

LANGUAGE THAT HELPS LANGUAGE THAT HARMS

How words can support or silence survivors

Why It Matters

Language shapes perception, power, and safety.

The way we talk about abuse can validate survivors, or reinforce shame, fear, and disbelief.

Trauma-informed language helps people feel believed, respected, and in control of their own story.

| *Every word carries weight. Choose language that restores agency, not removes it.*

In conversation

Use words that invite trust, centre the survivor's experience, and offer choice, rather than pressure or judgement.

LANGUAGE THAT HARMS	LANGUAGE THAT HELPS
What did you do to provoke the abuse?	You don't have to justify anything — it's not your fault.
Why do you keep going back?	Leaving can be the most dangerous time — what's been making it hard to stay away?
You need to report this to the police.	You have options. Would you like to talk them through?
Are you being physically abused or is it just verbal?	All forms of abuse can cause harm — I want to understand what this looks like for you.
You need to protect your children.	What do your children need right now, and how can we help you with that?
You should...	Would it help if...

Reflective prompt

How do the words we use influence whether a survivor feels heard, judged, or believed?

| *Language is not neutral — it either opens a door or closes it.*



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