Mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of. It is a medical problem, just like heart disease or diabetes. Mental illnesses are health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking or behavior (or a combination of these). Mental illnesses are associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities - and they are often accompanied by substance use. It’s critical that we talk about these challenges and that we do so in the right way.

### Updated Language

- **Prejudice and Discrimination**
  - **Outdated Language:** Stigma
  - **Updated Language:** Awareness

- **Experiencing or Living with a Mental Illness**
  - **Outdated Language:** Mentally Ill Person; referring to someone with a diagnosis as schizophrenia, autistic, bipolar, OCD, etc.
  - **Updated Language:** Drug Abuser; Alcoholic; Addict. Substance Abuse

- **Experiences/has been treated for Emotional, Mental and/or Behavioral Health Challenges**
  - **Outdated Language:** Mentally Ill Person; Suffering from a Mental Illness
  - **Updated Language:** Emotionally Disturbed

- **Person Experiencing /Living with or Diagnosed with a Mental Illness**
  - **Outdated Language:** Mentally Ill Person; Suffering from a Mental Illness
  - **Updated Language:** Emotionally Disturbed

- **Person who Experiences Substance Use Challenges**
  - **Outdated Language:** Mentally Ill Person; Suffering from a Mental Illness
  - **Updated Language:** Emotionally Disturbed

### Why it Matters

- **Prejudice refers to thinking, discrimination refers to action - both can be changed.**
- **Being aware doesn’t call for action, change in behavior or thinking.**
- **People who experience mental health conditions can and do live healthy, fulfilling lives. Suffering implies one is unwell, unhappy or can’t recover.**
- **Being diagnosed, experiencing symptoms of or having been treated for a mental illness is a common part of the human experience. The term disturbed perpetuates prejudice and creates a barrier to treatment.**
- **Certain language exaggerates mental illness and reinforces prejudice. Always use person-first language.**
- **Avoid words that suggest a lack of quality of life for people with substance use concerns. Terms like addict reduce a person’s identity, deny dignity/humanity and imply powerlessness or the inability to recover.**

### Phrases that hinder recovery

- **The mentally ill:** psycho, crazy, un sane
- **Addict:** meth head, tweaker, burnout, druggie, junkie
- **My son is bipolar,
- **My daughter has schizophrenia,
- **My neighbor who has autism,
- **My son is bipolar,
- **The autistic boy down the street
- **My schizo daughter
- **The psychotic guy down the street
- **My depressed client
- **My alcoholic father

### Rights of the Family Peer

- **The Family Peer Workforce should be thought of as professional and a respected career choice as much as clinicians, care managers, etc.**
- **There are specific differences between adult peers and family peers. They have different lived and systems navigation experience.**
- **The Family Peer workforce should be considered an accomplished and respected career choice.**
- **The Family Peer workforce should be thought of as professional and a respected career choice as much as clinicians, care managers, etc.**

### The importance of using person-first language when talking about mental illness and substance use cannot be overstated. This is true for members of the media, support and treatment professionals, family members, friends and the community at large.

### Person-first language separates the individual from the symptoms they experience - maintaining their identity as people with strengths who have the power to recover.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person-first phrases</th>
<th>Phrases that hinder recovery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• A person living with a mental health condition.</td>
<td>• The mentally ill: psycho, crazy, un sane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A person with substance use challenges.</td>
<td>• Addict: meth head, tweaker, burnout, druggie, junkie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• My son diagnosed with bipolar disorder.</td>
<td>• My son is bipolar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• My daughter with schizophrenia.</td>
<td>• My schizo daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• My neighbor who has autism.</td>
<td>• The autistic boy down the street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The client I’m treating for depression.</td>
<td>• My depressed client</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• My father who has alcoholism.</td>
<td>• My alcoholic father</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Person Experiencing Mental Health Symptoms that interfere with Daily Life/Activities

- ** Died by Suicide **
  - Committed Suicide; Completed Suicide

- ** Person in Recovery **
  - Former Addict; Former Alcoholic; Drunk

- ** The Family Support Workforce **
  - Professionals and Family Peer Specialists separate families peer support professionals from others

- ** Family Peer Support **
  - Peer Support applies to adult peer support alone

### Using terms that don’t acknowledge an individual’s symptoms perpetuates avoidance of needed support and treatment that promote recovery.

- The term is associated with a crime. The term completed suggests an accomplishment.

- Emphasize strengths and the ability to recover, not limitations.

### Why Changing Our Thinking, Our Actions and Our Language Matters

- Think before you act. Think twice before you speak. Your words matter.