploitative context.	“Adult males/females have been contacting the child.” “The child may have been groomed.”

		“There are concerns that the adult is facilitating communication with the child.” “ The child is vulnerable to online perpetrators.”
--	--	--

Use neutral, factual language		
Inappropriate Term	Implication	Suggested Alternatives
“the victim alleged they were raped” “the victim has allegedly been assaulted by their partner”	‘Allegation’ is a legal term that has its place in the justice system. However, when we record violence against women and girls as having ‘allegedly’ happened, it risks casting doubt on the truth of the report from the beginning. In turn, this could potentially affect the policing response that the report receives. It is during the investigation process that practitioners should take steps to establish whether there is evidence to support the report. In the event of a burglary, it would usually be recorded that a member of the public ‘reported they were burgled’ rather than ‘alleged they were burgled’. We should adopt a similar approach for violence against women and girls. ‘Reported’ is neutral language that simply means the victim-survivor has informed authorities about the incident.	If the perpetrator is known, they should be mentioned first – “The victim reported X raped her.” If the perpetrator is unknown – “The victim reported that someone raped her but she does not know / recall their name / identity.” “[name] told police that she was raped” “The victim reported that [her partner / partner's name] assaulted her.”
“the victim’s phone has been seized for download” “the victim’s bedding has been seized for forensic examination”	This gives the impression that the items have been taken by force and that the victim is an unwilling participant in this.	“the victim handed over their phone for download. This has been taken using relevant power [s.19 PACE] etc” “The victim allowed police to take their bedding for forensic examination”

Neurodivergent conditions

Inappropriate Term	Implication	Suggested Alternatives
recording autism as an ailment including "suffering from autism"	Some people might suffer as a result of autism but that's not a universal experience and it takes away that person's ability to own how their autism impacts their life. Person-first vs identity-first language can be a personal preference. This also applies to other neurodivergent conditions/learning disabilities.	Victim is autistic, victim has ADHD - depending on how the victim prefers the syntax. If officers are unsure, then ask the person how they prefer to be described.
"he/she is on the spectrum...he/she is an aspie"	These phrases have negative connotations and should not be used to describe autism, ADHD or dyslexia. Instead, where possible use the medical language of the diagnosis or placement on pathway to diagnosis.	[child] is currently awaiting an assessment for a neurodivergent condition/learning difficulty or disability. "the victim has learning difficulties/ADHD. This affects them by X" "the victim stated they have dyslexia but has not had a formal assessment for this. The victim does not plan to have a formal assessment"

Consider the reason for your writing and who the readership will be		
Inappropriate Term	Implication/Preferred Approach	Suggested Alternatives
"the address was filthy" on a referral to children's services	This could be subjective (levels of cleanliness vary!) and may suggest judgement. Instead, describe the dirt that you can see and why it is problem as the more detail you can give, the better the understanding that our partners will have about the support level required.	"I could see cat's faeces on the floor and smell cat urine in the sitting room and kitchen and [name] told me that they have 4 cats. [Name] is 4 years old and suffers from asthma and I am concerned about the impact of this living situation on their health."