



**Diogelu Gwent  
Gwent Safeguarding**

# **Use of Language by Professionals in Relation to Children and Young People at Risk of Child Exploitation**



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Protocols & Procedures Group

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **ABOUT APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE IN RELATION TO CHILD SEXUAL AND/OR CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION**

It is imperative that appropriate terminology is used when discussing individuals who have been exploited or are at risk of exploitation. Language implying that the person is complicit in any way, or responsible for the crimes that have happened or may happen to them, must be avoided. Language should reflect the presence of coercion and the lack of control people have in abusive or exploitative situations and must recognise the severity of the impact exploitation has on the person. 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. 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.

### **HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT**

This document can be used by professionals when discussing the exploitation of individuals, including when escalating intelligence and delivering training. The document can be read at the beginning of strategy meetings, multi-agency meetings, or other settings where professionals might be discussing individuals who are at risk of exploitation. This document can also be used as a guide to support appropriate use of language when making a written record.

### **GUIDANCE FOR USING APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE**

The following table outlines terms that should not be used when discussing or recording issues of exploitation and includes a list of appropriate alternative phrases. It is also important to use Plain English, avoid the excessive use of jargon and be sensitive to needs of different community cultures. Professional judgement will need to be used when considering how to record information for the individual.

## Responses to Individual Child/ Young Person Harm

Poorly worded response	Appropriately worded responses
<p><b>Putting themselves at risk</b></p> <p>This implies that the child / young person is responsible for the risks presented by the perpetrator and that they are able to make free and informed choices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child/young person may have been groomed</li> <li>• The child/ young person is at an increased vulnerability of being abused and/or exploited.</li> <li>• A perpetrator may exploit the child's/ young person's increased vulnerability.</li> <li>• The child/ young person is not in a protective environment.</li> <li>• The situation reduces the child's / young person safety.</li> <li>• The location is dangerous to children/ young people.</li> <li>• The location/situation could increase the opportunity to abuse them.</li> <li>• It is unclear whether the child/ young person is under duress to go missing.</li> <li>• There are concerns that the child/ young person may be being sexually abused/exploited.</li> <li>• It is unclear why the child/ young person is getting into cars. There are concerns that there is a power imbalance forcing the child/ young person to act in this way.</li> <li>• There are concerns regarding other influences on the child/ young person</li> </ul>

<b>Responses to Individual Child/ Young Person Harm</b>	
<b>Poorly worded response</b>	<b>Appropriately worded responses</b>
<b>Would not cooperate with...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child / young person did not feel safe enough to disclose.</li> <li>• The child/ young person appears to fear negative repercussions for disclosure.</li> <li>• The child/ young person is being criminally/ sexually exploited and or groomed and therefore is not able to disclose.</li> <li>• The child/ young person is being criminally/ sexually exploited and or groomed and therefore is not able to disclose.</li> <li>• Child/ young person considers the relationship to be consensual however the relationship has been formed in the context of exploitation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Missing....</b></p> <p>The Wales Safeguarding Procedures define a missing person as “anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established”.</p> <p>The term ‘missing’ is widely used and is not in itself problematic however, it is important that practitioners consider the context for an individual child/young person (if known).</p> <p>The bullet points in the right-hand column provide some pointers for practitioners to consider</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child’s/ young person safety is context driven.</li> <li>• The child / young person does not feel able to stay at their current location.</li> <li>• The child/ young person is being groomed/ coerced to leave.</li> <li>• The child/ young person may consider leaving to be the safest option in this circumstance.</li> <li>• Someone else has control over this child’s/ young person behaviour. The child/ young person has returned to a safe place.</li> </ul>

<b>Responses to Individual Child/ Young Person Harm</b>	
<b>Poorly worded response</b>	<b>Appropriately worded responses</b>
<p><b>Sexual activity with...</b></p> <p>This implies consensual sexual activity has taken place. If it occurs within an abusive or exploitative context this term is not appropriate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child/ young person has been sexually abused.</li> <li>• The child/ young person has been raped.</li> <li>• There are reports of sexual abuse.</li> <li>• The child / young person has described sexual activity, however concerns exist that they child / young person may have been groomed and/or coerced.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sexually active since [age under13]</b></p> <p>A child under 13 cannot consent to sex and is therefore being abused. This should be reflected in the language used.</p> <p>Has been contacting adult males/females via phone or internet</p> <p>This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the communication and does not reflect the abusive or exploitative context.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child/young person has been raped.</li> <li>• The child/ young person has been/may have been sexually abused.</li> <li>• Concerns exist that the child/ young person may have been coerced, exploited, or sexually abused</li> <li>• The child/ young person is being sexually exploited.</li> <li>• There are concerns that the child/ young person has been raped.</li> <li>• Perpetrators are sexually abusing the child/ young person.</li> <li>• The child/ young person is being sexually abused.</li> <li>• The child's/ young person's vulnerability regarding drug use is being used by others to abuse them.</li> <li>• The perpetrators have a hold over the child/young person by the fact that they have a drug dependency.</li> </ul>

<b>Responses to Individual Child/ Young Person Harm</b>	
<b>Poorly worded response</b>	<b>Appropriately worded responses</b>
<p><b>In a relationship with...</b></p> <p>This implies that the child or young person is in a consensual relationship and does not reflect the abusive or exploitative context.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 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.</li> <li>• The young person has been/is being groomed, exploited, and controlled.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Involved in CSE/ Adult exploitation</b></p> <p>This implies there is a level of choice regarding the child/ young person being abused. A five-year-old would never be referred to as being involved in sexual abuse for the same reasons.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child/ young person is vulnerable to being sexually exploited.</li> <li>• The child/ young person is being sexually exploited.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Promiscuous</b></p> <p>This implies consensual sexual activity has taken place. Promiscuous is a judgemental term which stereotypes and labels people. It isn't appropriate in any context when discussing children and young people, but particularly if it occurs within an abusive or exploitative context.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child/ young person is vulnerable to being sexually exploited.</li> <li>• The child / young person is being sexually exploited.</li> <li>• This child/ young person has been/is being coerced into sharing images of themselves online.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Boyfriend/girlfriend</b></p> <p>This implies that the child or young person is in a consensual relationship and does not reflect the abusive or exploitative context.</p> <p>Children / young person have been challenged in court with practitioner's recordings where a practitioner has referred to the perpetrator as the child's/ young person boyfriend or girlfriend.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 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.</li> <li>• The young person has been/is being groomed, exploited, and controlled.</li> </ul>

<b>Responses to Individual Child/ Young Person Harm</b>	
<b>Poorly worded response</b>	<b>Appropriately worded responses</b>
<p><b>Drug running – He/she is drug running</b></p> <p>This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child criminal exploitation (CCE). The child/young person is being criminally exploited.</li> <li>• The child/ young person is being trafficked for purpose of criminal exploitation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recruit/run/work</b></p> <p>This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context of the behaviour.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child/ young person is being criminally exploited.</li> </ul>
<p><b>He/she is choosing this lifestyle</b></p> <p>This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child/ young person is being criminally exploited. The child/ young person is being sexually exploited</li> </ul>
<p><b>Associating or spending time with ‘elders’</b></p> <p>This implies that the child or young people are responsible for their exploitation and have the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The young people say that they are friends with a person or group of people and there are concerns about the ages of those people, the imbalance of power, exploitation and or offending.</li> <li>• The young people have been groomed, exploited, coerced and/or controlled.</li> </ul> <p style="color: red;">Note: If the ‘elder’ is also under the age of 18 years old, this will need to be considered using language of vulnerability/ exploitation and also requires a child Protection processes/response.</p>

<b>Responses to Individual Child/ Young Person Harm</b>	
<b>Poorly worded response</b>	<b>Appropriately worded responses</b>
<p><b>Offering him/her drugs seemingly in return for sex or to run drugs.</b></p> <p>This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context relating to substance use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child/ young person is being sexually/criminally exploited.</li> <li>• The child/ young person is being criminally exploited through drug debt.</li> <li>• There are concerns that the child/ young person has been raped as they do not have the freedom or capacity to consent.</li> <li>• Perpetrators are sexually abusing the child/ young person.</li> <li>• The child/ young person is being sexually abused.</li> <li>• The child's / young person's vulnerability regarding drug use is being used by others to abuse them.</li> <li>• The perpetrators have a hold over the child/ young person by the fact that they have a drug dependency.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Gang Involved or Affiliated</b></p> <p>This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context or powerful grooming process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child/ young person is being sexually/criminally exploited.</li> <li>• Violence and crime affected child/ young person, family, or household.</li> <li>• There may be harmful behaviours and or attitudes that exist towards violence and criminality within this peer network.</li> <li>• It is unclear why the child/ young person is getting into cars. There are concerns that there is a power imbalance and powerful grooming forcing or compelling the child to act in this way.</li> <li>• There are concerns regarding other influences on the child/ young person.</li> </ul> <p style="color: red;"><b>Note: If other members of the peer network are also under the age of 18 years old, this will need to be considered using language of vulnerability/ exploitation and also requires a child protection processes/ response.</b></p>



## Responses to Individual Child/ Young Person Harm

Poorly worded response	Appropriately worded responses
<p><b>Gang(s) in the Area/ location</b></p> <p>This implies that the child or young people are responsible for the exploitation and have the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise an abusive or exploitative context or their right to be in the location without experiencing harm.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Area impacted by episodes of serious youth violence.</li> <li>• Groups of young people congregate to create safety for themselves.</li> <li>• There may be harmful behaviours and or attitudes that exist towards violence and criminality within this space/ community/neighbourhood.</li> <li>• The space/ community or neighbourhood may not be safe for this child/ young person or group of children.</li> <li>• There appears to be limited safe opportunities for young people or adults to interrupt/ harmful behaviours and or attitudes that exist towards violence and criminality within this community/neighbourhood.</li> <li>• This community requires support to address concerns or attitudes that exist towards violence and criminality within this space/ community/neighbourhood.</li> <li>• Owing to conflict and tensions between these groups, other areas or locations in the borough may not be safe for this child or group of children.</li> <li>• The location/situation could increase the opportunity to abuse vulnerable children/adults.</li> </ul>

<b>Responses to Individual Child/ Young Person Harm</b>	
<b>Poorly worded response</b>	<b>Appropriately worded responses</b>
<p><b>Despite the risk s/he continues to return to the location...</b></p> <p>This implies that the child or young people are responsible for any exploitation they experience in a location. It does not recognise abusive or exploitative context or their right to be in the location without experiencing harm.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child(ren)/ young person's consider themselves to be safe in this space/community/ neighbourhood.</li> <li>• The child(ren)/ young persons did not consider themselves safe where they were.</li> <li>• The child(ren) / young people have been groomed or coerced into being in this neighbourhood/location.</li> <li>• The child(ren) / young people do not feel they have another safe place to go.</li> <li>• The location/situation could increase the opportunity to abuse child(ren)/ young person's.</li> <li>• The child(ren)/ young people feel under threat/ coerced to remain in this location.</li> <li>• The child(ren) / young person's do not feel safe enough to leave this location.</li> </ul>