

VICTIM BLAMING

What is victim blaming language?

Victim blaming language is a language used to imply that a victim of crime, abuse or a harmful act is partially or fully responsible for the incident. This type of language should be discouraged with no blame being placed on the individual as a victim of crime. This can affect children, young people and adults.

Examples of victim blaming language

Below is a short list of examples of victim blaming language (this list is not exhaustive)

- “What was you wearing?”
- “You shouldn’t have drunk that much”
- “You should have known better”
- “You should have just listened to them”
- “You need to toughen up”
- “You know you shouldn’t have made them angry”

This language is harmful because:

- They minimise the perpetrator’s responsibility.
- They make the victim’s feel guilty or ashamed for something that wasn’t their fault.
- They discourage victims from seeking help or reporting incidents.

Instead use language like this:

- “I’m sorry this has happened to you”
- “It wasn’t your fault”
- “How can I help you”
- “You did the right thing by saying something”

Empathy and validation can make a huge difference in supporting a victim to feel safe and listened too.

What is the impact of victim blaming language?

Unfortunately, victim blaming language can have profound and lasting effects on individuals, communities and society as a whole. When victims are blamed for the harm, they have suffered, it not only deepens their emotional and psychological wounds but also perpetuates harmful societal norms.

Impact on victims

Shame & Guilt - Victims may internally blame themselves believing they caused the harm. This can lead to deepened feelings such shame, embarrassment and unworthiness.

Silence & Isolation - Fear of judgement or disbelief will often stop victims from speaking out or seeking help. This can lead to victims feeling isolated and unsupported which can worsen the trauma.

Increased Trauma & PTSD - Using blaming language may lead to traumatization, making it more difficult for them to heal. Victims who suffer from blame are more likely to develop post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety & depression.

Hinderance to healing - Victims may struggle to process their trauma if they are preoccupied with self-blame. This may prevent them from accessing necessary resources or local support systems.

More information on victim blaming language

- Victim blaming and the online experiences of children and young people
- Child Exploitation Language Guide | The Children’s Society
- Language matters - Barnardo’s Beacon