

## Exploitation and Language

### 1. What are we talking about?

This guide has been adapted from a range of sources (referenced in section 6). It raises awareness of the need for practitioners to consider the words, phrases and jargon used when speaking to and speaking about victims of exploitation. Language refers to that used verbally and that which is written in files, referrals, assessments and reports.

### 2. Why does Language matter?

- Victim blaming language may reinforce messages from perpetrators around shame and guilt. This in turn may prevent the person from disclosing their abuse, through fear of being blamed by professionals.
- There is also a risk of minimising the person's experience, resulting in an inappropriate response.
- Language implying that the adult is complicit or responsible for the abuse or exploitation that has happened or may happen to them, must be avoided.

### 3. What do we need to do?

When referring to people who have been, or are at risk of being exploited, the language we use should reflect the presence of coercion and the lack of control people have in abusive or exploitative situations. We must recognise the severity of the impact exploitation has on the person.

### 4. How can we do it?

- Use strengths-based language (follow links in section 6 for examples)
- Be adversity aware/trauma informed
- Be confident to question victim blaming language
- Reflective Practice and regular supervision can support us to keep the conversation about language 'alive'
- Consider your own values and attitudes
- Avoid stereotypes



- Recognising 'their voice', in their own words, and ensure we know the meaning.

## 5. Multi-agency responsibility

Research evidence from academics, practitioners and Experts by Experience recognise that attending to language requires a whole system approach across all agencies. It also recognises the pivotal role that practitioners and services play in shaping the identity of many younger victims.

## 6. Further information/guidance

- NWG Network: [Making words Matter - A Practice & Knowledge Briefing](#)
- Newcastle City Council: [Language Guidance for Professionals working with adults](#)
- Children's Society Guidance: [Appropriate Language – child exploitation](#)

*This resource has been adapted from Northumberland Children and Adults Safeguarding Partnership 7-minute briefing – **with thanks***