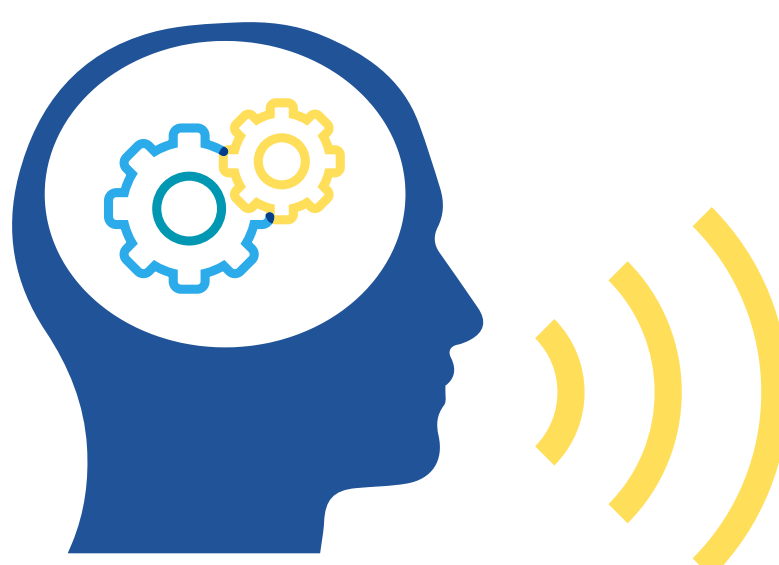


Mental health challenges are nothing to be ashamed of. It is a medical diagnosis, just like heart disease or diabetes. Mental health diagnoses are health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking, or behavior (or a combination of these). **Mental health** is associated with emotional, psychological, 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UPDATED LANGUAGE	OUTDATED LANGUAGE	WHY IT MATTERS
Prejudice and discrimination	Stigma	Prejudice refers to thinking, discrimination refers to action—both can be changed.
Acceptance	Awareness	Being aware doesn't call for action, change in behavior, or thinking.
Experiencing or living with a mental health challenge	Suffering from a Mental Illness	People who experience mental health challenges can and do live healthy, fulfilling lives. Suffering implies one is unwell, unhappy, or can't recover.
Experiences/has been diagnosed with emotional, mental, and/or behavioral health challenges	Emotionally Disturbed	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.
Person experiencing / living with or diagnosed with a mental health challenge	Mentally Ill Person; referring to someone with a diagnosis as schizophrenic, bipolar, OCD, etc.	Certain language exaggerates mental illness and reinforces prejudice. Always use person-first language.
Person who experiences substance use challenges	Drug Abuser, Alcoholic, Addict, Substance Abuse	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	Emotional breakdown, Nervous breakdown	Using terms that don't acknowledge an individual's symptoms perpetuates avoidance of needed support that promote recovery.
Died by Suicide	Committed Suicide; Completed Suicide	The term committed is associated with a crime. The term completed suggests an accomplishment.
Person in Recovery	Former Addict; Former Alcoholic; Drunk	Emphasize strengths and the ability to recover, not limitations.
The Family Support Workforce includes family peers, clinicians, and others who support families	Professionals and Family Peer Specialists separates family peer support professionals from others	The Family Peer workforce should be thought of as professional and a respected career choice as much as clinicians, care managers, etc.
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	Peer Support This term is more typically associated with adult peers.	There are specific differences between adult peers and family peers. They have different lived and systems navigation experience.