Birmingham City Council

7-Minute Learning

Victim Blaming and Language

BIRMINGHAM COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

1 What is victim blaming?



Victim blaming is when the focus is placed on the actions, behaviour or circumstances of the person who has experienced abuse, rather than on the actions and responsibility of the perpetrator.

2 Why does language matter?



- The words we use can either build trust and encourage disclosure, or create shame, fear and silence.
- Language can reinforce harmful myths and stereotypes about victims and abuse.
- Inclusive, respectful and non-judgemental language helps people feel believed, supported and safer.

7 Key takeaways



- Focus on the perpetrator's behaviour and responsibility.
- Use language that is respectful, trauma-informed and non-judgemental.
- Be aware of our own assumptions and biases.
- Create a safe, supportive space for disclosure and help-seeking.



3 Examples of victim blaming



- "Why didn't they just leave?"
- "They knew what they were getting into."
- "What were they wearing?"
- "Why didn't they report it sooner?"
- "They must have done something to trigger it."

6 The impact of victim blaming



- Can stop people from disclosing abuse or seeking help.
- Increases feelings of shame, guilt and self-blame.
- Can re-traumatise and reduce trust in services and professionals.
- Allows harmful behaviours and inequalities to continue.

4 Use supportive, inclusive language



- Use "person who has experienced abuse" (or "victim/survivor" if preferred by them).
- Keep the focus on the perpetrator's behaviour (e.g. "the person who caused harm").
- Use trauma-informed, respectful and clear language.
- Be mindful of diversity, culture, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity.

5 Common myths vs reality



Myth	Reality	Myth	Reality	Myth	Reality
"They should have left."	Leaving can be complex, unsafe and take time.	"They were asking for it."	Abuse is a choice made by the perpetrator, not caused by the victim.	"They didn't report it, so it can't be serious."	Many people don't report due to fear, shame, a lack of confidence or concerns they won't be believed.



Working together to safeguard people and end violence against women and girls in Birmingham.