

## Be Selective with Your Words Prostitute or Victim?

Victims will not readily admit that they were abused or that they submitted to an abuser or a rapist because it's connected to too much shame. They use the wrong terminology when talking about their situations to deflect from their reality; it's a defense mechanism. They may even defend their abusers and even deny that it was abuse, just to save face. An explanation I used in the past went something like this, "My boyfriend got upset. He hit me but he didn't mean to hurt me. He's nice to me and we're going to get married." I told healthcare my abusers were my husbands before, so they wouldn't see me as victim. To victims, admitting they've been abused feels like admitting they were "dumped". Rejection is not easy for any of us to accept or admit. Many put in a lot of effort to maintain their "cover" by not correctly naming the facts.

If and when, (AND ONLY IF AND WHEN) a victim admits they were abused or assaulted is the only time you can use this same language. Follow their lead. For example, if a victim admits their black eye was from an assault, and not from walking into a wall, this is when you too can use words like "assault", "abuse" and "victimization". Continue to call their boyfriend, their boyfriend, their partner, their partner, if this is what they call them; and don't speak ill of him/her. Labeling their abuser in a negative way can cause them to become defensive and argumentative.

### Don't ask them:

- How long have you been a **prostitute**?
- When did you start **prostituting**?

### To a victim this sounds the same as asking:

- How long have you been a **whore**?
- When did you start **whoring**?

### It's better to say:

- How long has this been happening to you?
- How long have you been enduring this?

### When talking about a survivor to others, don't say:

- She is/was a **prostitute**.

Using the word "**prostitute**" implies choice and this is offensive to many survivors and victims.

### Its better to say:

She was called a **prostitute** and a **whore** for years but she was never a prostitute or a **whore**; she was a **victim**. **She was prostituted**.

Victims set themselves apart from society because of the negative beliefs they have about themselves. We must not use words or labels that continue to set them apart.

Copyright © 2016 by Ruth Rondon

In partnership with:

