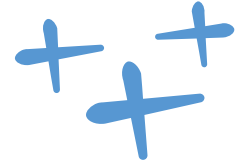
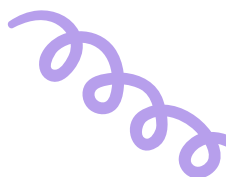


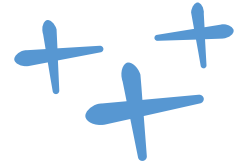


SCOTTISH
CHILDREN'S REPORTER
ADMINISTRATION



KEEPING THE PROMISE – SCRA'S LANGUAGE THAT CARES GUIDE





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Introduction

Language is a powerful tool for communication, but sometimes the way that it is used in and around Hearings can create, continue and worsen stigma. The language we use can also create barriers to understanding. We are working with the Language Leaders to change the language used in and around Hearings. The 'Language that Cares' guide has been created to support SCRA staff in this journey.

Language evolves and changes and this is the 'first edition' of our Language that Cares guide. As we progress on our journey together with the Language Leaders, we will update this. In the meantime this guide provides some contextual information around why change is needed while recognising that this is the start of our journey together.

Neil Hunter, Principal Reporter/Chief Executive

"Systems develop language to serve the system. Childrens Hearings are no different. Over the years we have developed customised and codified language that we understand – but is not easily understood by others – particularly children and young people. At first base this can exclude and disempower children and young people from genuine participation and meaningful voice and influence on decisions about their lives.

The Promise we made to children and young people in February 2020 requires us to change the language we use every day – this won't be easy and there are some limits – as this guide highlights. But we must strive towards a respectful, inclusive, rights-focused language for all children and young people we have contact with.

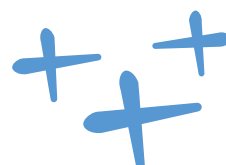
We will all have to unlearn terms and words that have become embedded in our day to day work – and relearn a new vocabulary that captures the kind of organisation we want to be.

We need to be thoughtful, reflective, careful, considered – but most of all willing to learn and to improve. I have huge faith that this first development on our language guide will really help us get there."



"I am a young person,
not a case nor a problem
I have the right to be heard,
I deserve a seat at the table
I may not attend hearings,
but that does not define me
I'm not broken,
I'm not unworthy of love
I will not be quiet! I will be seen
I deserve respect
I'm not anyone's mistake
Speak to me, not about me
I have thoughts, a heart and a voice"

Poem by Achillies
Our Hearings, Our Voice Board Member



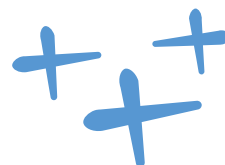
Practice Direction and Language



There is an ongoing review of Practice Direction as part of our ‘Language that Cares’ journey. In the meantime, when carrying out Reporter functions such as recording decisions, drafting grounds and recording decisions at Hearings, Reporters and Assistant Reporters must continue to follow Practice Direction. Similarly the purposes and decisions for records of proceedings, forms, letters and other documents currently on CSAS, which reflect the approach set out in Practice Direction, must continue to be used whilst these are reviewed. We will be working on a programme of work to update these.

Alistair Hogg, Head of Practice and Policy

“Legislation and legal requirements can create some limitations to how much we can change and modify the language we use. However, as much as possible we will review Practice Direction to reflect the purpose and intention of this guidance. Where we identify that we are restricted by legislation, we will seek statutory change to remove those restrictions. This intention is reflected in the Hearings for Children report.”



Who are the Language Leaders?



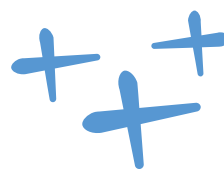
The Language Leaders is a co-design group made up of six young adults with lived experience of Hearings, and five professionals from across the Hearings System (SCRA, Children’s Hearings Scotland, Social Work, Advocacy and Children’s Rights) with facilitation by Our Hearings, Our Voice. We have been working with the group since November 2022. The work is fully supported strategically by all the key organisations involved in the Children’s Hearings System.

The aim of the group is that:

Everyone involved will recognise the power of language and use words, tone and body language in a way which supports children to feel **safe, included** and at the **centre** of their Children’s Hearing.

You can read more about how this work evolved on the [CHIP website](#).

The work of the Language Leaders was welcomed by the Hearings System Working Group in the [Hearings for Children report](#) with a commitment from Sheriff Mackie to work with the group to support the group’s aims.



Why language matters?



'Words can motivate and inspire. They can also damage and disempower. The words we are exposed to from birth not only drive our language development, but they shape the lenses through which we view the world. They form the narrative through which we think of ourselves. Words change lives'

One of the things the **Independent Care Review** highlighted was that we need to change the way we speak and write about care.

Consultation with hundreds of care experienced people led to a commitment to ensure 'language must be easily understood, be positive and must not create or compound stigma' (The Promise, p.87) and 'simple, caring language must be used' (p.69). The Promise reminds us that the "use of disrespectful language can lead to low self-esteem and compounds a self-stigmatisation as children realise that their peers do not use this type of language."

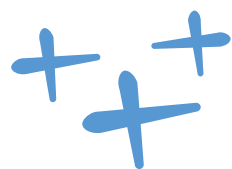
Language determines how people view themselves and how they relate to their world. We all play a role in shaping culture for the people who experience services' involvement in their lives.

Language Leaders

“All children have needs and the language they experience impacts on their wellbeing, sense of self and ability to thrive.”

www.chip-partnership.co.uk/language-leaders/

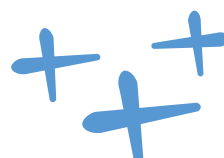
Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership




Language Leaders Principles



To ensure children feel safe, included, and at the centre, the language we use must be personalised, balanced, non-stigmatising and allow children to be involved in decisions. The language principles interact with each other and have equal importance.



To ensure language is personalised listen to a child or young person's preferences



Children and young people will be supported to ensure professionals use the terms, names and words that the child or young person prefers when describing issues that relate to their lives and experiences" (The Promise, Plan 21-24, p19).

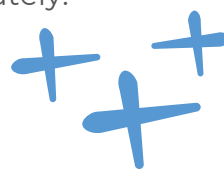
We should allow children and young people to choose how they would like to be described, as well as how they would like issues and people in their lives to be described. In particular, we should listen to a child or young person's preference of how they would like their parents and carers to be referred to. For example, many children and young people have told us they do not like the use of the terms like 'foster carer', 'biological parents', 'key worker' etc.

Children and young people may have different preferences about how they describe where they live or spending time with their family. For example one child shared they didn't like the use of the phrase 'family time' instead of 'contact' as they saw their foster parents as their 'family'.

Words like 'placement' or 'unit' should be avoided and instead we should ask the child or young person how they would describe where they stay; of course, if a child or young person's preference is to use the term 'placement' or 'unit' we should respect that child or young person's preference.

It must be ensured that the child or young person is not pressured to adopt a term they are uncomfortable with.

You should start to think about language at the point of scheduling and aim to include discussions with key people about a child or young person's preferences at this stage. Ensure that preferences are recorded accurately on our case management system in line with the Standard Operating Model to ensure consistency for the child or young person. This information should be shared appropriately.



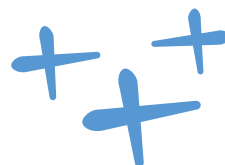
To be balanced and non- stigmatising - don't label




To be balanced and non-stigmatising we should avoid the use of labels. We should avoid labelling in all our communication with children, young people and their families, both formal and informal. It is also important to apply this to discussions with each other and other professionals.

The Children's Hearings System is focused on responding to the needs of children and young people, seeing their behaviour in the context of their wider circumstances. It should not be about placing blame on the child or anyone else. To avoid the use of labels, behaviour should be described and situated within its context and the assumption of motives avoided. For example, rather than describing a child as violent, we should describe what has been observed with context. We should expect the assessments provided by others to provide that wider context, focussing on strengths and positives as well as challenges and risks. This also fits with the principle of language being balanced.

We do however have a responsibility in carrying out Reporter functions, for example in drafting grounds, to clearly describe behaviour, even where that may be distressing for children and other participants at Hearings to read or hear. Those necessary descriptions of behaviour do not involve inputting any blame or motive - **Practice Direction 7** includes direction on the use of language in grounds and must be followed by Reporters.



To ensure children are involved use simple, plain language and avoid using abbreviations



If you can use a more straightforward word or phrase to describe something, do this. The glossary in this guide will help you.

A Note on Statutory Language


"There will be times where the statutory framework requires certain terms to be used, but this should be done sparingly, with the aim of the reduction of stigmatising language at every opportunity" (The Promise, Plan 21-24 , p19).

We acknowledge that there are times when statutory language should be used. It is important to recognise when this is the case, and steps must be taken to ensure that these terms are not used as acronyms under any circumstances when communicating with children, young people and their families.

A Note on Abbreviations

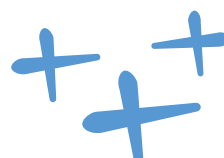
Young people have told us that using abbreviations makes it difficult to understand what is being discussed.

Abbreviations should always be avoided when speaking to young people, children and families.



'Abbreviations suit professionals more than children'

OHOV Board Member

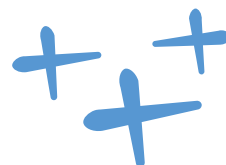


Language and Court



We acknowledge that in some circumstances particular language requires to be used, and an example of this is in court. At this stage, staff are not being asked to use the suggested alternative language whilst appearing in court, or in formal written communications for court such as appeal answers and submissions. The suggested alternatives should however be used in informal communications, for example with children and families, in the court setting.

The Language Leaders plan to engage with partners in the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service to look at how we can influence language used in court.





Glossary

The glossary provides options that you may wish to use.

Word	Suggested alternative(s)
Abscond Abscond is such a weird word, I'd never heard of that word before I was in care" Young person	Run away, went missing, left without permission
Accused	There is no need to refer to any individual using this term – use their name
Contact "Contact feels like a forceful or 'have to' word. It's sterile with no love involved. It should be about connection with family" <i>Our Hearings, Our Voice Board Member</i>	Spend time with
Customer	Children, young people and families are not customers
Dispensed with	Does not need to come to a hearing

Glossary cont ...



Word	Suggested alternative(s)
Excused	Does not need to come to a hearing
Implementation authority	Local authority responsible for giving effect to the order; name of local authority
<p>Looked After Child/ LAC/LAAC</p> <p>'This term needs removed altogether. All children should be looked after' <i>Our Hearings, Our Voice Board Member</i></p> <p>"LAC is a demeaning term. Abbreviations suit professionals more than children" <i>Our Hearings, Our Voice Board Member</i></p>	Care experienced
Offender	There is no need to refer to any individual using this term – use their name
Panel	Children's hearing, hearing, tribunal members
Perpetrator	<p>There is no need to refer to any individual using this term – use their name or a description of who they are</p> <p>"when this applies to someone who has caused the child harm, they may prefer to use the term perpetrator rather than that person's name. This needs to be discussed and personalised for each child"</p> <p><i>Our Hearing, Our Voice Board Member</i></p>



Glossary cont ...



Word	Suggested alternative(s)
Residence/reside	Where you live/ who you live with
<p>Respite</p> <p>"I always felt respite was being used as a break for the carers, not me" Our Hearings, Our Voice Board member</p> <p>"The short break should always be described in a way that is meeting the child's needs, not those of the carer" Our Hearings, Our Voice Board member</p>	<p>a short break for the child to feel more relaxed and supported/Sleepovers/holiday/time away/a short break/visiting family or friends</p>
Required	Needs to
Service user	There is no need to refer to any individual using this term – use their name or a description of who they are
<p>Sibling</p> <p>"Why would you call my brothers and sisters siblings and not my brothers and sisters?"</p>	<p>Brother, sister, use their name (sibling may be appropriate in some circumstances for example to be non-gendered but should be avoided where there is a suitable alternative)</p>
Termination/terminate	To end/end
Vulnerable	Unsafe at times



Final thoughts




Consider the influence of your language used in both written and verbal communication and how that may alter the perspective and practice of any professional it is shared with.

The language you use can change the responses to and outcomes for a young person and can do so even when your involvement has ended.

If you have any feedback, or would like to discuss anything please contact

keepingthepromise@scra.gov.uk



'The language I hear, positive or negative, affects me at the time but some of it stays with me for life.'

Our Hearings, Our Voice Board Member

Further Resources

[Change the language of care – the British Psychological Society](#)

[Language guide | North Lanarkshire Council](#)

[Language that Cares - Language Policy Official Draft](#)

[Your Voice – language matters](#)

[Treehouse Practice – language matters](#)

[Includem – getting your language right](#)

[Renfrewshire Council Language Policy](#)

[TACT Fostering and Adoption](#)

[The Promise Scotland Plan 2021-2024](#)

[Stigmatising Labels | OHOV Feedback Project](#)

