

INTRODUCTION

This guidance can be used by professionals when discussing or recording information about the exploitation of adults at risk, including when escalating intelligence and delivering training.

It is imperative that appropriate terminology is used when discussing adults who have been exploited, or are at risk of exploitation. 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.

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. Professionals should be aware of the context and circumstances around the adult and their vulnerabilities.

Professionals must also be aware that any recording will be subject to Third Party Disclosure should there be any criminal court case. Inappropriate use of language can have serious consequences within a criminal court context, and may impact upon convictions.

There are many slang terms used to describe exploitation which are well understood by professionals but they can be dehumanising and in some circumstances minimise the risk, violence or abuse.

Professionals should be mindful of stereotyping language when working with different genders, LGBTQIA+ and ethnic minority groups.

Professionals need to consider assessing Mental Capacity of any decisions or choices that the adult appears to be making that could be impacted by an impairment or disturbance of the mind or brain or undue influences. Apparent "repeated unwise decisions" will require further exploration and assessment by professionals. There should be consideration of executive (dys)functioning in line with risk levels.

KEY INFORMATION

Adult at risk

Defined as someone who is:

- Aged 18 or over and;
- Has an appearance of needs for care and support (whether or not those needs are being met); and
- Is experiencing, or is at risk of abuse or neglect; and
- As a result of those needs is unable to protect him or herself against the abuse or neglect or the risk of it

(Care Act, 2014)

Adults with care and support needs can be targeted by perpetrators for the purposes of exploitation. It is important for professionals to remember that adults are exploited too.

REPORTING A SAFEGUARDING ADULTS CONCERN IN NEWCASTLE

If you are concerned about an adult at risk please report your concerns via existing safeguarding reporting pathways.

To report concerns on a multi-agency basis:

Report online

Or contact Community Health and Social Care Direct (8am - 5pm)

0191 278 8377

Outside of these hours call - 0191 278 7878

In an emergency always dial 999

For further information, please visit:

www.newcastlesafeguarding.org.uk/report-a-concern

APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

The following tables outlines terms that should not be used when discussing or recording issues of the exploitation and abuse of adults and includes a list of suggested appropriate alternative phrases.

Inappropriate term	Suggested alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Putting themselves at risk” • “They are choosing to be involved in risk taking behaviours” <p><i>This implies that the adult is responsible for the risks presented by the perpetrator(s) and that they are able to make free and informed choices.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Despite the risk s/he continues to return to the location...” <p><i>This implies that the adult is 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</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The adult may have been groomed” • “The adult is at an increased vulnerability of being abused and/or exploited” • “A perpetrator may exploit the adult’s increased vulnerability” • “The adult is not in a protective environment” • “The situation could reduce the adult’s safety” • “The location/situation could increase a perpetrator’s opportunity to abuse them” • “There is concern the adult is experiencing undue influence / control and coercion” • “There are concerns that the adult may be being sexually abused and/or exploited” • “There are concerns that there is a power imbalance influencing the adult to act in this way” • “There are concerns regarding other influences on the adult” • “There are concerns regarding the adults capacity to make relevant decisions regarding contact” • The adult has limited choices or control over their situation”

Inappropriate term	Suggested alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “sexual activity with...” <p><i>This implies consensual sexual activity has taken place. If it occurs within an abusive or exploitative context this term is not appropriate. Adults may have temporarily been unable to consent due to intoxication and/or may lack capacity to consent to sex due to some other reason</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The adult has been sexually abused” • “The adult has been raped” • “There are reports of sexual abuse” • “The adult has described sexual activity, however concerns exist that they may have been groomed and/or coerced” • “There are concerns the adult may have been unable to consent” (consider MCA assessment) • The adult has limited choices / control over how they are able to meet their basic needs.
Inappropriate term	Suggested alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Sexually active since...” <p><i>When referring to the adult as a child in the context of non-recent reports of abuse, a child cannot consent to sex and is therefore being abused. This should be reflected in the language used.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The adult has reported that they have been raped” • “The adult has been/may have been sexually abused” • “Concerns exist that the adult may have been coerced, exploited, or sexually abused
Inappropriate term	Suggested alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Offering him/her drugs seemingly in return for sex” • “Survival Sex work” <p><i>This implies that the adult is responsible for the abuse and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The adult is being sexually exploited” • “There are concerns that the adult has been raped” • “Perpetrators are sexually abusing the adult” • “The adult is being sexually abused” • “The adult’s vulnerability regarding drug and or alcohol use is being used by others to abuse them” • “The perpetrators have a hold over the adult by the fact that they have a drug dependency”

Inappropriate term	Suggested alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “In a relationship with...” <p><i>This implies that the adult is in a positive, consensual relationship and does not reflect the abusive or exploitative context.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The adult says that they are in a relationship with a person; there are concerns about that person’s age, the imbalance of power, fear, exploitation and/or offending” • “The perpetrator has manipulated the adult to believe they are in a relationship” • “The adult considers the relationship to be consensual however the relationship has been formed in the context of exploitation”
Inappropriate term	Suggested alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Promiscuous” • “Experimenting” <p><i>This implies consensual sexual activity has taken place. Promiscuous is a judgemental term based on assumptions and includes a significant gender bias as it is rarely applied to boys and men. <u>It should not be used in any context.</u></i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The adult is vulnerable to being sexually exploited” • “There are concerns that the adult is being sexually exploited” • “There are concerns that the adult is being manipulated/ coerced into having sexual contact with multiple people”
Inappropriate term	Suggested alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Prostituting themselves or selling themselves” <p><i>This implies that the adult is responsible for the abuse and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The perpetrator has raped or facilitated the adult being raped” • “There are concerns that the adult is being sexually exploited” • “The adult has limited choices / options available to them” • “The adult may be a victim of human trafficking and/or modern slavery (where their exploitation involves being recruited, moved, or held by a perpetrator which is highly likely in this context)”

Inappropriate term	Suggested alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Drug running /dealer – He/she is drug running or is recruiting others to deal drugs” <p><i>This implies that the adult 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.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Criminal exploitation (CE)” • “The adult is being criminally exploited” • “There are concerns that the adult is being trafficked for the purpose of criminal exploitation” • "The adult has been forced to sell drugs." • "The adult has been targeted by perpetrators and then groomed, often through promises of payment or gifts" • "The adult is being coerced, groomed, manipulated into exploiting others" • "The adult is being exploited through drug debt." • "The perpetrator is using debt bondage to continue to control and exploit the adult."
Inappropriate term	Suggested alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “He/she is choosing this lifestyle or is making a lifestyle choice” • "They are fully capacitated to make unwise decisions." • "Makes poor choices / they know what they are doing." • "They need to take responsibility for their behaviour" <p><i>This implies that the adult 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.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The adult is being criminally exploited” • “The adult is being sexually exploited” • "The adult may be unable to make capacitated choices due to a cognitive impairment or undue influence" • "They need support to understand the complex nature of exploitation" • "They need support to understand what exploitation is, and how they have been groomed." • "They need support to understand that only the exploiter is responsible for what happened to them and they are not to blame." • "They need help and support to understand how the exploiter is harming them and does not have their best interests in mind" • "I have assessed capacity in relation to <insert specific decision here>"

Inappropriate term	Suggested alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Choosing to spend time/ associating with individuals of concern” <p><i>This implies that the adult 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.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The adult says that they are friends with a person and there are concerns about that person’s age, the imbalance of power, fear, exploitation and/or offending” • “There are concerns that the adult has been groomed, exploited and/or coerced and controlled”
Inappropriate term	Suggested alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Offering him/her drugs seemingly in exchange for sex or storing or selling drugs” <p><i>This implies that the adult 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.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The adult is being sexually/criminally exploited” • “The adult is being criminally exploited through drug debt” • “There are concerns that the adult has been raped as they do not have the freedom or capacity to consent” • “Perpetrators are sexually abusing the adult” • “The adult is being sexually abused” • “The adult’s vulnerability regarding drug use is being used by others to abuse them” • “The perpetrators have a hold over the adult by the fact that the adult has a drug dependency” • “The adult has been given substances in an attempt to control and exploit them”

Inappropriate term	Suggested alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Would not cooperate with..." • "Tells lies" • "Fabricates, exaggerates" • "Has a history of making false allegations" • <p><i>Statements suggesting a person is not telling the truth can be extremely damaging to someone, particular in relation to any future criminal action against perpetrators. Victims/survivors may not be viewed as credible witnesses based on such recordings.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The adult did not feel safe enough to disclose" • "The adult may fear negative repercussions for disclosure" • "Professionals have been told conflicting information by the adult, this could be due to: difficulty with recall, trauma, drug and substance use, control / manipulation of the perpetrator, to protect others"
Inappropriate term	Suggested alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Not compliant or not engaging" • "Will not engage" • "Choosing to live a chaotic life" <p><i>This implies the person's engagement is solely their responsibility and within their control. A person's positive engagement with services may be affected by a number of factors, including a perpetrator preventing them from doing so or services themselves being inaccessible.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The adult may feel overwhelmed by the number of professionals trying to engage them from different services." • "The adult is being criminally/sexually exploited and/or groomed and feels unable to disclose and or engage" • "There are barriers to engagement beyond the adult's control." • "The adult has multiple and complex needs / vulnerabilities that may affect their ability to accept / access support" • "Due to the trauma they have experienced because of their exploitation, the adult finds it difficult to trust unknown adults" • "Services have not yet found the best way to build relationships with them" • "Support was offered that did not meet the needs of the young person at that time" • "It is recommended that the services try an alternative approach to engaging the adult"

Inappropriate term	Suggested alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The adult has absconded / ran away" • "The adult does not want to be found or have contact with services." • "The person is in hiding." <p><i>Where there are concerns that an adult is not where they normally expected to be and there are concerns they may be at risk</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The adult does not feel able to stay at their current location" • "The adult is being groomed/coerced to leave" • "The adult may consider leaving to be the safest option in this circumstance" • "Someone else has control over the adult's behaviour" • "The adult is missing and may be at risk of harm" • "The adult is fearful of being harmed or others at risk of harm" • "The adult may have no control over their whereabouts" • "The adult might be being forced to be in a location."
Inappropriate term	Suggested alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Gang Involved or affiliated" • "The adult enjoys being part of gang / drill culture" <p><i>This implies that the adult 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.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The adult is being exploited by organised crime groups" • "Violence and crime has affected adult, family or household" • "There are concerns that there is a power imbalance and powerful grooming forcing or compelling the adult to act in this way" • "There are concerns regarding other influences on the adult" • "The adult is being groomed" • "The adult is under threat of violence" • "The adult feels that they may be protected" • "They are being groomed or at risk of being exploited by perpetrators/ Organised Crime Groups" • "They are a victim of human trafficking and/or modern slavery and are being exploited to commit criminal offences"

Inappropriate term	Suggested alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "They are allowing people into their homes" • "They live in a party house" • "They are failing to look after themselves and their property" • "Not controlling their visitors" • "They attract anti social behaviour" <p>These statements suggest the adult has control and choice over what is happening to them and does not recognise the exploitative circumstances. Phrases such as "party house" minimise the risks involved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The adult may be subject to undue influence, manipulation, control and coercion" • "The adult may be fearful and unable to stop being coming into the property" • "Their house/accommodation has been invaded/taken over by organised crime groups" • "The adult is being exploited"

FURTHER RESOURCES

Newcastle Criminal Exploitation and Serious Violence Referral Flowchart

Principles of Engagement (Newcastle Safeguarding Adults Board)

Appropriate Language in Relation to Child Exploitation (The Children's Society.)

Making Words Matter – Attending to Language when working with children subject to or at risk of Exploitation: A Practice & Knowledge Briefing (CNTW, NWG and Space)

Why language matters blogs (NSPCC)