



Words matter

One in five Americans experiences a mental health disorder in any given year. Do you feel equipped to talk to them without saying something potentially hurtful or inadvertently discouraging them from seeking the help they need?

Help increase awareness and reduce stigma — use these stigma-free ways to talk about mental health.

1. REMOVE

If you use words like crazy, nutty, head case, lunatic, psycho, schizoid, etc., you're reinforcing stereotypes and minimizing the importance of understanding mental health conditions. Simply remove these words from your vocabulary. Instead, be specific.

2. REWORD

Rephrase how you describe the situation, keeping in mind a mental health condition does not define the person. So, for example, say: "someone who lives with a mental health condition" or "someone who is affected by a mental health condition." Don't say: "Someone who suffers from a mental health condition."

3. RETHINK

Don't use the disease to describe the person. Instead, use a person-first approach. For example, say: "a person living with schizophrenia" or "someone diagnosed with schizophrenia." Don't say: "A schizophrenic person."

REMEMBER: No matter how much we care for someone or how well-intended we might be, the words we use matter.

DON'T SAY	DO SAY
Abuse, abuses	Use, uses Example: Person who uses drugs
Addict	Person with substance use disorder
Afflicted with	Living with, diagnosed with, with, who has, etc. Example: Person who has schizophrenia
Alcoholic	Person with alcohol use disorder
Alcohol problem	Alcohol use disorder More broadly: Substance use disorder
Anorexic, anorexics	Person who has anorexia, someone diagnosed with anorexia, etc.
Capitalize conditions or disorders, e.g., General Anxiety Disorder Exception: Conditions preceded by a name should be capitalized, e.g., Asperger syndrome, Tourette syndrome	Anxiety, depression and other conditions should not be capitalized unless the words appear in a headline.
Clean	Abstinent, not actively using
Clean drug screen	Tested negative for substance use
Committed suicide	Died by suicide
Dirty	Actively using
Dirty drug screen	Tested positive for substance use
Drug abuse	Drug misuse, harmful use
Drug abuser, drug addict, druggie, etc.	Person with substance use disorder
Drug problem, drug habit	Substance use disorder
Former/reformed addict/alcoholic	Person in recovery, person in long-term recovery
Mentally ill, mental illness	Diagnosed with a mental health condition, mental health condition Example: Person with a mental health condition
Problem Example: His wife was concerned he had a drinking problem.	Concern, condition, issue (depending on context) Example: His wife was concerned he was living with alcohol use disorder.
Suffers from	Living with, diagnosed with, with, who has, etc. Example: Person who has schizophrenia
Victim of	Living with, diagnosed with, with, who has, etc. Example: Person who has schizophrenia

For more information about mental health, visit: www.PsychHub.com/selfcare

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