



Child Sexual Exploitation: Language Matters

As professionals we have moved on significantly in the way we talk about children who have been sexually exploited. Judgemental language to describe what is **child sexual abuse** both compromises criminal investigations (as strengthens the defence of the perpetrator) and diminishes both the child and ourselves.

Suggested alternatives for professionals when describing behaviour around CSE concerns

Inappropriate terms	Suggested alternatives
Putting themselves at risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child may have been groomed. • The child is at an increased vulnerability to being abused / exploited. • A Perpetrator may exploit the child's increased Vulnerability • Situation could reduce the child's safety • Location/situation could increase a perpetrators opportunity to abuse them. • Child in not in a protective environment • The location is dangerous to children • Not clear if the child is under duress to go missing • Concerns are that the child may be being sexually abused • It is unclear why the child is getting in to cars. • Concern that there is a power imbalance forcing the child to act in this way. • Concerns regarding others Influences on the child.
Sexual activity with...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have been sexually abused • They have been raped. • Allegation of sexual abuse • Child has described sexual activity, however concerns exist that they child may have been groomed/coerced

Sexually active since (Age under 13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raped • Concerns exist that child may have been coerced, exploited or sexually abused. • Child may have been sexually abused.
Have been contacting adult Males/females via phone or internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult males/females have been contacting the child. • Child may have been groomed. • Concerns that the adult is facilitating communication with a child. • Child is vulnerable to online perpetrators. • Concerns that others may be using online technology to access or abuse the child. • Adults appear to be using a range of methods to communicate with the child
offering her drugs seemingly in return for sex'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child is being sexually exploited • Concerns that the child has been raped • Perpetrators are sexually abusing the child • The child is being sexually abused • The child's vulnerability regarding drug use is being used by others to abuse them. • The perpetrators have a hold over the child by the fact that they have a drug dependency.
Involved in CSE	This implies there is a level of choice regarding the child being abused a better term would be the child is vulnerable to being sexually exploited or they are being sexually exploited. A 5 year old would never be referred to as being involved in sexual abuse for the same reasons.
Promiscuous	This puts the blame on the child and implies they know what may be happening and therefore is not seen by practitioners as exploitative or abusive. Often used to describe females behaviour.
Prostituting themselves	This completely misses that the child is being controlled/manipulated. Changes in legislation have meant that child prostitution is no longer an acceptable term and should never be used
Boyfriend/girlfriend	Children have been challenged in court with practitioner's recordings where their practitioner has referred to the perpetrator as the child's boyfriend or girlfriend.