

Communication – Context - Curiosity

Language is often used unconsciously, and can be shaped by the cultures and communities in which we live and work. Sometimes practitioners can use language ways that risk negatively impacting upon young people. We shape our identity with language – and are shaped by how others use language about us. Professionals should commit to being open, reflexive and teachable when it comes to the language they use. This is particularly important with regards to young people who face Risk Outside The Home.

- ☐ The language we use affects how we see and understand young people
- ☐ The language we use affects how others will see and understand young people
- ☐ The language we use affects how young people will see themselves
- ☐ The language we use can affect the support offered to young people
- ☐ The language we use can affect the outcomes for young people

We should gently challenge and educate others and be open to being challenged by others.

“It is imperative that appropriate terminology is used when discussing children and young people who have been exploited or are at risk of exploitation. Language implying that the child or young person is responsible in any way for abuse and crime that they are subjected to, must be avoided to ensure we safeguard them appropriately. It is also important to recognise that a child cannot consent to their own exploitation.” (Childrens society).

Language is crucial in building relationships, but inappropriate terminology can reinforce and perpetuate blame and shame, risking reinforcing emotional bonds with perpetrators. It can build barriers to engagement and alter professional views of a young person. Language can also favour adults and act to exclude children. Specific words may carry negative meanings and memories for some children which may impact engagement with support

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Example One: *“Sexual activity with....”*

This implies consensual sexual activity has taken place. If it occurs within an abusive or exploitative context this term is not appropriate and should not be used.

Alternative: “The perpetrator has raped the child...The child has been/may have been sexually abused...Concerns exist that the child may have been coerced, exploited, raped, or sexually abused.”

Example Two: *“In a relationship with...”*

This implies that the child or young person is in a consensual relationship and does not reflect the abusive or exploitative context including the use of coercion and control by the perpetrator.

Alternative: “The young person 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 young person has been/is being groomed, exploited, and controlled...The perpetrator has manipulated the child/young person to believe they are in a relationship.”

Example Three: *“Putting themselves at risk...”*

This implies that the child is responsible for the risks presented by the perpetrator and that they can make free and informed choices without recognition of the child’s age, circumstances and lived experience or the realities of grooming, coercion, and control.

Alternative: “The child may have been groomed. - There are a lack of protective factors surrounding the child - The location is dangerous to children - It is unclear whether the child is under duress to go missing - There are concerns that the child may be being exploited - There are concerns that there is a power imbalance forcing the child to act in this way.”

Examples taken from [The Children’s Society: Appropriate Language](#)