

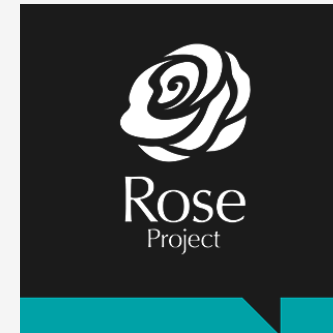
Norfolk Practice Week

The Art of Individuality

Monday 18 – Friday 22 May 2026



Victim blaming and exploitation- Individuality



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Welcome...

We'd love you to participate but please use the 'raise hand' facility to ask questions and contribute when others are talking.

Please be considerate to others – this should be a safe, open and reflective space to learn.

If you need live captions, click on the 3 dots at the top of your screen.

Please do take 2 minutes to provide us with some feedback – we love to hear what you think. The QR code and link will be provided later.

Some of these Practice Week sessions are being recorded for learning purposes. Your presenter will let you know at the start.

Thank you!



The Magdalene Group has been working in the field of sexual violence, exploitation and coercion for over 30 years, providing gender and trauma-informed support to some of the most vulnerable women and young people in society.

What we'll cover

- What is victim blaming
- The impact of victim blaming including what young people tell us
- Deep dive into victim blaming language
- How we can reframe language
- Further reflections and learning

What is victim blaming?

Victim blaming is any language or action that implies (whether intentionally or unintentionally) that a person is partially or wholly responsible for abuse that has happened to them. It is harmful and can wrongfully place responsibility, shame or blame onto a victim, making them feel that they are complicit or responsible for the harm they have experienced.

Which statements came directly from referrals?



1. Female (12) has no regard for online safety. When confronted about her behaviour, female is combative, believes her actions are acceptable and does not understand associated risks.
2. Helena (15) is placing herself in danger within this inappropriate relationship and is often involving herself in risky situations. Sophia's foster parents are finding this behaviour hard to deal with.
3. Her attendance at school is spot-on but she is manipulative and she will lead others down the wrong path if she is allowed to carry on with this behaviour. (13)
4. Lucy is 12 years old but has the mental capacity of 6 years old with foetal alcohol syndrome. Lucy has engaged in inappropriate conversations with others online and appears to have the view of, "my body/ my choice and I will do what I want"

Answer

They all came directly from referrals!

Female (12) has no regard for online safety. When confronted about her behaviour, female is combative, believes her actions are acceptable and does not understand associated risks.

Helena (15) is placing herself in danger within this inappropriate relationship and is often involving herself in risky situations. Sophia's foster parents are finding this behaviour hard to deal with.

Victim blaming and exploitation

- The language used by adults or peers can reinforce the shame and guilt felt by children that have been exploited.
- It can create barriers between **professionals, parents, caregivers** and young people as it may lead to a young person thinking they will not be believed or supported if they share their experiences.
- This message can often be reinforced by exploiters.
- When victim blaming is used the risk or harm to the child or person is overlooked.

Forms of victim blaming

- **Behavioural-** victim blaming blames the behaviour of a child as the reason for the sexual violence perpetrated against them.
- **Characterological-** a child is blamed for their character or personality.
- **Situational-** places the blame on the situation the child was in, rather than blaming the perpetrator for choosing to commit violence in that situation or place.

Examples from professionals

- They made a social media profile and talked to people they barely knew.
- They were dressed liked they wanted attention.
- They are people pleasers.
- They went in that car, hotel, park.
- They were drunk.
- They went out in the dark.

What young people tell us

“They told me I shouldn’t be dressed like that.”

“The professional kept asking me the wrong questions.”

“They don’t believe me.”

“I was told not to go out when it’s dark.”

What's the impact of this language?



menti.com
1273 5307

Mentimeter results

What's the impact of this language?



Key Ingredients for child centred language



Child exploitation and abuse: an appropriate language guide

The Children's Society



Child Sexual Exploitation Taskforce

Key Ingredients for child centred language

Focus on what has happened to the child or person rather than making a value judgement about their experiences.

Key Ingredients for child centred language

Language implying that the child or person is responsible in any way for abuse that they are subjected to must be avoided to make sure that we safeguard them appropriately.

Key Ingredients for child centred language

Consider the influence of your language within written information and how that may alter the perspective and practice of any professional it is shared with.

Key Ingredients for child centred language

Remember: while this may be something you work with and discuss every day, this may be a child's first time telling someone about their experiences. They should be treated with empathy and respect.

Practical tips

- Think about the language we use.
- Tailor the intervention and be unique to the person's processing style.
- Adjust resources.
- Explore what works for them, a quieter room, sensory kit, etc.
- Reflect on your own attitude towards neurodivergent individuals. Are we stereotyping individuals?
- Challenge our own practice and continue developing ourselves.

Why is victim blaming harmful?

- Children and young people may feel they are to blame.
- Children and young people's experiences may not be treated as a safeguarding concern.
- Increase of self-harming incidents.
- Reports of children and young people taking their own lives.

Types of victim blaming

- **Direct and indirect victim blaming**
- Direct victim blaming happens when a child or young person is held responsible for what has happened to them. **Remember that children cannot consent to their own abuse.**
- Here are some examples of direct victim blaming:
 - In the context of nude image sharing, professionals may blame the child or young person for sharing the image in the first place, and say what's happening to them is their fault because they sent the image.
 - After receiving an abusive message online, a professional may say it's the child or young person's fault for accepting a friend request from someone they didn't know on social media.

Types of victim blaming

- **Indirect or unintentional victim blaming** can be harder to identify. It often happens when a person is trying to help a child or young person after something has happened to them. However, that 'help' reinforces the idea that the child or young person has done something wrong or is responsible for what has happened to them. Here are some examples of indirect victim blaming:
 - Taking away the child or young person's device or banning them from using an online platform, app or game as a consequence.
 - Delivering online safety education to a child or young person immediately after a disclosure, which highlights what they should have done to keep themselves safe.
 - Suggesting that a child or young person should take responsibility for keeping themselves safe online.

Language

Term	Impact
Boyfriend, girlfriend, partner or in a relationship with	<p>This implies that the child or person is in a consensual relationship and does not reflect the abusive or exploitative context including an imbalance of power or coercion and control.</p> <p>Referring to their abuse as a legitimate relationship could reaffirm the lies and manipulation used by abusers.</p> <p>It can also negatively impact victims receiving justice and abusers being sentenced appropriately, as seen in cases where child and adult victims have been challenged in court with recordings of where a practitioner has referred to the abuser as their boyfriend, girlfriend, or partner.</p>
Alternative	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The child or person says that they are in a relationship with a person. However, there are concerns about consent due to that person's age, the imbalance of power, and/or indicators of exploitation and abuse.■ The child or person has been/is being groomed, exploited, and/or controlled.■ This person is not providing a healthy or safe relationship for the child or person.■ The child or person is using language that implies they may be the victim of grooming or coercion.	

Language

Term	Impact
Has been contacting adults via phone or online	<p>This implies that the child or young person is or was responsible for the communication and does not reflect the abusive or exploitative context, playing in to the grooming and manipulation used by abusers.</p> <p>Focusing on the actions of the victim as opposed to the abuser can reinforce the belief that the child or person is to blame for the abuse they have experienced.</p> <p>Using online spaces is part of most people's everyday lives. The anonymised nature of online spaces makes it easy to connect without sharing personal details, and abusers can exploit this to conceal their identities and motives.</p>
Alternative	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ There are concerns that the adult is facilitating or seeking communication with a child or with children.■ There are concerns that others may be using online technology to access or abuse the child.■ Abusers appear to be using a range of methods to communicate with the child or with children.■ The child or person is being targeted online with a view to exploiting/abusing them.	

Language

Term	Impact
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 including the use of coercion and control by the perpetrator.
Alternative	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The child or 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 child or person has been, or is being groomed, exploited, and controlled.■ The perpetrator has manipulated the child or person to believe they are in a relationship.	

Language

Term	Impact
Peer on peer abuse	<p>The use of this term only recognises the harm and abuse that may happen to children of a similar age or developmental stage and fails to acknowledge that harm or abuse may be inflicted by children towards children of any age or developmental stage.</p> <p>It is also important to recognise the power imbalance that exists between children based on differences in personal characteristics such as age, ability, class, and gender.</p>
Alternative	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Child on child abuse is taking place.■ The situation described is child on child abuse.	

Language

Term	Impact
Putting themselves at risk	<p>This implies that the child or person is responsible for the risks presented by the abuser and that they can make free and informed choices without recognition of their age, circumstances, and lived experience or the realities of grooming, coercion, and control.</p> <p>This implies they have chosen to be at risk and discounts the lack of accessible safe options or the power to say no.</p>

Alternative

- The child or person may have been groomed or exploited.
- There are a lack of protective factors surrounding the child or person.
- The situation could reduce the child's or person's safety.
- The location is dangerous to children.
- There are concerns that the child or person may be being exploited.
- It is unclear whether the child or person is under duress to go missing.
- It is unclear why the child or person is getting into [x] vehicle or visiting [x] location.
- There are concerns that there is a power imbalance forcing the child or person to act in this way.
- There are concerns regarding other influences on the child or person.

We see prompts asking professionals to consider:

- whether the victim has returned to the perpetrator
- whether they have engaged with services 'properly'
- whether they are 'minimising' or 'denying' the abuse
- whether they are 'escalating' risk through their actions
- whether they are complying with professionals
- whether they are 'educating themselves of the risks'

Areas to consider in practice



Further practical tips

- Believe and support young people
- Bring challenge
- Educate yourself
- Reflect on your own biases
- Use inclusive language

Reflections

- Reflect on what you see in your day to day job that reinforces victim blaming.
- What can you do about these reflections?

Please take 2 minutes to
provide us with some feedback



Useful links

- Victim Focus- [Research & Resources | Access Empowering Resources Today — VictimFocus](#)
- Child exploitation and abuse: an appropriate language guide- [Child Exploitation Language Guide | The Children's Society](#)
- National Working Group- [Welcome to the NWG Network](#)
- Open Letter- [An Open Letter to the Social Worker Who Wrote My Case Files | BASW](#)

Thank you!

Any further Q&A?