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.

The terms we use to describe mental illness matter. We have all heard derogatory terms used to describe someone who has a mental illness. Here are a few to jog your memory: Cuckoo; Mad as a hatter; Screwy – having a screw loose; Bananas; Loopy; Crackers; Wacko (whacko); Loony; Nuts; Freak; Weirdo. Can you imagine mocking someone with an illness such as cancer or heart disease?

Here's how we can do better.

**UPDATED LANGUAGE**

- Prejudice and Discrimination
- Acceptance
- Experiencing or Living with a Mental Health Challenge
- Experiences/has been treated for Emotional, Mental and/or Behavioral Health Challenges
- Person Experiencing/Living with or Diagnosed with a Mental Health Challenge
- Person who Experiences Substance Use Challenges

**OUTDATED LANGUAGE**

- Stigma
- Awareness
- Suffering from a Mental Illness
- Emotionally Disturbed
- Mentally Ill Person;
- Drug Abuser; Alcoholic; Addict. Substance Abuse

**WHY IT MATTERS**

- Prejudice refers to thinking, discrimination refers to action - both can be changed.
- 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.
- People who experience mental health conditions can and do live healthy, fulfilling lives. Suffering implies one is unwell, unhappy or can't recover.
- 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.

**EXPERIENCING MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS**

- A person living with a mental health condition
- A person with substance use challenges
- My son diagnosed with bipolar disorder
- My daughter with schizophrenia
- My neighbor who has autism
- The client I’m treating for depression
- My father who has alcoholism

**EXPERIENCING MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS**

- Emotional breakdown; Nervous breakdown
- Committed Suicide
- Former Addict; Former Alcoholic; Drunk
- Professionals and Family Peer Specialists separates family peer support professionals from others
- Peer Support applies to adult peer support alone

**REFRAMING LANGUAGE**

- Why changing our thinking, our actions and our language matters
- The terms we use to describe mental illness matter.
- We have all heard derogatory terms used to describe someone who has a mental illness. Here are a few to jog your memory: Cuckoo; Mad as a hatter; Screwy – having a screw loose; Bananas; Loopy; Crackers; Wacko (whacko); Loony; Nuts; Freak; Weirdo. Can you imagine mocking someone with an illness such as cancer or heart disease?

**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.
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**UPDATING LANGUAGE**

- Person in Recovery
- Completed Suicide, Died by Suicide
- Person in Recovery
- The Family Support Workforce
- Family Peer Support

**OUTDATED LANGUAGE**

- Emotional breakdown; Nervous breakdown
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- Former Addict; Former Alcoholic; Drunk
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- Peer Support applies to adult peer support alone

**WHY IT MATTERS**

- Using terms that don’t acknowledge an individual’s symptoms perpetuates avoidance of needed support and treatment that promote recovery.
- The term committed is associated with crime and/or a religious sin.
- Emphasize strengths and the ability to recover, not limitations.
- 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.

**PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE**

- A person living with a mental health condition
- A person with substance use challenges
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- My daughter with schizophrenia
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**Phrases that hinder recovery**

- The mentally ill; psycho, crazy, unclean
- Addict; meth head, tweaker, burnout, druggie, junkie
- My son is bipolar
- My schizo daughter
- The autistic boy down the street
- My depressed client
- My alcoholic father

**Person-first phrases**

- A person living with a mental health condition
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Think before you act. Think twice before you speak. Your words matter.