APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE:

CHILD SEXUAL AND/OR CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION

GUIDANCE FOR PROFESSIONALS

In collaboration with

The Children's Society

No child should feel alone

VS VICTIM SUPPORT

NPCC National Police Chiefs' Council

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This document can be used by professionals when discussing the exploitation of children and young people, including when escalating intelligence and delivering training. The document can be read at the beginning of strategy meetings, multi-agency meetings, or other settings where professionals might be discussing children and young people who are at risk of exploitation.

ABOUT APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE IN RELATION TO CHILD SEXUAL AND/OR CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION

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 complicit in any way, or responsible for the crimes that have happened or may happen to them, must be avoided.

Language should reflect the presence of coercion and the lack of control young people have in abusive or exploitative situations, and must recognise the severity of the impact exploitation has on the child or young person.

Victim-blaming language may reinforce messages from perpetrators around shame and guilt. This in turn may prevent the child or young 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 child's experience, resulting in a lack of appropriate response.

GUIDANCE FOR USING APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

The following table outlines terms that should not be used when discussing or recording issues of child sexual exploitation, and includes a list of appropriate alternative phrases.

INAPPROPRIATE TERM	SUGGESTED ALTERNATIVES
Putting themselves at risk This implies that the child is responsible for the risks presented by the perpetrator and that they are able to make free and informed choices.	• 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.
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.	• The child has been sexually abused. • The child has been raped. • There are reports of sexual abuse. • The child has described sexual activity, however concerns exist that they child may have been groomed and/or coerced.

INAPPROPRIATE TERM	SUGGESTED ALTERNATIVES
Sexually active since [age under 13] A child under 13 cannot consent to sex and is therefore being abused. This should be reflected in the language used.	• The child has been raped. • The child has been/may have been sexually abused. • Concerns exist that the child may have been coerced, exploited, or sexually abused.
Has been contacting adult males/females via phone or internet This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the communication and does not reflect the abusive or exploitative context.	• Adult males/females may have been contacting the child. • The child may have been groomed. • There are concerns that the adult is facilitating communication with a child. • The child is vulnerable to online perpetrators. • There are concerns that others may be using online technology to access or abuse the child. • Adults appear to be using a range of methods to communicate with the child.
Offering him/her drugs seemingly in return for sex This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the abuse and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.	• The child is being sexually exploited. • There are concerns that the child has been raped. • Perpetrators are sexually abusing the child. • The child is being sexually abused. • The child's vulnerability regarding drug use is being used by others to abuse them. • The perpetrators have a hold over the child by the fact that they have a drug dependency.

INAPPROPRIATE TERM	SUGGESTED ALTERNATIVES
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.	• 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.
Involved in CSE This implies there is a level of choice regarding the child being abused. A five year old would never be referred to as being involved in sexual abuse for the same reasons.	• The child is vulnerable to being sexually exploited. • The child is being sexually exploited.
Promiscuous This implies consensual sexual activity has taken place. Promiscuous is a judgemental term which stereotypes and labels people. It isn't appropriate in any context when discussing children and young people, but particularly if it occurs within an abusive or exploitative context.	• The child is vulnerable to being sexually exploited. • The child is being sexually exploited.
Prostituting themselves This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the abuse and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context. Changes in legislation have meant that child prostitution is no longer an acceptable term and should never be used.	• The child is vulnerable to being sexually exploited. • The child is being sexually exploited.

INAPPROPRIATE TERM	SUGGESTED ALTERNATIVES
Boyfriend/girlfriend This implies that the child or young person is in a consensual relationship and does not reflect the abusive or exploitative context. Children have been challenged in court with practitioners recordings where a practitioner has referred to the perpetrator as the child's boyfriend or girlfriend.	• 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.
Drug running – He/she is drug running This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.	• Child criminal exploitation (CCE). • The child is being criminally exploited. • The child is being trafficked for purpose of criminal exploitation.
Recruit/run/work This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.	• The child is being criminally exploited.
He/she is choosing this lifestyle This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.	• The child is being criminally exploited. • The child is being sexually exploited.

INAPPROPRIATE TERM	SUGGESTED ALTERNATIVES
Spending time/associating with 'elders' This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.	• The young person says that they are friends with a person and there are concerns about that person's age, the imbalance of power, exploitation, offending. • The young person has been groomed, exploited, controlled. **Note:** If the elder is under the age of 18 years old, this will need to be considered using child protection processes.
Offering him/her drugs seemingly in return for sex or to run drugs This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.	• The child is being sexually/ criminally exploited. • The child is being criminally exploited through drug debt. • There are concerns that the child has been raped as they do not have the freedom or capacity to consent. • Perpetrators are sexually abusing the child. • The child is being sexually abused. • The child's vulnerability regarding drug use is being used by others to abuse them. • The perpetrators have a hold over the child by the fact that they have a drug dependency.

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