

# MAKING WORDS MATTER

Attending to Language when working with  
children subject to or at risk of Exploitation:  
A Practice & Knowledge Briefing

**AFUA APPIAH, STEVE BAGULEY, SPACE  
& DR ROMANA FAROOQ**

## AUTHORS

### **Afua Appiah**

Clinical Psychologist in Training,  
Cumbria, Northumberland,  
Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust

### **Steve Baguley**

Adolescence & Education Lead,  
NWG Network

### **SPACE**

Stop & Prevent Adolescent  
Criminal Exploitation

### **Dr Romana Farooq**

Principal Clinical Psychologist & Clinical Lead,  
Cumbria, Northumberland,  
Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust

Citation: Appiah, A., Baguley, S., SPACE, & Farooq, R. (2021). *Making Words Matter. Attending to Language when working with children subject to or at risk of Exploitation: A Practice and Knowledge Briefing*. NWG Network, Derby, UK.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank all our cross organisation stakeholder working group including Joe Russo (The Enthusiasm Trust), Julie Howe (Dorset Police), Shauna Breen (Birmingham Children's Trust) and Lynette Reid (Birmingham Children's Trust). We would also like to thank the NWG Network and the Marie Collin Foundation for commenting on earlier drafts of the Briefing. We would also like to thank SPACE for bringing and amplifying the voices of affected parents, carers and families in the development of this Briefing. Finally and most importantly we would like to thank the many children, young people, parents and carers who inspired us and challenged us to think critically and dismantle some of the oppressive language, discourses and narratives in services and society about children subject to exploitation.

# ABOUT THE NWG NETWORK

NWG Network is the only cross sector capacity building charity of its kind in the UK with 12,788 named members all working together to tackle child exploitation. Our members represent small local voluntary projects/organisations, large national children's charities, social care, sports and leisure, statutory agencies including police, education, health. The NWG is an essential lifeline for front-line workers and safeguarding leads seeking guidance to understand child exploitation. The overall aim of our work is to stop child exploitation. We do this by enhancing the capacity of front-line practitioners so that they are better equipped to know how to prevent, disrupt and provide the best possible response to victims and survivors and their families. By being an accelerant for change in the field of Child Exploitation we want to really make a difference to the lives of children and young people, who are at the very heart of everything we do.

# CONTENTS

FOREWORD .....	4
INTRODUCTION.....	5
WHY IS LANGUAGE IMPORTANT? .....	6
LANGUAGE, IDENTITY & CHILD EXPLOITATION.....	6
LANGUAGE, IDENTITY AND POWER RELATIONS.....	8
EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION .....	9
VOICES OF PARENTS AND CARERS & THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE .....	10
THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE & THE PROCESS OF DEHUMANISATION.....	11
SUPPORTING PRACTITIONERS TO ATTEND TO LANGUAGE.....	13
SUMMARY .....	14
KEY POINTS OF REFLECTION FOR PRACTITIONERS .....	15
KEY POINTS OF REFLECTION FOR SERVICES AND SENIOR LEADERS.....	16
REFERENCES .....	17
RESOURCES .....	19

# FOREWORD



It has been our pleasure to work with Dr Romana Farooq (Principal Clinical Psychologist & Clinical Lead) and Afua Appiah (Clinical Psychologist in Training) in developing 'Making Words Matter: Attending to Language when working with Children subject to or

at risk of Exploitation: A Practice & Knowledge Briefing' highlighting the importance of language we use when safeguarding and responding to children, young people and families dealing with the complex issues of exploitation.

Since I started in the field of child sexual exploitation in 1998 there have been positive developments in the language we use. Do you remember when victims of CSE were referred to as child prostitutes? But there is so much more that we need to do. There has been work undertaken across the country around not using victim blaming language with local and national guidance being produced to support practice in this area for example: Appropriate Language: Child Sexual and/or Criminal Exploitation. Guidance for Professionals by the Children's Society (2018). I am also encouraged to hear that Adult Services Partnerships are beginning to develop guidance to support their staff too, it is so important to recognise the cliff edge of those reaching 18 and how we support them into adult services.

There has also been work undertaken about the dehumanising language that is used in criminal exploitation and I remember hearing about the powerful presentation by Dr Romana Farooq at the National Parents as Partners In Exploitation Safeguarding (NPIES) Meeting at the House of Commons and a subsequent conference in 2019 on Working with Parents as Safeguarding Partners. In response to requests from our members around the use of language, the NWG Training Lead Sarah Brown has developed a course 'Mind Your Language' bringing to life some of the complexities of language, which has been very popular and received such positive feedback.

I was delighted when Dr Romana Farooq and Afua Appiah agreed to collaborate with us and SPACE in developing the Practice & Knowledge Briefing. This is an area of work that we are all so passionate about. We look forward to receiving feedback and about the implementation and impact of the briefing. We also look forward to further working with services who wish to further develop their response in this area, or wish to engage in our training.

We hope that this resource will enable us all to consider our use of language which is so vitally important in how we support and safeguard those we are working with, this alongside the need to ensure that attitudes and behaviours change will make a real difference to our approach when tackling child exploitation and to the lives of children and young people.

**Sheila Taylor MBE**  
**CEO NWG**

# INTRODUCTION

## WHAT AND WHO IS THE BRIEFING FOR??

The Practice & Knowledge Briefing on “Attending to Language when working with Children subject to or at risk of Exploitation” has been co-produced and co-developed with a number of key stakeholders including Experts by Experience. The working has consisted of the NWG Network, representatives from the NHS, Higher Education, the Police, Children’s Social Care, Third Sector Organisations and SPACE.

The guidance is aimed at all practitioners involved in safeguarding children and young people subject to or at risk of exploitation including frontline practitioners and senior leaders within social care, mental health and criminal justice services. As this Briefing is intended for a wide audience the evidence included is aimed to provide relevant and important key learning across all settings.

The Briefing draws on both evidence and research as well as practice and knowledge from academics, practitioners and Experts by Experience to describe why language is important, the impact of language on a developing child and young person and suggests ways to support practitioners and services in attending to language.

Although attending to language requires a whole system approach from frontline practitioners all the way up to senior leaders, this Briefing aims to begin a conversation and increase curiosity around language and its impact on children and young people subject to exploitation in services. It recognises the pivotal role that practitioners and services play in shaping the identity of vulnerable children and young people.

This Briefing is not intended to be a prescriptive document but is intended to inform, enable and inspire services to consider the importance of language with vulnerable children and young people. This Briefing is also a working document, therefore it will be reviewed and is expected to evolve to reflect the growing evidence base.

## WHAT IS MEANT BY ATTENDING TO LANGUAGE?

Attending to language describes the need for practitioners to consider the words, phrases, discourses and jargon used when speaking to and speaking about young people. There is an emphasis on the impact of language use and the implications it has on providing effective support to children and young people who have been subject to exploitation. It refers to language used verbally and that which is written in files, referrals, assessments and reports.

# WHY IS LANGUAGE IMPORTANT?

Language is used to connect, to understand and to communicate (Galbin, 2014). Language is also important to how a child or young person's identity is formed (Fivush, Habermas, Waters & Zaman, 2011). The way in which children and young people are described, spoken about and represented is important in how children and young people begin to develop a sense of self and an understanding of their behaviour within society (McAdams, 2011). Narratives that are 'problem saturated' have an immense impact on the sense of self of children and young

people, in particular there is evidence that they internalise these 'problem saturated' narratives (Looyeh, Kamali & Shafieian, 2012). Evidence highlights that as children develop they take on board the narratives held of them by others which in turn forms the basis of how they go on to describe themselves (McLean & Syed, 2015). Therefore, it is important that language used to speak about and represent children and young people is attended to, evaluated, critically reflected on and deconstructed.

## LANGUAGE, IDENTITY & CHILD EXPLOITATION

It is vital that we attend to language when working with and speaking about children and young people who are subject to or at risk of exploitation and harm. Attending to and focussing on language routinely allows us to specifically explore common terms which often become normalised in professional discourse. Another key area is attending to language used by practitioners in direct communication with young people and in turn the language these young people use to shape their identity.

There is a wealth of evidence illustrating the processes that children and young people undergo when forming their sense of self and their identity. It is understood that children and young people negotiate their sense of self and that this happens across a range of environments, in different relationships and at different points in time (Weedon, 1997; Binder & Kotsopoulos, 2011; Puroila, 2019). To do this it identifies that children and young people need to be in communication with others in various settings as part of establishing their identities. It is important that we acknowledge that young people subject to or at risk of exploitation may have limited opportunities to access a range of environments and a limitation on the range of opportunities to communicate with others

(Ricks, Kitchens, Goodrich & Hancock, 2014). Language used in services often sets the tone for how young people are then to be judged and understood. For example, terms which do not make explicit the context of coercion, exploitation and control can reinforce guilt and shame and 'the perpetrators voice' (Beckett, 2011). In addition, terms which fail to recognise the limited opportunities for effective self-agency held by children and young people limit how the child or young person can be understood. Narratives developed on behalf of these young people by practitioners has been evidenced to skew decision making which can perpetuate deserving/undeserving discourses which in turn influences which opportunities are afforded to children and young people (Sims-Schouten, Skinner & Rivett, 2019). Young people are further at risk of not disclosing their experiences out of fear of being blamed or being seen as at fault. In this instance, language used to describe their experiences draws attention away from perpetrator responsibility and devalues the vulnerability of this population (McAlinden, 2014). Language which lacks the full context of the young person's experience promotes failure in seeing the whole young person and a failure to support each area of need they present with.

At present contradictions in language around children who are exploited is evident, such as they are high risk and highly vulnerable and at the same time need to take responsibility for their actions (Daniel, 2010; Bradt & Bouverne-De Bie, 2009). This not only evidences bias by which a sequence of further marginalisation can occur, it is important to consider the implications of blanket assumptions of 'vulnerability'. An example can be seen in young people contesting their 'vulnerable' label as this enforced narratives of them being incapable of caring for themselves (Stephen, 2002; Harris, 2004; Ellis, 2016) despite speaking of experiences which contradicted this. It is therefore a given that young people can become frustrated when excluded from decision making processes and the right to make life choices (Ellis, 2018).

The concepts of vulnerability and victimhood are complex, contested and problematic (Ellis, 2018). A simple definition and understanding of vulnerability and victimhood not only assumes what a 'vulnerable victim' looks like but also inadvertently becomes a parameter by which young people who do not fit that image can

be excluded (Pheonix, 2012). Children and young people subject to exploitation rarely fit the image of a 'perfect victim' and in most cases will resist being 'rescued' by services and practitioners and as a result may be viewed as having made a 'choice' to engage in exploitative behaviours (Shaw & Greenhow, 2020). It is important that practitioners expand their perspective of vulnerability and victimhood to understand ways in which young people have made attempts to meet their own needs.

With this in mind, it is imperative that each setting and each interaction becomes an opportunity to shape their identity positively. Initiatives such as 'every interaction matters' (NHS England, 2018) can support increasing these opportunities children and young people have access to.

***'You can't be what you can't see'***

Marian Wright Edelman, 2018

## THE ENTHUSIASM TRUST

### A GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE



The Enthusiasm Trust is an organisation dedicated to building compassionate and meaningful relationships with young people affected by exploitation, crime, deprivation and isolation. The Enthusiasm Trust consists of Youth Workers and Mentors who have lived experience of exploitation and marginalisation which enables them to build trusting and meaningful relationships with children and young people.

The Enthusiasm Trust have developed processes which are aimed at supporting their youth workers and mentors in interrogating their language and avoiding the likelihood of them developing 'problem-saturated' understandings of the child. They do this by:

- Using strengths based language and recognising complex trauma and its impact on children
- Not showing their youth workers and mentors the referral form prior to the initial meeting with the young person. This is to reduce the influence of the young person's 'paper self' on the worker and to support them in developing an understanding of the child, from the child's perspective
- As an organisation and as practitioners making a conscious effort to use the word child/children to remind each other not to adultify the young person and to recognise their developmental stage, age and their rights as a child.
- Developing a reformed approach to assessing and managing risk. They have moved away from arbitrary risk categories like low, medium and high risk and rephrased these to silver, gold and platinum. These categories allow them to focus on the intensity of input and support that the child requires rather than arbitrary risk categories

# LANGUAGE, IDENTITY AND POWER RELATIONS

In order to understand the impact of language on children and young people, consideration needs to be given to the role of power in shaping identity. The development of children and young people's identity and self-definition is shaped by experiences with others and how the child is perceived by others (Norton, 2016). Language itself is not conceived of as a neutral medium of communication (Norton, 2016). As Foucault (1980) established it is subject to power imbalances which are determined by expectations set within society and by those privileged enough to have their narratives heard and shared (Ahoonon, Tienari, Merilainen, 2013). Language is therefore inseparable from social meanings that are developed in communities and shaped by inequalities embedded in these communities. Labels and terms used to describe young people form ideas and blueprints of how they are to be seen and judged or in effect which lens is chosen to scrutinise the young person's past and present behaviour. We must therefore be mindful of power imbalances at play when narratives are privileged, subjugated or silenced and the influence of the words and phrases we choose as practitioners.

Language currently used by health and social care services to speak about and represent children and young people could be defined as 'adultist' (Bell, 1995). This describes the use of terms, phrases and behaviours which benefit the adult over the child. This includes using language which is difficult for the child to understand and diminishes their right to have an opinion (Bertrand, Brooks & Dominquez, 2020). Practitioners maintain power and control of decision-making processes through the linguistics which favour the adult understanding of the young person's experience (Gabriel, Brown, Leon & Outley, 2020). Language used by practitioners about young people which does not embody the young person's narrative is at risk of increasing power imbalances and marginalisation of young people already experiencing disempowerment (Young, 2013). Evidence recommends that future practice should prioritise anti-oppression and have an ethical commitment to social justice and demonstrate 'power-sharing' within relationships with young people (Larson, 2008). This calls on practitioners to become mindful in their influential behaviours and interactions with young people and with one another.

***"Our capacity to destroy one another is matched by our capacity to heal one another"***

Bessel van der Kolk, 2014



# EMPOWERU HUB

## BIRMINGHAM CHILDREN'S TRUST (CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE)



BIRMINGHAM  
CHILDREN'S TRUST

The EmpowerU Hub responds to children subject to exploitation and missing in Birmingham as part of a Local Authority Multi-Agency hub. They have taken a number of steps to address victim blaming language which has included:

- Buy in from senior management in respect of 'on the spot' challenges of victim blaming language in meetings and to encourage challenge from partners
- Attending to and challenging language which is victim blaming in records through co-coordinators who audit their records
- A commitment to and acceptance of 'in house' challenge of victim blaming language and recognising this as a process of learning and development
- The impact of victim blaming and attention to victim blaming language included as a core part of all their training and awareness raising sessions around Gangs & Systemic Youth Violence and Child Exploitation.

## EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

It is imperative that children and young people who are further marginalised are consciously included in discussions around language. The risk of harm significantly increases when a young person is subject to intersecting forms of discrimination, an example being race and systemic racism (Barn, 2010; Bernard, 2018). Over the last decade, several reports have indicated that children and young people from Black, Asian and other minoritized groups in the UK are disproportionately represented within the criminal justice system (Lammy, 2017; Taylor, 2016). It is evidenced that prejudice, stereotypes and language intersect in how a

child or young person from a disadvantaged background is understood. An example of this being the adultification of young black boys through language which fails to acknowledge the true status of the young person as a child (Davis & Marsh, 2020). This has resulted in young people being scrutinised as an adult despite having many contraindicating factors to this perspective. There is therefore a need for critical appraisal and reflection on the language used to speak about children from minoritized backgrounds in order to ensure inclusive care and services are delivered.

# VOICES OF PARENTS AND CARERS & THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE

Implications of language use is not limited to the young person but extends to family and carers also. Experiences shared by parents and carers emphasises that they can feel wholly responsible for exploitative circumstances their child has been subjected to (Thomas & D'Arcy, 2017), in particular when the harm was

extra-familial. Additional to this, discourses with parents and carers which do not make clear the true extent of their child's experiences negatively impact their ability to contest narratives which do not support the needs of their child.

## SPACE

### STOP & PREVENT ADOLESCENT CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION



SPACE is a national organisation campaigning for change in the statutory response to County Lines Exploitation. It also provides a unique advocacy, advice and guidance service to affected families as well as training and consultancy for practitioners and awareness raising and preventative sessions for parents. A key underpinning of all the work that the organisation does is amplify the lived experience of victims and the wider family.

SPACE attends to language by:

- Removing ideas and narratives around protective parents as deficient and shifting the onus of engagement, action and responsibility away from victims
- Ensuring all communication centralises the experiences of victims, affected parents and their families

- Challenging and interrogating language which may be experienced as shaming, humiliating, blaming and dehumanising by victims, affected parents and their families in particular terms such as “beyond parental control”
- Using language which is in line with the lived experience of children and their families

***“No parent can control an exploited child under the control of an Organised Crime Gang. Exploited children are equally beyond statutory professionals’ control but the focus and the language used remains on parents on whom it is wholly unrealistic and unfair to place such a colossal and dangerous expectation”***

(SPACE)

# THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE & THE PROCESS OF DEHUMANISATION

***'For me it's the word "risky". I've never met a young person or child who is "risky"... to me a risky child is one who might carry a knife or a gun on them... With "CSE" and the word "risky" it's kind of like thinking you're in GCSE maths and it's more like a problem... You know using those words it's more like the child is an equation than actually a human being. And that takes away that emotion and that meaning of what that child is... using words like that you can feel that less important, your problems are not important, your trauma is not important, and that can be even more damaging.'***

(Excerpt from Farooq, Stevenson & Becham-Hulvej, 2018, p 55)

Theory exploring the slippery slope of dehumanisation sets its foundation in the use of dehumanising language. The process of seeing an individual as less than human is initiated through the narratives developed about them (Luna, 2015). These narratives retold become the norm of what we hear about these groups and become parameters to justify how an individual is to be judged (Tran et al., 2018). Dehumanisation serves the function of inhibiting our moral compass whereby we are able to sit comfortably with judgements and actions which we otherwise would not reach if the whole person was seen (Goff, Jackson, Di Leone, Culotta & DiTomasso, 2014). The process of dehumanising is slow and insidious and a process that begins usually through the use of short-hand terms, labels and discourses when communicating about children and young people. It is however, the responsibility of all to recognise and challenge language which perpetuates this.

***"Get people to stand in awe of what you have carried, rather than standing in judgement of how you carried it"***

Father Greg Boyle, 2016

Examples of some of the language that we should be curious about and consider alternatives for can be seen below. The list is not exhaustive but gives an idea of terms which are routinely used in services working with children and young people subject to exploitation.

TERM	WHAT IT CAN IMPLY
<b>Plugging</b>	Dismisses the context of sexual violence, coercion, humiliation and exploitation the child has had to endure in the process of this act being committed
<b>Going country</b>	Implies a voluntary action and diminishes the multifaceted coercion, grooming and exploitation that occurs
<b>Putting themselves at risk</b>	Implies the child is free and able to make informed decisions and is responsible for risks instigated by the perpetrator or the contexts in which they live
<b>Prostitution</b>	Implies the child has capacity to make a free and informed choice and negates exploitation or coercion into sexual acts
<b>Promiscuous</b>	Implies an invitation to consensual sexual activity and elicits a stereotypical judgement which is victim blaming for non-consensual sexual contact.
<b>Knife crime</b>	Negates the potential seriousness of other forms of violence. Is this categorically more dangerous than a blunt object used to cause harm? Also does not consider the context which fosters a need to carry a weapon.
<b>Cuckooing</b>	Does not consider the multifaceted nature of exploitation and that a home either there's or others is being used to facilitate further forms of exploitation
<b>Drug dealer</b>	Hides the coercion and exploitation the child is subjected to. Implies autonomy in actions and consent to engage in criminal activity fully informed of potential repercussions and free from coercion
<b>LAC kid</b>	Not using the child's name creates emotional distance with the child and hides their individual experiences. How may this term be experienced by children when used by professional carers attempting to engage them therapeutically?
<b>Gang member</b>	Hides the coercion and exploitation the child is subjected to. Implies autonomy in actions and consent to engage in criminal activity fully informed of potential repercussions and free from coercion
<b>Drug or Money Mule</b>	This implies that the young person has the capacity to make a free and fully informed choice. It also does not recognise the exploitative context the young person is being influenced by.
<b>Refusal to Engage or Hard to Reach</b>	Does not recognise perpetrator influence or how accessible services are for the young person. Does not consider what processes may limit opportunities a young person has to engage with services or how safe do they feel to enter into 'unknown territory'.
<b>The child is in communication with unknown adults online</b>	Can imply that the child is proactive in seeking out adults online rather than attending to the motivations of adults in engaging in these communications with vulnerable children.

# DORSET POLICE FORCE

## A GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE



Dorset Police force developed a Vulnerability team in 2018 which aims to provide a service to people who are most vulnerable. The Vulnerability team was tasked with scrutinising existing policy and guidance and developing frameworks to achieve a better service for vulnerable individuals. As part of this they developed a range of processes to ensure they were interrogating and attending to language which included:

- Encouraging all officers to ensure that all forms of communication are child focussed
- Avoiding the use of passive sentences in reports and trying to clearly establish and communicate what the child has been subjected to
- Ensuring all officers remain focussed on the child's experience and that their narrative remains central
- Replacing the use of case references with the child's name so that officers feel more connected to the individuals being discussed
- Recognising and creating spaces to attend to empathy fatigue and its affects on language
- Offering routine supervision and automatic referrals to support officers experiencing primary and secondary trauma and other symptoms of morale injury:

## SUPPORTING PRACTITIONERS TO ATTEND TO LANGUAGE

The process of attending to language does not come without complexities, therefore it is vital that practitioners are supported through the process of reflection and implementing change. This requires staff being enabled to engage in discourses that move away from phrases which are comfortable and offer protection against emotional burnout (Brady, 2017; Powell, Cassematis, Benson, Smallbone & Wortley, 2014). What is needed is a move towards engaging with the detail of the young person's identity and experiences shaped by narratives as told by the young person. It is important that practitioners access safe spaces where discourses can be reflected upon and receive regular support and supervision to challenge discourses that remain unhelpful (Moffett, 2009). Routine supervision and reflective practice with a suitably qualified specialist aids in supporting practitioners through reflecting and challenging their own use of unhelpful terms, shaping the language used by practitioners and in turn aids in

shaping an eventual shift at a whole system and service wide level (Munro, 2011; Martin, 2016; MacEachern, Dennis, Jackson & Jindal-Snape, 2019). There is a need for organisations to make it an ethical responsibility to interrogate and reflect on language and to create safe reflective spaces where practitioners can engage in this process (Falender, 2020; Knight & Borders, 2018; Ashton, Morris & Smith, 2018). Services should also offer awareness training to practitioners on victim blaming language and the process of dehumanization to increase awareness.

The foundation of positively engaging children and young people should be using language that the young person is familiar with. Young people should be involved in co-producing and co-developing their own preferred narratives and language to describe their experiences. Narratives about young people should avoid using language which personifies the child as problematic, but rather problems such as exploitation should be externalised (Ricks et al., 2014).

# SUMMARY

This Briefing for practitioners and services working with children subject to or at risk of exploitation begins to offer an understanding of why attending to language is important when working with vulnerable children and young people. It also provides key points which should be considered to effectively attend to language and support practitioners require in order to attend to language.

The Briefing highlights how language has great importance in shaping a child's identity within society. It emphasises how 'problem saturated' narratives when left uncontested and are then retold become normalised and used to personify the young person as the 'problem'. In addition, it highlights the importance of remaining mindful of using language which does not provide the full context of the young person's experiences or their subjection to exploitation.

Within this Briefing issues surrounding attending to language such as emotional burnout, primary and secondary trauma are experiences linked to difficulties practitioners may face as they begin to attend to their language. An emphasis is placed on services supporting staff to engage with the often horrific detail of a young person's experiences and the importance of practitioners routinely engaging in supervision and reflective practice with appropriately trained specialists.

The Briefing has also provided good practice examples from several organisations such as Local Authorities, Police Forces and Third Sector Organisations on how they are thinking about and adapting their processes and systems to attend to language. This is to enable a whole system shift in services and organisations and in essence offer better care and treatment to children and young people subject to exploitation.

## KEY POINTS OF REFLECTION FOR PRACTITIONERS

Practitioners should consider the following around language when working with children and young people subject to exploitation:

- ❑ Notice the language that is used to describe and talk about children and young people
- ❑ Be curious about why certain language is used and its impact on children and young people
- ❑ Avoid using language, jargon or acronyms which are poorly understood by children, young people and their parents/carers
- ❑ Use language preferred by the child or language that they are familiar with when speaking about their experiences to support them in developing a preferred narrative
- ❑ Be curious when a child or young person uses negative or problem saturated language to speak about themselves – where have they learnt this from?
- ❑ Avoid using language that places the problem in the child or young person
- ❑ Be mindful of differences in power and privilege between children and young people in contact with services and practitioners
- ❑ Remind ourselves and others the influential role practitioners and services play in shaping a child or young person's identity and experiences
- ❑ Support children and young people as Consultants on their own life experience and in how their life story is told and shared
- ❑ Challenge and deconstruct language that may be dehumanizing and enable others to reflect on the implications of this for children and young people
- ❑ Recognise that a young person's full life narrative will include diverse experiences where exploitation may be less present or not present at all – be inclusive of all these experiences
- ❑ Consider and interrogate whether your language and structures are anti-racist, anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory

## KEY POINTS OF REFLECTION FOR

# SERVICES AND SENIOR LEADERS

- ❑ Do we provide regular supportive supervision and reflective practice to ensure practitioners are supported and enabled to attend to language within a safe, reflective and supportive environment?
- ❑ Are regular service audits and evaluations conducted to quality assure and explore what language is being used in paperwork?
- ❑ Is the training around safeguarding, child exploitation and any other mandatory training provided to practitioners inclusive and considerate of the role of language and its impact on children?
- ❑ Do service policies and strategies explicitly highlight the importance of attending to language and do they offer alternatives or signpost practitioners to relevant resources?
- ❑ Do senior leaders explicitly express a commitment to attending to language and encourage others to do so too?
- ❑ Are the service systems, processes and language anti-racist, anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory?
- ❑ Is the workforce diverse and representative of the children, young people, families and communities you work with?
- ❑ Is the workforce diverse enough to allow for diverse perspectives and discourses?



# REFERENCES

- Agyekum, K. (2006). The sociolinguistic of Akan personal names. *Nordic journal of African studies*, 15(2), 206-235.
- Ahonen, P., Tienari, J., Meriläinen, S., & Pullen, A. (2014). Hidden contexts and invisible power relations: A Foucauldian reading of diversity research. *Human Relations*, 67(3), 263-286.
- Ashton, R. A., Morris, L., & Smith, I. (2018). A qualitative meta-synthesis of emergency department staff experiences of violence and aggression. *International emergency nursing*, 39, 13-19.
- Barn, R. (2010). Care leavers and social capital: Understanding and negotiating racial and ethnic identity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 33(5), 832-850.
- Beckett, H. (2011). *Not a World Away: The sexual exploitation of children and young people in Northern Ireland*. Bristol, Northern Ireland: Barnado's.
- Bell, J. (1995). Understanding adultism. *A Major Obstacle to Developing Positive Youth-Adult Relationships*. Hrsg. von. YouthBuild USA.
- Bernard, C. A. (2018). Working with cultural and religious diversity. *Sociology*, 649-665.
- Bertrand, M., Brooks, M. D., & Domínguez, A. D. (2020). Challenging Adultism: Centering Youth as Educational Decision Makers. *Urban Education*, 1-2.
- Binder, M., & Kotsopoulos, S. (2011). Multimodal literacy narratives: weaving the threads of young children's identity through the arts. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 25(4), 339-363.
- Bradt, L., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2009). Social work and the shift from 'welfare' to 'justice'. *British Journal of Social Work*, 39(1), 113-127.
- Brady, P. Q. (2017). Crimes against caring: Exploring the risk of secondary traumatic stress, burnout, and compassion satisfaction among child exploitation investigators. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 32(4), 305-318.
- Cila, J., Lalonde, R. N., Sasaki, J. Y., Mar, R. A., & Lo, R. F. (2020). Zahra or Zoe, Arjun or Andrew? Bicultural baby names reflect identity and pragmatic concerns. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*. *Advanced online publication*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000420>
- Daniel, B. (2010). Concepts of adversity, risk, vulnerability and resilience: A discussion in the context of the 'Child Protection System'. *Social Policy and Society*, 9(2), 231-241.
- Davis, J., & Marsh, N. (2020). Boys to men: the cost of 'adultification' in safeguarding responses to Black boys. *Critical and Radical Social Work*, 8(2), 255-259.
- Edelman, M. W. (2015). *You can't be what you can't see*. USA: The Children's Defense Fund.
- Ellis, K. (2016). He's got some nasty impression of me he has: Listening to Children in the Secure Estate. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46, 1553-1567.
- Ellis, K. (2018). Contested vulnerability: A case study of girls in secure care. *Children and youth services review*, 88, 156-163.
- Falender, C. A. (2020). Ethics of Clinical Supervision: An International Lens. *Psychology in Russia: State of the Art*, 13(1), 42-53.
- Farooq, R., Stevenson, L., Beacham-Hulvej., & Norfolk Foundation Trust Youth Council. (2018). 'Risky child, risky involvement?': Hearing the voice of the child subject to or at risk of sexual exploitation. *Child & Family Psychology Review*, 6(9), 52-57.
- Fivush, R., Habermas, T., Waters, T. E., & Zaman, W. (2011). The making of autobiographical memory: Intersections of culture, narratives and identity. *International Journal of Psychology*, 46(5), 321-345.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*. Vintage.
- Gabriel, M. G., Brown, A., León, M., & Outley, C. (2020). Power and social control of youth during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Leisure Sciences*, 43(1), 1-7.
- Galbin, A. (2014). An introduction to social constructionism. *Social Research Reports*, 6(26), 82-92.
- Goff, P. A., Jackson, M. C., Di Leone, B. A. L., Culotta, C. M., & DiTomasso, N. A. (2014). The essence of innocence: consequences of dehumanizing Black children. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 106(4), 526-545.
- Harris, A. (2004). *Future girl - Young women in the twenty-first century*. New York: Routledge.
- Knight, C., & Borders, L. D. (2018). Trauma-informed supervision: Core components and unique dynamics in varied practice contexts. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 37(1), 1-6.
- Larson, G. (2008). Anti-oppressive practice in mental health. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 19(1), 39-54.
- Looyeh, M. Y., Kamali, K., & Shafieian, R. (2012). An exploratory study of the effectiveness of group narrative therapy on the school behavior of girls with attention-deficit/hyperactivity symptoms. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 26(5), 404-410.
- Luna Scott, C. (2015). The Futures of Learning 3: What kind of pedagogies for the 21st century?. *UNESCO Education Research and Foresight, Paris*, 15, 1-21.

- MacEachern, A. D., Dennis, A. A., Jackson, S., & Jindal-Snape, D. (2019). Secondary traumatic stress: prevalence and symptomatology amongst detective officers investigating child protection cases. *Journal of police and criminal psychology, 34*(2), 165-174.
- Martin, J. (2016). Child sexual abuse images online: Implications for social work training and practice. *The British Journal of Social Work, 46*(2), 372-388.
- McAdams, D. P. (2011). Narrative identity. In *Handbook of identity theory and research* (pp. 99-115). Springer, New York, NY.
- McAlinden, A. M. (2014). Deconstructing victim and offender identities in discourses on child sexual abuse: Hierarchies, blame and the good/evil dialectic. *British Journal of Criminology, 54*(2), 180-198.
- McLean, K. C., & Syed, M. (2015). Personal, master, and alternative narratives: An integrative framework for understanding identity development in context. *Human Development, 58*(6), 318-349.
- Moffett, L. (2016). Reparations for 'guilty victims': Navigating complex identities of victim-perpetrators in reparation mechanisms. *International Journal of Transitional Justice, 10*(1), 146-167.
- Munro, E. (2011). *The Munro review of child protection. Interim report: The child's journey*. London: Department for Education.
- NHS England. (2016). *Making every contact count consensus statement*. Public Health England.
- Norton, B. (2016). Identity and language learning: Back to the future. *TESOL quarterly, 50*(2), 475-479.
- Nybell, L. M. (2013). Locating "youth voice:" Considering the contexts of speaking in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 35*(8), 1227-1235.
- Pheonix, A. (2012). *Review of recent literature for the Bailey review of commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood*. Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre (CWRC).
- Powell, M. B., Cassematis, P., Benson, M. S., Smallbone, S., & Wortley, R. (2014), "Police officers' perceptions of the challenges involved in Internet Child Exploitation investigation", *Policing: An International Journal, 37*(3), 543-557.
- Puroila, A. M. (2019). Who Am I? Shaping Young Children's Identities Through Everyday Narratives. In *Story in Children's Lives: Contributions of the Narrative Mode to Early Childhood Development, Literacy, and Learning* (pp. 55-75). Springer, Cham.
- Ricks, L., Kitchens, S., Goodrich, T., & Hancock, E. (2014). My story: The use of narrative therapy in individual and group counseling. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health, 9*(1), 99-110.
- Shaw, J., & Greenhow, S. (2020). Children in care: Exploitation, offending and the denial of victimhood in a prosecution-led culture of practice. *The British Journal of Social Work, 50*(5), 1551-1569
- Sims-Schouten, W., Skinner, A., & Rivett, K. (2019). Child safeguarding practices in light of the Deserving/ Undeserving paradigm: A historical & contemporary analysis. *Child abuse & neglect, 94*, 1-12.
- Stephen, D. (2000). Young women construct themselves: Social identity, self-concept and psychosocial well-being in homeless facilities. *Journal of Youth Studies, 3*, 445-460.
- Thomas, R., & D'Arcy, K. (2017). Combatting child sexual exploitation with young people and parents: Contributions to a twenty-first-century family support agenda. *British Journal of Social Work, 47*(6), 1686-1703.
- Tran, N. T., Baggio, S., Dawson, A., O'Moore, É., Williams, B., Bedell, P., ... & Wolff, H. (2018). Words matter: a call for humanizing and respectful language to describe people who experience incarceration. *BMC international health and human rights, 18*(1), 1-6.
- Van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Mind, brain and body in the transformation of trauma*. Penguin: UK.
- Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory* (2nd ed.). Oxford, England: Blackwell.

# RESOURCES

## **TACT FOSTERING AND ADOPTION:**

### **Language that cares**

[https://www.tactcare.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/03/TACT-Language-that-cares-2019\\_online.pdf](https://www.tactcare.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/03/TACT-Language-that-cares-2019_online.pdf)

## **CARE REVIEW SCOTLAND**

### **The Promise**

<https://www.carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/105249.001-CR-Promise-Infographics-Posters-A1-v1-web.pdf>

## **HACKNEY CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING PROJECT**

### **Languaging Child and Adolescent Vulnerability**

<https://www.csnetwork.org.uk/assets/images/Language-Guide.pdf>

## **THE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY**

### **Appropriate Language**

<https://tce.researchinpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Appropriate-language-Child-sexual-and-or-criminal-exploitation-guidance-for-professionals.pdf>

## **BARNADOS**

### **Language Matters**

[https://www.plymouthonlinedirectory.com/media/2824/Barnardo-s-Language-Matters-Presentation/pdf/Barnardos\\_Language\\_Matters\\_Presentation.pdf?m=637426713393030000](https://www.plymouthonlinedirectory.com/media/2824/Barnardo-s-Language-Matters-Presentation/pdf/Barnardos_Language_Matters_Presentation.pdf?m=637426713393030000)



# MAKING WORDS MATTER



BIRMINGHAM CHILDREN'S TRUST

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND QUERIES CONTACT:

[network@nwgnetwork.org](mailto:network@nwgnetwork.org)