

## **Terms and phrases relating to child sexual abuse**

We, the Victims and Survivors' Consultative Panel (VSCP), work with the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse to ensure the needs and perspectives of victims and survivors are reflected in the Inquiry's on-going work.

We would like to raise awareness of some of the terms that are regularly used by the general public and the media when reporting on cases and the impact that the use of these terms may have on victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.

### **Victims and survivors rather than 'victims' or 'survivors'**

Both these words have very different connotations and varying personal meanings for individuals. Some people identify as victims and some as survivors, we therefore prefer to use the words '**victims and survivors**' together when collectively referring to people that have been sexually abused.

### **Non-recent sexual abuse rather than 'historical sexual abuse'**

The word 'historical' implies that the sexual abuse happened a long time ago but, for many victims and survivors, the effects of the sexual abuse are still with them today. It also implies that the type of abuse covered by the Inquiry's terms of reference no longer happens in today's society however it is clear that this is still very much the case. We use the term '**non-recent sexual abuse**' as this accurately reflects the time that has passed since the sexual abuse happened but does not diminish the **IMPACT** of the sexual abuse suffered by the victims and survivors.

We never speak about historical murder or armed robbery therefore we should not refer to sexual abuse as historical but non-recent or current.

### **Child sexual abuser, child sexual offender or perpetrator of child sexual abuse rather than 'paedophile'**

The term paedophile refers to a diagnostic paraphilic disorder often used inappropriately to describe all perpetrators of child sexual abuse. However, this term applies to a person that has a primary or exclusive sexual preference to prepubescent children. Not all paedophiles act on their sexual preference or interest. It is helpful to note that having a sexual preference or interest in children and young people is not a criminal offence - however *acting on* that sexual preference or interest is a criminal offence.

We use the terms '**child sexual abuser**', '**child sexual offender**' or '**perpetrator of child sexual abuse**' to more accurately reflect the crimes committed, no matter what the age of the child.

### **Child sexual abuse rather than 'child sex abuse'**

Child sex abuse implies that 'sex' is normal and acceptable and simply the act of sex whereas child sexual abuse encompasses the meaning of power and control and not just a sexual act.

We prefer the phrase '**child sexual abuse**' as this encompasses the range of offences, such as grooming, viewing sexual abuse images, and encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

### **Child sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse rather than 'child prostitution, child sex worker, child sex tourism, rent boy'.**

We prefer not to use these terms as they imply that the child is complicit in the (sex) abuse. In fact, these are all types of **child sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse** .

More appropriate terms include: Child sexually abused in the prostitution industry, child sexually abused in the sex tourism industry.

#### *Definition of child sexual exploitation (CSE)*

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

### **Child sexual abuse images rather than 'child pornography'**

The term child pornography implies that the child is complicit in the sexual abuse and it detracts from the fact that these images are depicting a crime. We use the term '**child sexual abuse images**' as this more accurately reflects what the images are - sexual assault and/or rape of children. Once an image is made it can be on the internet forever; this has a long lasting impact on the victim/survivor in addition to the impact of the actual sexual assault and/or rape they have been subjected to in the production of the image(s).

### **Victims and survivors rather than 'survivor community'**

This phrase is commonly used to refer generally to **victims and survivors**. We prefer not to use this phrase because it does not account for the various different views, opinions, and

experiences of all victims and survivors. Additionally, this could be further alienating for those that may not be part of a particular community or support network.

**‘Share their experience’ rather than ‘share their story’**

Victims and survivors of child sexual abuse are invited to **share their experience** with the Inquiry through the Truth Project. We avoid the phrase ‘tell us your story’ as this may imply that the account given is fictional. The Truth Project provides a safe and confidential space for victims and survivors to share their experiences with the Inquiry where they will be listened to and not judged. The accounts given, either in person or in writing, will inform the work of the Inquiry.

When referring to specific crimes against children name the crime where possible e.g. child rape. Try and avoid euphemism. There needs to be recognition of the risk that some victims and survivors of sexual abuse but not rape could feel that their experiences are less important.

If an article or report is making reference to child murder and the murder has a sexual motivation it should be named as such. e.g. murder after sexual assault and or rape, sexually motivated murder.