

1st January 2022

Dear Colleagues

During 2021 we collectively recognised that we can do more to use language that cares, through a journey of co-production with many of you (the CSC workforce) and members of Silsip (Childrens looked after, Say it Loud Say it Proud) we have worked on terminology we agree we want to use and not use. Children and their families tell us that language matters and we ask that you strive to use language that shows you care, in all that you/and we do.

As we pledge to use different language, there may be times when we are unsure if specific language is ‘ok’, or we may at times get it wrong. If you are uncertain then ask yourself:

* How would I feel if this language was used about me or about my behaviour?
* Am I using language which recognises that children have a right to care and protection?
* Am I describing children and families and their strengths, and am I being specific about what it is that children need to be different for them to be able to thrive?
* Am I being clear about what is fact and what is my professional opinion?
* Am I avoiding using any jargon or acronyms that children, families or my colleagues don’t understand?
* Am I being curious about what language children and adults use to describe themselves including their strengths, their difficulties, their personalities and their histories (for example ‘victim’ and / or ‘survivor’?)
* Am I avoiding using language which might suggest that children or adults could be to blame for their own abuse or exploitation?
* Am I thinking about trauma and adverse childhood experiences - asking myself ‘what has happened to this child or parent?’ rather than ‘what’s wrong with them?’
* Am I prepared to check out the language I am using or ask for feedback from others if I am unsure? Remember that lived experience is unique – what one person feels is ok another may not – be humble, ask if you aren’t sure – this is working in partnership.

Please read this document, following which I ask that you sign the Pledge – “I am doing all I can to ensure myself and colleagues who work for or with social care are working with Language that Cares”. Feel free to pass the Pledge on to colleagues within our professional net work and encourage the language that cares to grow.

Never underestimate the power of words. The language we use is incredibly important in building working relationships that demonstrate we understand the lived experiences of children and young people and their families. It is important we represent those experiences in a way that is empowering, opens doors, develops a sense of belonging and worth and enables change.

Please watch and reflect on the following video from Luke Rodgers, BEM founder of The Care Leaders.

[Luke Rodgers - Foster Focus - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjoXNAGUVmo)

If you can watch the whole clip great if not, please watch the clip from the point at 3 minutes 50 seconds to 9.18 where Luke describes a referral made about him and the language used.

Perceptions are formed by the language we use. Please think about how you describe children, young people, and their families; how your words might be interpreted; are you saying what you are meaning?

The power of words can be empowering, especially for children looked after. Imagine being 10 years old and never having a place that is referred to as your home.

Example - Parents often complaint about the use of the words “parental substance misuse” when it is not both parents, be clear in your language, is it Mother/Father or both?

The article below is a parent’s experiences of language used by social work professionals:

Community Care article:

[Divisive, demeaning and devoid of feeling: how social work jargon causes problems for families (communitycare.co.uk)](https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2018/05/10/divisive-demeaning-devoid-feeling-social-work-jargon-causes-problems-families/)

Think about the meaning in what you are saying – is it representing what you mean? and if it a fair representation?

Examples

* Unacceptable behaviour or understandable behaviour?
* Avoidant or in-flight survival mode?
* Defiant or in fight survival mode coping with a threat?
* Aggressive or frightened?
* Attention seeking or attachment seeking?
* Withdrawn or cautions?
* Rude or self-protective?
* Not engaging or doesn’t feel safe yet?

The information below (page 3) is designed to help you reflect on language; it is not a complete list. Once you have read, please sign up to our collective Pledge and return to your manager for your supervision file.

Thank you

**Sonia Johnson, Assistant Director, Children’s Social Care**

**January 2022**

**REFLECTIONS ON LANGUAGE**

| **LANGUAGE** | **ALTERNATIVES** |
| --- | --- |
| **Abscond** | * Left without permission * Whereabouts unknown * Missing |
| **Asylum Seeker / UASC / Unaccompanied asylum seeker** | * Child seeking safety from XX * Seeking safety from xx * Seeking Refuge from xx |
| **Birth/ Biological Parent** | * Parent * Natural Parent * Birth Mother/Father   *If appropriate ask the child how they would like their parent/s referred to* |
| **Care Leaver** | * Care Experienced * Moving on * Moving to independent living   *Ask the young person themselves; when we consulted our CL’s in 2019 they liked care leaver* |
| **Care Plan** | * Young person’s plan * My/your plan * Independence plan * Change plan * Caring for you plan |
| **Case** | * Family I am working with / or key worker for * Child I am working with / or key worker for * Young Person I am working with / or key worker for |
| **Case Study** | * Example of Practice * Child Study * Family Study |
| **Challenging Behaviour** | * Emotional behaviour * Complex behaviours * Saying what behaviour, they have exhibited * Trauma needs * Help seeking behaviours |
| **Consistent Guide** | * Constant Support * Consistent * Close Friend * Family Friend * Relative |
| **Contact/ Supervised Contact** | * Family time * Family visit * Visit * Seeing family / mum/dad/brother |
| **Contact Centre** | * Name the venue |
| **Designated Teacher** | * Teacher * My tutor * Teaching support |
| **Difficult to Place** | * No suitable matches * Carers cannot meet the support needed * Looking for the right home/environment |
| **Disabled**  **Disabled child** | For example:  “A man who is blind” instead of “a blind man”  “Person with autism” instead of “autistic”  “A person who uses a wheelchair” instead of “wheelchair bound”  Child with a disability or even better the condition the has “child with cerebral palsy” |
| **Drop Out** | * Early school leaver * Withdrew from education * Change in pathway/direction * Left school early |
| **Foster Carers** | * Call carers by their name/ the name the child users   *For long term matches: Ask the child and carer ..*   * By name * Foster’s mum/dad |
| **Full Potential** | * Very best * Excel yourself * Reaching targets |
| **Family Group Conference** | * Family meeting * Family group chat * Family support meeting * A meeting |
| **In Care** | * Child looked after * Cared for by… |
| **Intervention** | * Guidance/ help * Involvement * Support * Programme |
| **LAC (Looked After Child)**  We no longer use the term LAC – defer to CLA – Child/ Children Looked After | * CIC – Child in Care * Child fostering * Our children |
| **LAC Review** | * CIC – Child in Care Review * My review/ your review * Supported child review |
| **LAC Visit** | * CIC (Child in care) visit * Social Worker visit * Child visit * Visit |
| **Leaving Care** | * Moving to independence * Moving on / moving out * Becoming a young adult |
| **Moving Placement** | * Moving home * Moving families |
| **Naughty** | * Trauma needs * Emotional behaviour * Unsettled * Misbehaving, if age appropriate * Say what the behaviour is |
| **NEET (not in Education or Employment)** | *Do not abbreviate the term;*   * Not in school or work * Not in education * Between jobs |
| **Negative Behaviour** | * Emotional behaviour * Adverse behaviour * Say what the behaviour is * Trauma behaviour/needs |
| **Offender** | * A child who has committed a criminal offense * A child in need of youth justice support |
| **Permanence** | * Long term * Settled |
| **Placement** | * Family * Home * Where you live/ your home * ‘John and Barbara’s use names if its short-term fostering |
| **Putting Themselves at Risk** | * The child may have been groomed * The child is at an increased vulnerability of being abused and/or exploited * A perpetrator may exploit the child’s increased vulnerability * The child is not in a protective environment * The situation could reduce the child’s safety * The location is dangerous to children * The location/situation could increase a perpetrator’s opportunity to abuse them * it is unclear whether the child is under duress to go missing * There are concerns that the child may be being sexually abused * It is unclear why the child is getting into cars * There are concerns that there is a power imbalance forcing the child to act in this way * There are concerns regarding other influences on the child |
| **Respite** | * Short break * Time away * Holiday * Their own time * Weekend away * Sleep over |
| **Reunification** | * Returning home * Going back to family * Reuniting |
| **Rehabilitation** | * Recovery * Recovering * Feeling better because of… |
| **Special Needs** | * Additional needs * Additional support |
| **Statutory Visits** | * Visit * Social Worker visit * Home visit |
| **Targets** | * Goals * Wishes * Achievements |
| **Targeted Services** | * Services to meet identified need * Services * Services available |
| **Victim** | * Survivor * Harmed party * Person Harmed |

**CONCLUSION**

Many of these suggestions came from the Staffordshire ‘Voice Project’.

The top five words that the group felt most strongly about were:

1. Abscond
2. Case
3. LAC (Looked After Child)
4. Placement
5. Respite

**Further reading:**

* TACT Fostering & Adoption have a policy document which can be accessed via the link below:

[TACT-Language-that-cares-2019\_online.pdf (tactcare.org.uk)](https://www.tactcare.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/03/TACT-Language-that-cares-2019_online.pdf)

* Research in Practice:

[Appropriate-language-Child-sexual-andor-criminal-exploitation-guidance-for-professionals.pdf (researchinpractice.org.uk)](https://tce.researchinpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Appropriate-language-Child-sexual-andor-criminal-exploitation-guidance-for-professionals.pdf)

* Things not to say to people who’ve been in care:

[Things Not To Say to people who've been in care - BBC Three](https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/clip/2faec03d-1191-4ff9-bb9d-c8ed13705d98)

* Inclusive Language Guide

[MK-College-Inclusive-Language-Guide.pdf (mkcollege.ac.uk)](https://mkcollege.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/MK-College-Inclusive-Language-Guide.pdf)

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| **Declaration:**  **“I am doing all I can to ensure myself and colleagues who work for or with social care are working with Language that Cares.”** | |
| **Signed:** | **Date:** |