

Language of Care

Clackmannanshire Council Language Policy



Clackmannanshire
Council



Who is this policy for?

This document was developed in the context of care experienced children and young people, however it is applicable to any child we support. It is for anyone across Clackmannanshire working with children, young people and their families including:

**Clackmannanshire
Council Staff**

Elected Members

**Clackmannanshire
Alliance**

Corporate Parents

**Clackmannanshire
Community**

Third Sector Partners



**Clackmannanshire
Council**



Language and The Promise



Between 2017 and 2020, the Independent Care Review listened very carefully to those with experience of living and working in and around the 'care system' to properly understand what needs to change. The Care Review heard over 5,500 experiences. Over half were children, young people and adults who had lived in care. The rest were families and the paid and unpaid workforce. It was their stories that guided the Care Review and their experiences that shaped the findings of the Care Review.

The Care Review published seven reports; The Promise was one of these reports. The Promise laid out five foundations and over 80 calls to action.

The Promise shone a light on the impact of language and the language used when talking to and about care experienced children and families.

Through the Independent Care Review, care experienced children and young adults voiced that their time being looked after by the state often "felt cold, overly professionalised, stigmatising and uncaring."

The Promise outlines that "Scotland should be a good parent to the children it has responsibility for."

The workforce, carers and the community should "act, speak and behave like a family so that Scotland can be the best parent it can be."

"Scotland must stop stigmatising the children it cares for."

- The Promise, p.87



Clackmannanshire
Council



Language in Clacks

In Clackmannanshire, we are keen to ensure we are keeping The Promise by addressing our language and its impact on our care experienced community.

Oor Clacks Voices and Oor Wee Clacks Voices were involved in giving their views to the Care Review and vocalised that they wanted the language used around care experienced children and young people to change. Our Participation Network have been looking into language intensively, working with different groups including foster carers and kinship carers, as well as local organisations to discover and define the changes in language required in Clacks.

The Participation Network developed a Corporate Sponsorship Pledge signed by Senior Leaders and Elected Members to pledge their commitment to address reframing the language of care.

Through extended Discovery and Definition phases, utilising surveys, discussions and design workshops, the idea of a Language Policy for Clackmannanshire was developed.



Clackmannanshire
Council

Corporate Sponsor Pledge



Task: Re-framing the Language used in Care

I, Lorraine Sanda and Councillor Ellen Forson, on behalf of the Children and Young People's Board pledge to support work undertaken by Keeping the Promise Clacks (Participation Forum) in collaboration with the Mobilisation Team to challenge and re-frame the language used in respect of care within the work of Clackmannanshire Council, our Third Sector Partners and The Clackmannanshire Alliance.

I will support this by:

- Ensuring that I maintain **clarity** to those within Clackmannanshire Council, Third Sector Colleagues and The Clackmannanshire Alliance around the potential impact that re-framing the language used in care will have on our care experienced community and our wider community.
- Ensuring my **commitment** to the planning, implementation and evaluation of reframing the language used in respect of care.
- Ensuring that I am actively **challenging** the Keeping the Promise Clacks and the Mobilisation Team around their commitment to the delivery of re-framing their use of language in care.
- Ensuring that I am effectively **communicating** to members of the organisation, including members of our Communications team, the significance and impact of reframing the language used in care.

What does this mean for practice?

"The voice of every person with care experience must be heard in their care journeys, with real weight given to their wishes in line with the UNCRC"

-The Promise, p33

We want to ensure that we provide stable environments with the loving, supportive, and enduring relationships that every child needs to thrive, while ensuring that our care experienced community have access to the support and tools they may require when it is needed, for as long as it is needed.

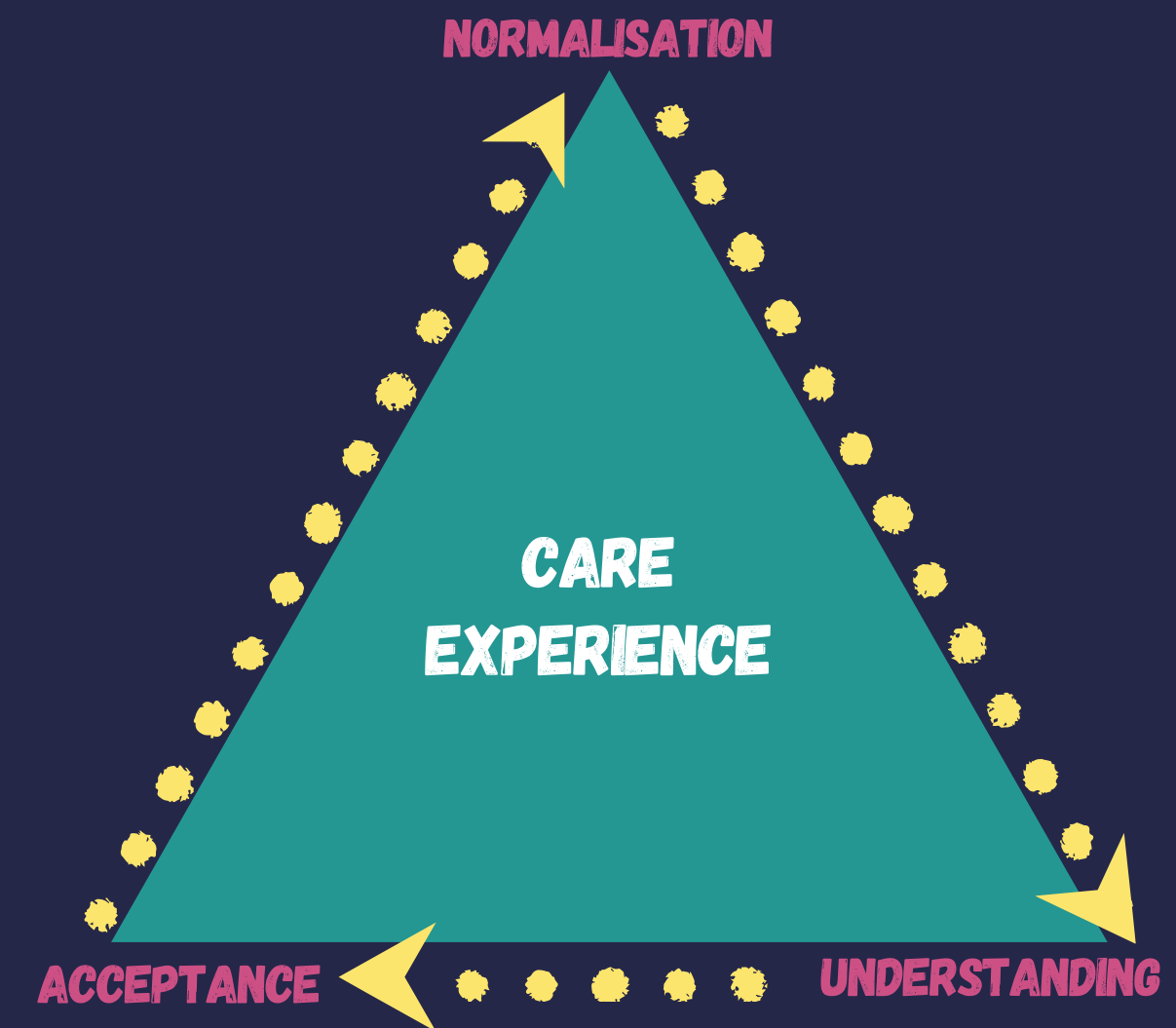
Our language should be reflective of this, and should be respectful, empowering and inclusive of our care experienced community. We will achieve this by reducing the language that reinforces the 'othering' and stigma associated with the care system.

Discussions around preferred language will be a collaborative and individualised conversation between professionals and children and their families. We will check with each individual young person what terms and phrases they prefer and they are most comfortable with. In doing this, our young people's own language will be heard, respected and included in their reports, meetings and discussions.

We will become flexible and able to evolve with our language, taking time to pause and reflect while writing reports or having discussions within our teams, and remember the lasting impact that language can have.



Clackmannanshire
Council



The Promise, p 87

**KEY THEMES TO
CONSIDER**



Key Themes

These four themes were identified during the collaborative design process of the policy.

Non-judgemental

Language used should be inclusive, thoughtful and free of judgement.

Easy to understand

Language should be clear and use of abbreviations and acronyms should be limited.

Transparent

Young people should be able to see and hear themselves within anything written about them.

Culture and values align

It is not enough to just change our language. These changes need to be reflected in our work with children and their families.



NON – JUDGEMENTAL

It is important as a community that the **language we use is non-judgemental and empowering.** Our care experienced community may have experienced language that make them feel blamed, judged and stigmatised.

We will ensure that the language used in respect of care experienced children and young people does not reinforce negative feelings that have a lasting impact.

We will try to **understand the thoughts, feelings and experiences of our young people rather than labelling behaviour.** For example, rather than referring to 'challenging' behaviour, considering how the young person is feeling and what they are experiencing.



**Clackmannanshire
Council**

WHY THIS MATTERS?

We know through research that "shifting public attitudes is a vital component of addressing stigma and creating systemic change at all levels of society."

Each and Every Child, Frameworks

Through ensuring that our language is non-judgemental, empowering and focused on what all children need to thrive and meet their potential, we can create real change in public perception, and remove some of the barriers and stigma associated with living in care.

Our care experienced children and families are some of the few groups in society that are required to read and hear about their lives. This in itself reinforces difference. It is important to be mindful of the language that we use reduce the judgement placed on the care community.

KEY POINTS:



Language should be inclusive



Language should not reinforce stigma or shame



Understanding of feelings and experience rather than labeling behaviour

TRANSPARENT

We will **always write and speak as if children and their families are in the room alongside us.**

We will ask children and young people their preferred words and phrases so that their language is heard and respected when writing reports or attending meetings.

When writing or speaking about a child, we will use language that describes what is happening for them at that time in a way they can understand. For example, rather than using 'dysregulated', explaining what this means: 'having trouble coping with some of the big emotions that a person feels.'

Checking in with the child or young person around the content of what has been written and ensuring their understanding of this throughout their journey of care.



**Clackmannanshire
Council**

WHY THIS MATTERS?

Key themes and feedback from young people were:

they felt passionately around ensuring that their voice is clear throughout

reports should be written alongside them

they could not see themselves in their reports and meetings

don't cut and paste!

they understand the language used

actions are communicated back to them

KEY POINTS:



Write and speak as though the child or young person is in the room



Check that a child or young person understands what has been written

EASY TO UNDERSTAND

We need our language to be simple, clear and easy to understand for everyone, with little use of abbreviations and acronyms.

Sometimes we can use professional terms or jargon and this can feel too formal. Acronyms or abbreviations may feel like a hidden or secretive language to the wider community, and can leave people feeling unsure or embarrassed to ask the meaning.

We will ensure that reports, meetings and discussions take on a **more informal tone** where professionals **use clear, simple language and limit the use of abbreviations and acronyms. If there is a requirement to use an abbreviation or acronym, explain what they mean.**



**Clackmannanshire
Council**

WHY THIS MATTERS?

Discussions with Oor Clacks Voices and The Participation Network highlighted abbreviations and acronyms as problematic. Most notably, the acronym LAC due to the association with 'lacking' in something.

"The physical act of writing out or saying the words in full serves to remind us that looked after children are children and young people first and not a category. Each child has individual talents and claims on a positive future. And is it really such an inconvenience to type a few more letters?"

Dr Graham Connelly, CELCIS

When someone does not understand the meaning of words or acronyms it means that they can't fully engage in the decisions that are being made about them or their children. We need to make sure that everyone understands what is said or written so they can be fully included in decisions.

KEY POINTS:

- ★ If there is a simpler word to use, use it
- ★ Less jargon
- ★ Try to write more informally
- ★ Limit or stop using abbreviations

CULTURE AND VALUES ALIGN

It is not enough to just change our language. These changes need to be reflected in the way we work with children and their families.

While it is key that we understand individual preferences around language, we need to ensure our culture and values align. To put this policy into practice, **we will work in a personalised and collaborative way with children and their families.**

We will **lead in sharing the preferred language that individual children and young people use with other professionals** working alongside families to ensure respect and consistency.



**Clackmannanshire
Council**

WHY THIS MATTERS?

Changing language is only effective if we also change the practice. For example, considering words around 'family time' is meaningless if the arrangements themselves reinforce the stigma associated with care experience.

This policy challenges us to consider whether the language we use is as a result of duty, choice or habit.

The language we use in writing about a child or young person is both a habit and a choice. Often, there is no legislative reason as to why we need to use certain descriptors, yet we continue to use them. For example, while we continue to have the term "looked after" in policy and legislation, this does not need to dictate the language we use in discussions and reports with or about children and young people.

We will promote a positive culture with the conditions to challenge our language and change our habits. This policy does not stand alone, and should inform the review and development of other policies and procedures relevant to children and their families.

KEY POINTS:

- ★ Considering language in isolation is not enough. Our values and culture need to reflect this.
- ★ Is our language a habit, duty or choice?
- ★ A child's preferred language should be consistent amongst those working alongside them.

Further Information



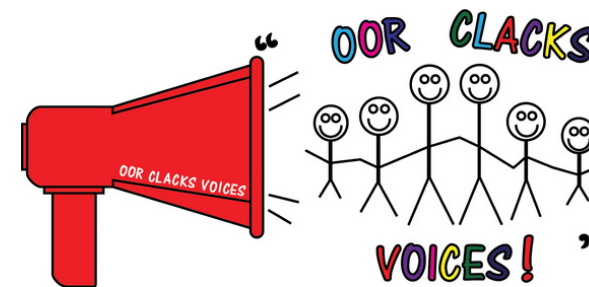
Clackmannanshire
Council



the promise
scotland



WHO
CARES?
SCOTLAND



Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Participation Network,
Reframing Language Working Group
and Oor Clacks Voices for their input.

Heartfelt thank you to all our children,
young people and families who have
shaped the development of this policy.
We could not have done this without
you.



Clackmannanshire
Council



#Keep
The
Promise

