



CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE
**MEDIA
REPORTING**
LANGUAGE GUIDE

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WHEN IT COMES TO REPORTING ABOUT CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE (CSA), LANGUAGE MATTERS.



Members of the media have an obligation to use appropriate and accurate language when reporting on CSA. The words used in reporting journalism have an effect on the way members of the community consider and view this serious crime, especially if they have no background knowledge about the issue.

LANGUAGE DO'S AND DON'TS

A minor child or teen **cannot legally consent** to sex, regardless of the circumstances. In most cases, adult perpetrators of CSA **groom** their intended child victims.

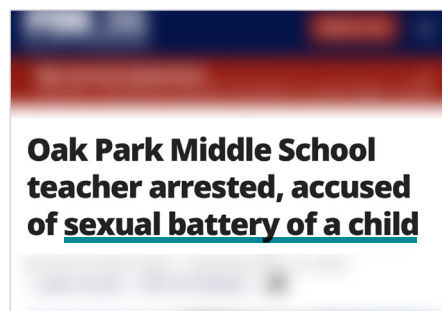
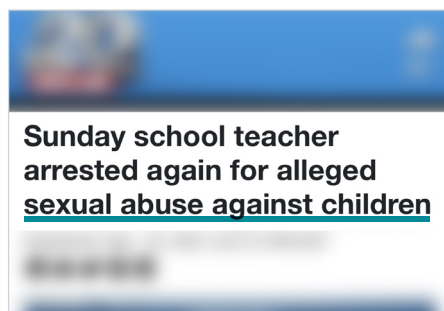
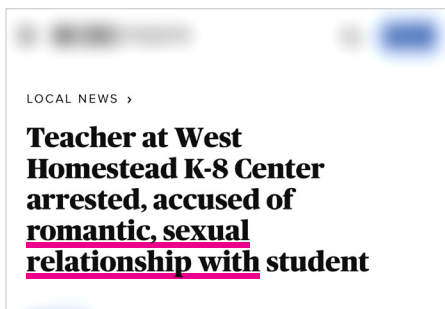
***Did you know?** The **grooming** process allows abusers to desensitize children, preparing them to be tricked into sexual abuse by testing and violating boundaries, using secret-keeping, and escalating touches or sexualized behavior. Children most at risk for grooming and abuse are children who have experienced a degree of emotional, social, or economic disadvantage, but any child – regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, zip code, or other factors – is at risk. A predator also grooms families and organizations by building trust and working to appear as a positive, friendly, and helpful person in the child's life.*

WHEN REPORTING, REMEMBER:

-  **DO NOT describe sexual abuse using terms such as: “a romantic relationship with”, “a sexual relationship with” – as this phrasing is inaccurate and implies victim consent.**
-  **DO use more appropriate language such as: “grooming and abuse of a minor”, “sexual assault of a child”, “sexually abused a child” – as this phrasing more accurately depicts the crime.**

Any direct or indirect depiction of child sexual abuse as a consensual relationship is not merely semantical, it's a damaging misrepresentation of the truth which furthers stigma and misinformation. **Regardless of the circumstances, children cannot consent to any kind of sexual activity or “relationship.”** Remember, perpetrators manipulatively groom children to break down barriers, test secret-keeping, and foster trust and intimacy before violating the ultimate boundary.

EXAMPLES:



BECOME A RESOURCE

CSA is a serious and pervasive issue hiding in the shadows of our communities, with 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 5 boys becoming victims before graduating high school.¹ While we cannot always prevent first instances of abuse, **95% of continued CSA is preventable through awareness and education.** Your reporting can help shine a light, shatter stigma, and educate the public through the use of accurate language that helps our society understand the complex realities of CSA.

Did you know? Child sexual abuse victims are often suffering in silence: 75% of child victims of sexual abuse do not disclose within a year of their abuse, 45% of

child victims keep their abuse a secret for at least five years, many stay silent for decades, and some never tell.² Societal stigma, fear of being believed, threats from an abuser, trauma-bonded romantic feelings toward an abuser, and feelings of shame, blame, and guilt often keep victims and survivors from telling.

While reporting about CSA, consider your public service responsibility to educate the community on what they can do to keep their families safe from harm by including information on prevention, the grooming process, signs of CSA, and how to report known or suspected abuse.

¹ LaurensKids.org, Child Protect Children's Advocacy Center

² Radcliff Street, Ste. 200, Charleston, SC. 29403

For more information, visit LaurensKids.org or contact us by phone at 786-288-5045.



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