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Use of appropriate language

When reading about safeguarding or discussing with colleagues there are lots of terms which can seem confused or overlapping. Safeguarding terminology has evolved over time. Some safeguarding language is outdated but still used by some people. Other language is used for slightly different things in different settings. You will want to move to the most up to date language but also know what other people mean when they use older terms, or terms that are specific to their context.



Use of appropriate safeguarding language

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Why does it matter?

We all need to get language right for a number of reasons. We want to make it clear that safeguarding encompasses all individuals and step away from old beliefs that it only covers children. We want to make sure that when we are having a discussion we're all considering the same thing. We want to make sure we never use victim-blaming language which implies that a child, young person or adult at risk may be at fault. We need to use professional terms for legal reasons.

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What do I need to do?

Consult the [online glossary of safeguarding terms](#).
Check the NSPCC "[Why language matters](#)" blog
For further information on children's or adult safeguarding visit www.rochdalesafeguarding.com

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Example – "Toxic Trio"

Although the term was originally used to describe three factors commonly present in case reviews, the grouping together of these specific factors means that 'toxic trio' consequently leads to being misunderstood as if any of these factors are present, a child will experience abuse, whereas if none of them are present, a child is safe. However, by focusing on the 'toxic trio' in isolation, it risks overlooking other factors present in a family's life such as:

- availability of appropriate support and services
- parental adverse childhood experiences
- cultural or language barriers
- disability or poverty.

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Example – "Child Pornography"

Using the phrase 'child pornography' hides the true impact of perpetrators' behaviour. They are not making or watching pornography, they are abusing children.

Instead of using 'child pornography', use 'child sexual abuse materials'. Changing our language ensures we are not trivialising serious crimes, whilst making sure we don't cause further harm to children. Reframing the language we use around child sexual abuse materials better enables professionals to trigger the appropriate child protection response.

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Example – "Did not attend"

The phrase 'did not attend' implies that a child is responsible for attending an appointment and chose not to go. But young children can only attend an appointment if their caregiver takes them; they can't travel independently and may not even know about the appointment. A shift to recording a missed appointment as 'was not brought' reminds practitioners that it is the adult who is responsible for ensuring that a child receives appropriate medical care, not the child. It prompts professionals to consider the causes and consequences of the missed appointment. This change opens opportunities for discussions and plans around support, safeguarding, and welfare for a child.

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Example – "Attention Seeking"

'Attention-seeking' is a term that implies that children are purposefully 'acting up' to get a reaction. It encourages the belief that ignoring the behaviour will make it stop. However:

- Children who display 'attention seeking' behaviour are really in need of attention, attachment or connection.
- It's important that children know you really see and hear them.
- Always think about the reasons behind behaviour. Consider whether the child has underlying support or safeguarding needs, or both.