

Session overview

This session is an opportunity to discuss language and attitudes – some of which are quite common in society – but which victim blame rather than place the responsibility with the abuser.

Information for practitioner

This session particularly refers to technology-assisted child sexual abuse (TACSA) harm, but discussions can be widened to talk about bullying and other forms of abuse, depending on the young person.

It is important to be very conscious of your own language in this session to prevent any blame.

You may need to be tactful in challenging language used during this session as it is possible that the young person might use victim blaming language themselves. For example *“they shouldn’t have sent the picture if they didn’t want anyone to see”*.

Be aware that you may be dealing with a young person who believes that they are to blame for what has happened. The point to emphasise is that perpetrators are where the blame lies.

Pre-session action

Select a *“Looking after yourself”* exercise in advance for the close of the session.

Resources needed for this session

- Statements cards

Session

Check in with the young person as to how they have been since your last session together. Any thoughts or feelings that you may need to reflect on and address before you begin this session.

Inform the young person what we are going to do in this session, sharing the overview.



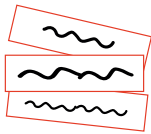
Ask the young person what they think victim blaming is – they may already have a clear idea, or they may not know.

Practitioner to explain that it is the term given when someone has harmed another person but the person who was harmed gets blamed for it instead of (or as well as) the perpetrator.



Share the definition below, highlighting the importance of the statement in bold showing that the UK Government are very clear on the harmful impact it has:

“Victim blaming is any language or action that implies (whether intentionally or unintentionally) that a person is partially or wholly responsible for abuse that has happened to them. **It is harmful and can wrongfully place responsibility, shame or blame onto a victim, making them feel that they are complicit or responsible for the harm they have experienced.**”



Statements
cards

Activity

Both the young person and practitioner to share any examples of victim blaming that they know, have heard or have seen written.

Using the statements on the cards, discuss with the child the victim blaming language.

Some are clearly about TACSA, others about bullying or other abuse.

Discussion points might include:

- **What might be going on here?**
- **Why is this victim blaming?**
- **What assumptions are being made about the victim and the circumstances?**

Victim blaming occurs when people talk about what actions they believe a victim could/should have taken – or not taken – to avoid being harmed.

The reality is that harm and abuse can happen regardless of a victim's choices and when someone is abused, groomed or otherwise pressured, the fault lies wholly with the abuser, not the victim.



When thinking about TACSA the victim may feel complicit in the abuse/harm because they engaged in conversation, or encouraged conversation, or because they flirted or sent 'normal' pictures. We must reiterate to the young person that just because you engage in some way doesn't mean the other person (perpetrator) has a right to harm you in ANY way.



Reflections

What do you think are the reasons for victim blaming?



This discussion should take place before the practitioner gives examples to ensure the voice of the young person is heard.

Reasons for victim blaming could include:

- **A lack of understanding**
- **Not directing the blame at the perpetrator**
- **Focussing on the risk rather than focussing on the cause of the harm**
- **A way of protecting themselves from thinking it might happen to them**
- **Looking only at the behaviour of the young person**
- **Not thinking about the complexity of what is happening for the victim**
- **They are annoyed that they now have to manage a situation**
- **They are dismissive of the harm/impact**
- **An instant emotional response being transferred onto the young person**

There is a theory that blame is a strategy to keep ourselves protected from harm. That if we create a reason as to why something happened, then we can believe that it won't happen to us, as we can control our safety – which leads them to blaming the victim. For example: I walked home through a dark park and someone pushed me and stole my phone. Someone might tell you that you shouldn't have walked home through a dark park and they think that it won't happen to them as they wouldn't do that. The person to blame for what happened is the person who decided to hurt someone and steal from them.

It is NEVER the victims fault.

What might be the effects of victim blaming?

- **People don't seek help:** People are often worried that they are going to be blamed, and so when something has happened they may not want to come forward, or may not feel comfortable telling someone what happened.
- **The abuser is not held responsible:** Victim blaming can minimise or mask the actions of the perpetrator, and in some cases create an environment where the offender's actions are even seen as justifiable.
- **Self-blame and/or shame:** When people blame the victims, the victims may think it was their fault and then may believe they deserved it. For the victim there can be a range of impact:
 - *Feeling ashamed or guilty.*
 - *Ostracised by friends.*
 - *Encouraged by others not to report or seek support.*
 - *Negative thoughts, self-blame and creating the 'if only I had/hadn't done...'* mindset.
 - *Fear of being a 'bad-luck magnet'.*

Can you think of a time when you have heard victim blaming language being used? And how can we challenge it?

- ✓ Encourage the child to think of their own examples as this may help their understanding and ability to challenge.
- ✓ Using the statement cards think about some ways of responding to develop our skills in challenging unacceptable assumptions, attitudes and behaviours around victim blaming.
- ✓ In doing the above, think about a response if you hear someone else being blamed, but also think about how you might respond if someone was saying it about you.

Was it easier to think about what we say when it relates to someone else?

It can be difficult to challenge what people say about us, practise different ways of saying, *"I don't like what you just said; it feels as though you are blaming me."*



Looking after yourself exercise to close

They were asking for it

What was she wearing?

You shouldn't have been drinking

**They're always doing
stupid things**

**Why did they go to
that chat room?**

She should have said no

Well he broke the law

He knew what he was doing

I would never do anything like that

You should have known better

She's had loads of boyfriends

He's a player

**Why would you walk home on
your own?**

**You shouldn't have taken a
picture of yourself naked**

**You must have sent mixed
messages**

**He knows not to send images
of himself – why did he do it?**

**They clearly weren't listening
in our e-safety lessons**

**They should have left the
relationship sooner**

**If they hadn't sent the image this
wouldn't have happened**

**If you hadn't chatted with them on
snapchat it wouldn't have happened**

**It's not like they haven't
done it before**

**Why did he go and meet him –
he should have known better**