



Seven Minute Safeguarding Victim Blaming Language

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility

Please speak to the Designated Safeguarding Lead: **Hannah Pallôt** or Deputy Designated Safeguarding Leads: **Matt Collinge** or **Sam Shainberg** immediately with any concerns.
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What is meant by 'victim blaming language' and what is the impact of using this language?

Victim blaming language (VBL) is terminology that implies the child is complicit or responsible for their abuse. Appropriate language must always be used to ensure that the child is referred to in a way which does not place blame on them for the crimes that have happened to them.

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. Additionally, in criminal proceedings, police have a duty to disclose any material that might assist the defence. Victim blaming language could therefore undermine a police investigation.

[This document](#), produced by the Children's Society in 2022, explored the use of appropriate language in relation to CSE in more detail. It contains a table with examples of VBL and alternative phrases.

REMEMBER:
Exploitation is NEVER the victim's choice or fault: it is abuse perpetrated by an adult.

What are the implications?

The language used should reflect the presence of coercion and the lack of control children and young people have in the abusive or exploitative situation, and the severity of the impact. Victim-blaming language may reinforce messages from perpetrators around shame and guilt. This may prevent disclosures, through fear of being blamed by professionals.

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

What are some examples of victim blaming language?

- "Putting themselves at risk"
- "Promiscuous"
- "Having contact with adults via the internet"
- "He knows what he's doing"
- "Choosing to sell drugs"
- "She's 15 and has a 30-year-old boyfriend"
- "Has made a lifestyle choice"
- "Refusing to engage"

[This very short video](#), produced by Waltham Forest Council has other examples.

What do we need to do as practitioners?

- Ensure the voice of the child is evident in all recordings
- Remember, the child is the victim and may not realise they are being exploited
- Avoid language that suggests the child is complicit or responsible for the crimes that have happened to them
- Always challenge where victim blaming language is evident
- Notice, correct and challenge our own and others' language choices

What needs to be considered?

- A child is not responsible for being at risk
- A child is being sexually exploited
- An adult is facilitating this contact
- This child is being exploited for purpose of criminal gain
- A child cannot choose to be sexually exploited
- An adult is behaving inappropriately with a child