



# Use Language that Cares

## Changing the Narrative

Language is a powerful tool for communication but sometimes the way that it is used in social care creates stigma and barriers for understanding. And we want children, young people, and their families to feel empowered throughout professional involvement with Child and Family Services.

Sometimes professionals use over complex words, abbreviations and jargon because: it feels quicker; it's what we are used to; we mistakenly think that improves quality, we see other professional using it or we don't think, we forget or don't notice the negative impact this has on the people we are trying to work with and help.

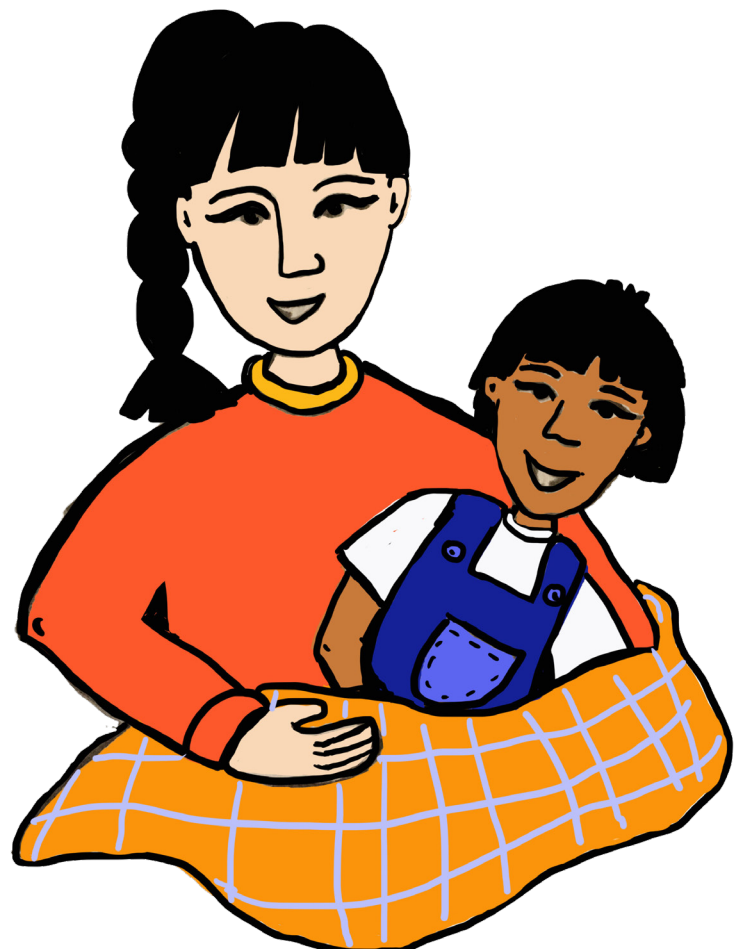
At worse, unnecessarily complex language, professional jargon, abbreviations can, consciously or unconsciously, make us seem arrogant, superior, can be something to hide behind or show power in an unhelpful and unskilful way.

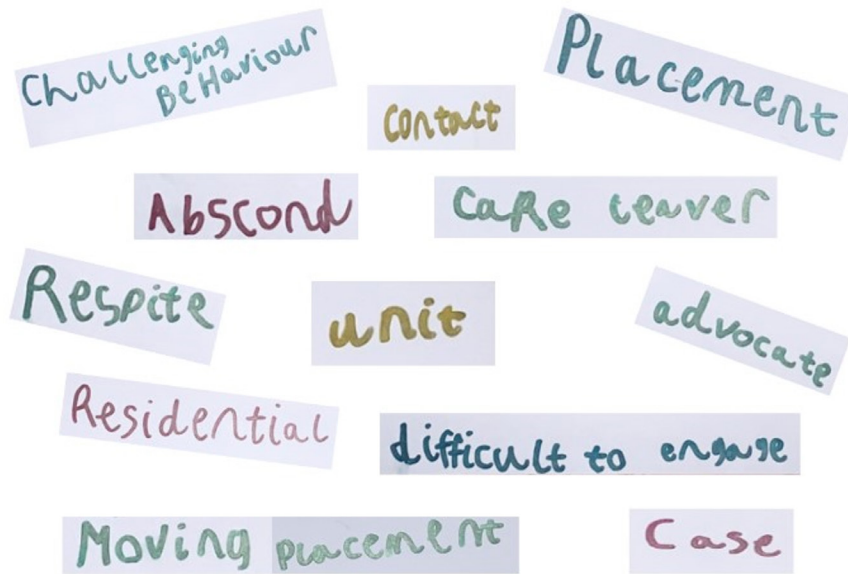
In Westmorland & Furness we build good, honest and respectful relationships, which fundamentally underpin all of our work, through kind, clear communication both verbally and non-verbally. We want to be clear and firm in a hugely kind manner. What we want is for our children to feel strong, empowered, confident and hopeful.

We promote relationship-based practice which means forging strong connections with the children, families and their naturally occurring network. We achieve this through having honest and clear but difficult conversations, whilst being compassionate, using clear verbal and non-verbal communication. We prioritise building positive relationships, and the use of child and family friendly language, as we recognise the importance of this in achieving positive change for children and young people.

### What we hope to achieve

- Children, young people and the families of Westmorland & Furness will tell us they understand what professionals are saying.
- Culture of language to change across the organisation and partners, easy to understand family friendly language will be used.
- Practitioners will be on board and feel empowered to change their language as they recognise words have power and the impact our language has upon achieving positive outcomes for children.
- Written documentation will reflect easy to understand family friendly language
- The stigma associated with professional intervention will be reduced.





## Feedback

*"Use words that I can understand"*

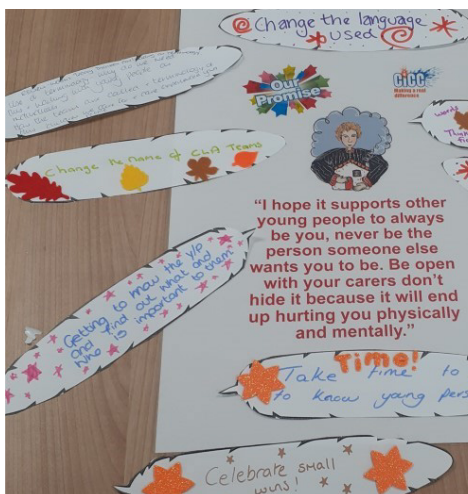
*"Don't call a meeting about me a CLA Review, use my name in the meeting title"*

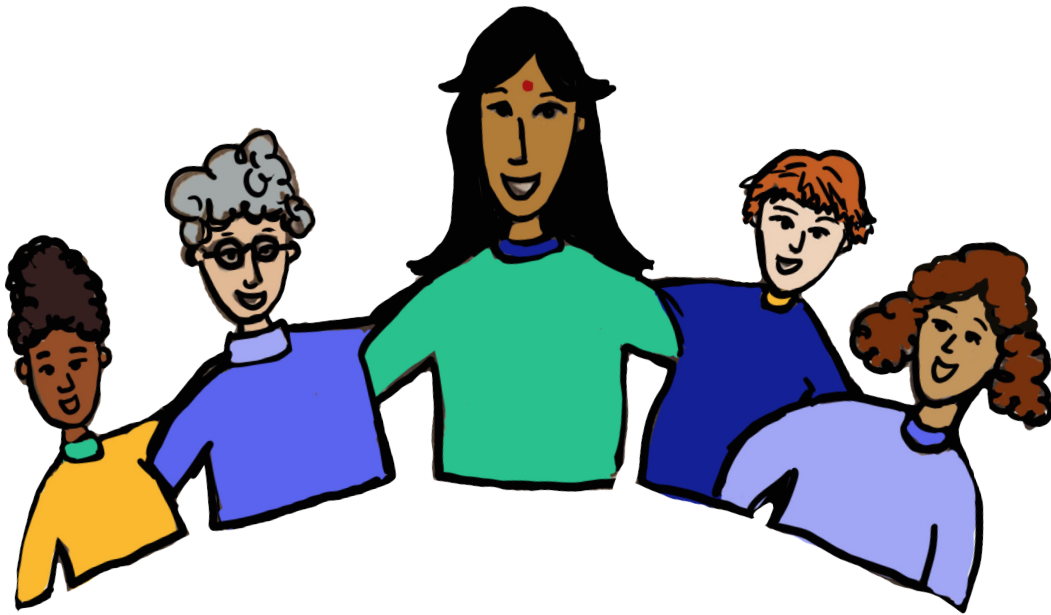
*"When a social worker repeats my words back to me they can sometimes change them a little, not on purpose, but it changes the meaning of what I have said: lost in translation"*

*"Listen to me"*

All the children and young people that we work with are individuals and the feedback we get from them is different and unique to them and their situation. All have words and phrases that they dislike, and when they hear them it can leave them confused, upset, feeling different, not listened to and judged.

**More importantly, remember to ask the person you are working with what they wish to be used**





## Cumbrian practitioners have told us

*"I was completing an assessment with a young mum to be, she was 16 and had lived experience of involvement with children's services on and off throughout her childhood. This young person said throughout our sessions she wanted to give her baby stability but when asked if she could what this means and what this would look like for her baby she said she didn't know, when asked how she knew of the word stability she said its something she had heard being said all the time when the social workers were there when she was growing up."*

*"I was completing a parenting assessment with a mum that has older children who have been removed from her care and she now has a baby in foster care. We were discussing how to respond to a baby who was upset. The mum said 'you would have to emotionally support him' when asked if she could explain what that means or what that looks like she said 'oh I didn't know, it's just something I've heard from social workers in the past with my older kids."*

## Small changes make a big difference!

- Use Child friendly easy to understand language
- Use the language of the family
- No professional jargon
- Avoid abbreviations as not everyone understands them, and they can have different meanings in different services.
- Behavioural specific
- Update language in policies

## Our Practice model

All our services have to 'start with the child and stay with the child', whether our involvement is brief or lengthy. In Westmorland & Furness Signs of Safety is our practice model, our strength-based child centered approach to organise, articulate and structure our work with children and families. A strengths-based approach focuses on identifying the strengths, or assets, as well as the needs and difficulties of children, young people and families. Our child-centred practice, helps us to assemble the evidence base about the child's lived experiences, especially the impact on the child of any adverse childhood experiences.

In Westmorland & Furness we have adopted the Signs of Safety practice model across our services and partner agencies, to help us in our work with children and families. Working in partnership with children, families and their naturally occurring network is central to our work, we prioritise building positive relationships, as we recognise the importance of this in achieving positive change for children and young people. We take a strengths-based, solution focused approach to our work, and support the family and network to come up with solutions to their difficulties. Signs of Safety underpins our work; however, we use a range of theories and models in our work.

One of the key principles of Signs of Safety practice is to use easy to understand language that everyone understands, therefore moving away from professional jargon and abbreviations. The language we use is important to help everyone have a good understanding of why we are involved and what we are working towards.

Signs of Safety practice encourages practitioners to describe behaviours rather than using professional phrases. This helps families to have a better understanding of the worries and what they are working towards.

Moving away from recording like this	What we would like to see
We are worried that Jonny is witnessing domestic abuse, and that this is having a significant impact upon his emotional well-being.	We are worried that Jonny is seeing his Mum and Dad arguing and shouting a lot, when they argue items in the home are getting thrown around. Jonny really worries about his Mum and Dad getting hurt, he doesn't like going to School the day after an argument, as he worries what will happen when he is at school.

Throughout the Liquid Logic Solution, the Signs of Safety forms encourage recording the exact words of the child/parent/carer/network.



## Commonly used words and phrases and some suggested alternatives

Signs of Safety promotes simple, clear, easy to understand language. Moving away from professional jargon and abbreviations that can be interpreted in different ways.

Workers have shared how they would describe professional words/phrases in a way that parents, carers, children, and their network would understand.

Feedback from people that we work with is that we should use language that is personal and individual to them.



### Ability to Protect

- Mum and dad are acting in way that keeps the children safe when something bad is happening.
- Not necessarily doing something deliberate to hurt someone but not being able to do something to keep them safe and well.
- We need to make sure that the people looking after you understand how to keep you safe

**Achieve your full potential** - Doing all the things you want to do in your life. Be who you want to be. What would help to get you to where you want to be?

### Additional needs

- Needs extra help.
- Something extra that you have, that we might need to know about so we can help you a little bit more.
- Some extra support is needed.

### Advocate

- The title says what it is but may need more explanation?
- Someone who isn't employed by us to help you have your say

**Assessment** - Get to know you, find out about you, what is life like for you, how it makes you feel and others in the family, any help need.

**Asylum seeker - Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking child (UASC) (Home Office term)** - Young People, migrant child, new arrival to this country.

**Attachment** - The relationship you have with others, how they make you feel and impact how you see the world.

**Best Interests** - People around you want what they think is best for you to help you achieve your potential in life.

**Birth Parents** - Parents, family, mum, dad

### Case

- Someone you are working with.
- Name the person.

**Care Leaver** - Care experienced adult

**Care Plan** - Future plans, my plan, (child's name) plan

**Challenging Behaviour**

- Children and young people who are finding things tough,
- In need of our help and support to make sense of how they are feeling and why, dealing with difficult situations

**Children in care** - Cared for.

**Children Looked After** - A child/young person we care for and support

**Children Looked After Review** - The (child/young person's name) review

**Child removed from their care** - They were unable to safely care for their child, so they live elsewhere.

**Contact** - Making plans to see your family, family time, staying in touch with people who are important to you.

**Designated Teacher** - A teacher you can talk to and understands what things are like for you, a teacher who will attend your meeting

**Difficult to engage**

- It is hard to get to see the child, young person, or parent.
- A child/young person where we need to work harder and be more creative in supporting them to feel confident to work with us.

**Difficult to place** - At the moment we are struggling to find the right place for (name) to live. We can't find a home good enough.

**Disguised compliance**

- When you say you are doing something, and it looks like you might be but really you are doing something else.
- Agreeing to do something but then not sticking to it.
- Behaviours that indicate that a family is working with services and looking after the children and keeping them safe but are superficial and can be dishonest.
- Working with me and telling me what you think I want to hear.
- Someone pretends that they are listening and making positive choices and changes in their lives, because this is what they think someone else wants them to do, normally the social worker.

**Domestic Abuse** - Behaviour in a relationship which makes someone feel scared, frightened, hurt, controlled financially or stopped seeing people, these behaviours are usually carried out in a discreet way so the victim cannot see clearly what is happening.

**Emotional Attunement**

- Trying to understand how someone is feeling inside their head and/or their body.
- Recognise and understand someone's emotional state.
- How well you are able to understand how someone else is feeling.
- Thinking about how someone else is feeling and responding to that person.

**Emotional Wellbeing** - Help you understand your emotions and feelings.

**Family time** - This is when your family members are able to visit you and spend time with you.

**Foster care** - A family to look after you whilst your parent can't, this can be until your parent can safely look after you again in the future.

#### **Impact**

- The effect the work we do has on families and young people.
- How it affects the person.
- How this has affected you/them.

**Inappropriate sexualised behaviour** - When a young person is exploring their feelings in a way that could hurt or upset them or someone else.

**Independence** - The things that need to happen to get you ready for... (will be specific for each individual) For example, going to college, living on your own, getting yourself dressed in a morning. Building up your own skills so you can achieve with less input/support from other people.

#### **Missing from home/Abscond**

- People are worried that you haven't been staying at your home and spending too much time without people knowing where you were at.
- Running away.
- Not where we think you are.

**Moving placement** - (Child's name) is moving to a different home.

**Multi-agency working** - The professionals who work with you and your family, all work together to help make things better for you and your family.

#### **Neglect**

- Not making sure everything a child needs is getting done like, not enough food, not getting to doctor and dentists when needed; not getting to school; house so unclean it could be unsafe for a child, clothes, or shoes too small, or unclean.
- When children aren't being provided with what they need to grow, be healthy, safe, and happy.

**NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training)** - Unemployed, not working or in training or education.

#### **NFA (This has two meanings no further action and no fixed abode.)**

- No further action- a social worker will no longer be involved with you and your family.
- No fixed abode- nowhere to live, nowhere permanent to live.

**Not engaged** - We are worried that you haven't communicated with the Social Worker when they have tried to speak with you, phone you or email you, about your life, and tell us your views. This means we can't get your views or story, which worries us that we don't fully understand what is happening in your family.

**PA, Personal Advisor. (Leaving Care)** - Someone who can offer advice and support, personal advisor.



**Parenting Capacity**

- What the parents are able to understand.
- How do mummy and daddy do their job as your parents.
- The parent's ability to look after their children in the safest way, meet all their needs and be able to do this for the long-term future.
- How a parent is able to keep a child safe.

**Participation** - How to make sure children/young people feel part of their reviews/meetings, that what they want to say is heard, that they have a chance to tell us what they think they need and what they want to happen next.

**Pathway plan** - A pathway plan is a document that your Social Worker or Personal Adviser will complete with you between the ages of 16 and 21 if you are in care /leaving care. A pathway plan sets out what you can do now in terms of your ability to live independently and what you may need help with to develop your skills and how this support will look.

**Peers** - Friends**Permanence**

- So, you know who will look after you until you are old enough to make those choices for yourself.
- Your home life without.

**PEP- Personal Education Plan/ PEP meeting**

- Children who are in care are entitled to some extra money to help them with their learning at School (this extra money is called pupil premium). A Personal Education Plan explains in writing how this money is going to help you in School.
- So, we know what you are good at and what you might need help with.

**Physical Abuse** - Things that have happened to you which can hurt you like, hitting, kicking, biting, pinching, throwing things.

**Placement** - Where someone lives, where you live, your home.

**Placement breakdown** - Where people have agreed that staying where you are now isn't safe for you anymore.

**Police Protection (PP)** - Police are really worried about your safety at home, so they move you too somewhere safe.

**Positive coping strategies**

- What you might use yourself to help you manage day to day.
- Dealing with things in a healthy way.
- A healthier way of solving a problem without making other problems or creating another one.

**Prioritising their own needs** - Parent/carer are focusing on and making decisions based on what they need rather than what their child needs.

**Prospective Adopters/Applicants** - An individual/couple I am assessing.

**Psychological Assessment** - To understand more how mummy/daddy is feeling in their head.

**Reg 24** - An emergency assessment that can make family members foster carers for children for a short while.

**Reunification** - We are working towards the children going back home to Mum/Dad.

**Reside** - Lives

**Respite**

- Staying somewhere for a short time with other carers/family members.
- A break in caring.
- Staying overnight with another foster family like a small holiday.

**Restraint** - Physical help to stay safe.

**Risk taking behaviour** - When a young person does something that could cause them harm and cause others to worry about them.

**Risk/Harm** - Things that can hurt you or might hurt you.

**Safeguarding**

- Keeping you safe, staying safe.
- Working together to make sure everyone is safe, healthy, and happy.

**Service user** - A child/young person who we provide a service for.

**Sexual Abuse** - Sexual abuse is when someone is forced, pressurised, or tricked into taking part in any kind of sexual activity with another person.

**Sibling** - Brother or Sister

**Significant harm** - Professionals are worried that something serious may happen to you which may hurt you and affect you in a bad way.

**Special Guardianship Order** - When you live with someone you know, who isn't mum or dad, to make sure you are safe and happy until you are 18.

**Special Needs** - Additionally supported, name what the person needs to be supported with.

**Statutory Duty**

- What the government tells us to do.
- Because we are very worried, we are going to have meetings and ask mum and dad to work with us. So that we do not need to go to court, and we can know that they are looking after you well.
- What we need to do as a Social Worker/as a service.
- A child/young person who we provide a service to.

**Statutory visit** - When a Social Worker visits you, in your home to see how you are doing.

**Supervised family time** - Supervised family time means that a safe adult will be with you, to make sure that you are safe and happy.

#### **Team around the family**

- A meeting every 6 weeks (at least) with those friends, family members and professionals that you feel support you and your family.
- A meeting that happens every 6 weeks, that involves all the family members and professionals who support the Early Help Plan to succeed.

**Therapist** - Someone who is specially trained to be able to help you to understand what has happened to you in the past and how you can make sense of what happened to help you move forward.

**Transition** - A period of time that involves change can be short term i.e. changing from one activity to another, or a longer period of time which we need to plan for e.g. Transition Social worker.

**Unsupervised family time** - You will spend time with your Mam/Dad/Grandma/Uncle etc without anyone else being there to make sure you are safe.

## Useful Links

**Tact Language that Cares:** Changing the way professionals talk about children in care. Alternative words and phrases to use with and about children who are looked after TACT

[www.tactcare.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/03/TACT-Language-that-cares-2019\\_online.pdf](http://www.tactcare.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/03/TACT-Language-that-cares-2019_online.pdf)

**Appropriate Language in Relation to Child Exploitation:** The Children Society Guidance for professionals, seeks to provide guidance to professionals on the appropriate use of language when discussing children and their experience of exploitation in a range of contexts. **Child Exploitation Appropriate Language Guide 2022 (cumbria.gov.uk)**

**Appropriate Language:** Child sexual and/or Criminal Exploitation Glossary: Created by children and young people for children and young people by the Family Justice Young Peoples Board, Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) Cafcass Glossary

[cafcass.gov.uk/family-justice-young-peoples-board/glossary-and-word-busting/glossary/](http://cafcass.gov.uk/family-justice-young-peoples-board/glossary-and-word-busting/glossary/)

**Language that Cares Appropriate Language:** Child sexual and/or criminal exploitation. Guidance for professionals on changing language to avoid blaming children and young people.

[www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/sites/default/files/Guidance%20App%20Language%20Toolkit.pdf](http://www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/sites/default/files/Guidance%20App%20Language%20Toolkit.pdf)



