

Ending Stigma: It Starts with Language

For professionals, advocates and all members of our community we have a responsibility to communicate using language that is widely accepted and without stigma. Below are some basic communication tips to aid in this goal.

Be Person First

When referring to a person's disability, try to use "people first" language. In other words, when necessary, it is better to say "a person with a disability" rather than "a disabled person." Another example is saying "a person with ADHD instead of "an ADHD kid."

Pledge to Not Saying "Commit"

Commit is an outdated notion conveying that suicide is a crime one commits, and leads to stigma. Instead, refer to the cause of death as "died by suicide." Talking about suicide or asking if someone is feeling suicidal will not encourage suicide attempts. It provides an opportunity for communication and prevention.

Handicapped

Handicapped was once used as a term for "begging with a cap in hand." It has a negative connotation and is no longer used in federal legislative language or documents. Instead, use the word "disability" or "ability."

Confined / Restricted / Afflicted

These terms are no longer acceptable. For example, wheelchairs offer mobility and independence; and a disability is not an affliction.

Engage. Identify.

Consider asking the person, "How do you identify?" or "What's *your* preference?"

Language

Avoid negative or sensational descriptions of a person's disability. Don't say "suffers from," or is "a victim of," or "afflicted with." These types of portrayals elicit unwanted sympathy, or worse, pity toward individuals with disabilities. Generally, do not refer to people with disabilities as "patients" unless they are receiving treatment in a medical facility and never say "invalid."

Other Language

Do not use diagnostic or Mental Health terms to explain everyday individual behaviors and experiences. Such as, "I'm having ADHD at the moment," or "That person is acting bipolar right now." Find another way to express your feelings and emotions while respecting others.

OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder)

Be mindful when using this word that those around you may actually have this diagnosis. The O refers to Obsession: something that must be done and done perfectly to satisfy the Compulsion (a need and drive to do the obsessive act) which keeps a person from enjoying parts of their life.

LGBTQ

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning. A safe and welcoming environment is essential for all. Remind others that it's not OK to use "gay" disrespectfully to mean something is bad. LGBTQA includes being an "Ally" for our LGBTQ community. For an individual who doesn't prefer a gender pronoun, using "zie" (pronounced zee) to replace he or she is widely accepted.

Using welcoming language when connecting with others is important for all of us.

Special Needs Advisory Coalition (SNAC) Is Working to Raise Awareness of The Power of Language

The Behavioral Health Bridge SNAC is helping "bridge the gap" between special needs and behavioral health to connect and empower our community and service providers.



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