

## 7. Where can I find out more?

[Child exploitation and abuse: an appropriate language guide](#)

[NSPCC: Why language matters](#)

[UK Council for Internet Safety: Challenging victim blaming language and behaviours when dealing with the online experiences of children and young people](#)

## 6. How can victim blaming be challenged?

It is important to use language that focuses on experiences, not labels, e.g. *'a person who has experienced abuse'*.

People who have experienced the abuse may prefer the language of 'victim', 'survivor' or no label at all and professionals should ascertain what language they prefer and be led by what language individuals use themselves.

Focusing on the experience of abuse can help professionals to look beyond commonly held assumptions about how victims should look or behave. This can help professionals to recognise and respond to abuse.

Regularly review language used historically in records to ensure any victim blaming language is not repeated.

Think about:

- How would it feel to the person to see the language being used to describe them?
- What does this use of language imply about the person?
- How will others interpret this information?
- How does this language promote a shared responsibility to safeguarding and support without blame?

## 5. What language could be used instead?

- The abuser has manipulated the person to believe they are in a relationship.
- The person is under coercion and control and unable to freely choose.
- It is recommended that services try an alternative approach to engaging the person in light of the trauma they have experienced.

## 1. What is victim blaming language?

Victim blaming is any language that implies (whether intentionally or unintentionally) that a person is partially or wholly responsible for abuse that has happened to them.

This can embolden abusers and isolate people who have experienced abuse, creating a barrier between people who have experienced abuse and professionals working in public protection.

The abuser then uses this to their advantage creating more distance between the person experiencing abuse and those who can help.

## 2. Why does language matter?

Victim blaming language is harmful and can wrongfully place responsibility, shame or blame onto a person.

One of the greatest barriers to a person seeking help and reporting abuse is feeling they are to blame for something that has happened to them.

Irrespective of the context or circumstance, the responsibility always lies with the person who abused the child, young person or adult.

## 3. What is the impact on the person?

Victim blaming can make a person feel that they are complicit or responsible for the harm they have experienced.

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

This can lead to concerns being dismissed or downplayed, or action being taken too late. It can also lead to people being criminalised instead of protected.

## 4. What language should be avoided?

- *'In a relationship with'* implies the person is in a consensual relationship that does not reflect the exploitative context.
- *'Lifestyle choice'* positions the person as having choice or agency in their abuse or exploitation.
- *'Would not engage'* does not account for why a person may be wary of services.

