



Best-Practices and Appropriate Terminology When Discussing Domestic and Sexual Violence

Survivor vs. Victim:

- Both terms are applicable when referring to an individual who has been impacted by domestic or sexual violence.
- The Coalition recommends using the term “victim” when:
 - Referring to an individual who has recently been impacted by domestic or sexual violence;
 - Discussing a specific crime or statute;
 - Referring to the criminal justice system;
 - The individual you are referring to has expressed that “victim” is the terminology that they prefer.
- The Coalition recommends using the term “survivor” when:
 - Referring to an individual who has been impacted by domestic and sexual violence and has had the time to go through their healing process;
 - Discussing the impact of domestic and sexual violence on individuals and communities;
 - Referring to support services available to those impacted by domestic and sexual violence;
 - The individual you are referring to has expressed that “survivor” is the terminology that they prefer.

Child Sexual Abuse Images:

- The passage of HB220 in 2017 changed the term for the crime of “child pornography” to “child sexual abuse images” in NH. The legislation that changed this terminology was driven by a group of victims who were sexually abused as children.
- Victims of this crime have shared that:
 - They will never feel closure because of the fact that the images of their sexual abuse will never be able to be fully removed from the internet; and
 - When people call the images of them being sexually abused as children “child porn” or “child pornography”, they fail to capture the horrific nature of this type of sexual abuse. They believe that “pornography” denotes something that is viewed by the general public as consensual vs. the rape and torture that they endured as children.
 - One victim said “if I was raped without the use of a webcam I’d be a victim of child sexual abuse. Now I’m a victim of child porn.”

- The movement to change the terminology is being driven by victims, advocates, and law enforcement across the nation.
- Victims and advocates respectfully request that elected officials, media outlets, and members of the public use the new legal term “child sexual abuse images” in an effort to make this term part of the public’s vernacular and to recognize horrific nature of these crimes against children.

Identifying victims/survivors:

- When referring to domestic and sexual violence, especially specific crimes or cases, it is critical that victims/survivors are not identified in any way – unless the victim/survivor has given expressed permission that they are comfortable being identified.
- It is a national best-practice amongst media outlets, law enforcement, prosecutors, and advocates to not publicly identify victims/survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse.
- Even when a victim/survivor is not directly named, they can be easily identified when excessive, unnecessary details or relationship qualifiers are shared.

Sexual assault involving a minor:

- When a sexual assault involving a minor occurs it is critical that we appropriately categorize and refer to this crime. Oftentimes, this crime is incorrectly referred to as “an adult having sex with a minor” OR “an adult engaging in a sexual relationship with a minor” OR “an adult engaging in sexual misconduct with a minor” OR “an adult having sexual contact with a minor” This problematic language is incredibly harmful to victims/survivors and minimizes these heinous crimes against children.
- In NH, the age of consent is 16 and any time a minor is involved in sexual activity with an adult, the only way to properly refer to this crime is as “sexual assault.”

Human Trafficking vs. Prostitution

- Human trafficking involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to make someone participate in commercial sex against their will.
- Evidence shows that most women and children who enter prostitution are forced into a violent system due to previous, often childhood, trauma. Contrary to some claims that majority of sex workers are not coerced into the business – research shows that most of the young people in the sex trade come from families affected by poverty, racism, abuse, parental imprisonment or deportation, and do not have safe places to return to. These adverse childhood experiences make youth more vulnerable and increase the likelihood of them turning to sex work for a means of making money due to lack of alternatives, or being manipulated by pimps/traffickers to enter the industry.
- It is critical that we don’t refer to victims of human trafficking as “prostitutes” or “sex workers” given that they have not consented to participating in the commercial sex industry and are truly victims.
- Children under the age of 18 in NH cannot legally give consent and therefore they’re involvement in the commercial sex industry should never be referred to as “prostitution.”