

Mental health challenges are nothing to be ashamed of. It is a medical diagnosis, just like heart disease or diabetes. Mental health diagnoses are health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking, or behavior (or a combination of these). **Mental health** is associated with emotional, psychological, and social well-being, which affects how a person thinks, feels, and acts. It is also a factor in how an individual handles stress, relates to others, and in making choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. It's critical that we talk about these challenges and that we do so **in a person-centered way**.

REFRAMING LANGUAGE

WHY CHANGING OUR THINKING, OUR ACTIONS, AND OUR LANGUAGE MATTERS



The terms we use to describe mental health challenges matter. We have all heard derogatory terms used to describe someone who has a mental health challenge. Here are a few to jog your memory: Cuckoo; Mad as a hatter; Screwy—having a screw loose; Bananas; Loopy; Crackers; Wacko (whacko); Loony; Insane; Nuts; Freak; Psycho, Crazy; Weirdo. Can you imagine mocking someone with a diagnosis 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 diagnosed with 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OUTDATED LANGUAGE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; referring to someone with a diagnosis as schizophrenic, bipolar, OCD, etc.

Drug Abuser, Alcoholic, Addict, Substance Abuse



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 challenges 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 diagnosed with 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.

The importance of using person-first language when talking about mental health and substance use challenges 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. **Here are a few examples.**

Person-first phrases

- A person living with a mental health challenge
- A person with substance use challenges
- My son diagnosed with bipolar disorder
- My daughter experiencing schizophrenia
- The individual I'm supporting who is experiencing depression
- My father who experiences alcohol misuse

Phrases that hinder recovery

- The mentally ill, psycho, crazy, lunatic
- Addict, meth head, burnout, druggie, junkie
- My son is bipolar
- My schizo daughter
- A depressed individual
- My alcoholic father



Experiencing Mental Health Symptoms that Interfere with Daily Life/Activities

Died by Suicide

Person in Recovery

The Family Support Workforce includes family peers, clinicians, and others who support families

Family peer support (FPS) is provided from one family member with lived experience as a primary caregiver to another caregiver in the effort to strengthen the whole family's well-being. FPS will assist family caregivers in navigating child, adult and family serving systems



Emotional breakdown, Nervous breakdown

Committed Suicide; Completed Suicide

Former Addict; Former Alcoholic; Drunk

Professionals and Family Peer Specialists separates family peer support professionals from others

Peer Support This term is more typically associated with adult peers.



Using terms that don't acknowledge an individual's symptoms perpetuates avoidance of needed support that promote recovery.

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

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.