



**THE MENTAL  
HEALTH  
COALITION**

# LANGUAGE GUIDE



# LET'S TALK ABOUT IT!

# **THE LANGUAGE WE USE IS POWERFUL, SO LET'S TALK ABOUT IT.**

If you feel a bit unsure about what language to use when describing mental health you, are not alone.

We are here to provide you with some helpful tools and hints to go forward!

This information is intended as a guide for people to talk about mental health in a safe manner. The content does not replace the relationship between you and your doctor or other healthcare professionals.

Here are five ways you can contribute to a more positive environment surrounding mental health:

**1. HELP EMPOWER PEOPLE**



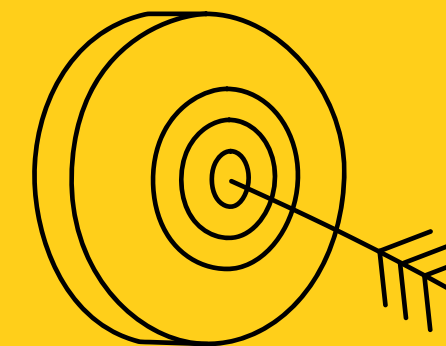
**2. STOP THE SHAME**



**3. BE SENSITIVE**



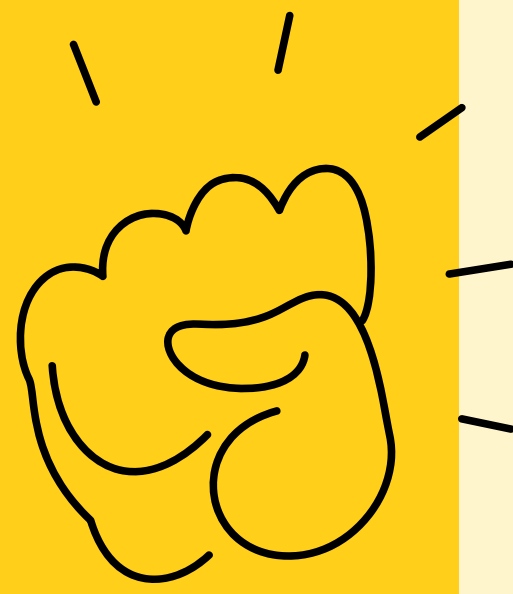
**4. GET SPECIFIC**



**5. YOU DO YOU**



# 1. HELP EMPOWER PEOPLE



The way we talk about mental health conditions should not define the person nor should we use victimizing language. Acknowledge the person first, then the condition.

## STEER CLEAR:

“Suffering /Struggling with a mental illness.”

## SAY:

“Living with a mental health condition  
/Thriving with a mental health condition.”

## STEER CLEAR:

“He’s schizophrenic /Oman is schizophrenic.”

## SAY:

“A person has schizophrenia /Oman is a  
person with schizophrenia.”

## STEER CLEAR:

Suffering /Struggling with a mental illness  
OR Is a victim of mental illness /suffers  
from a mental illness.

## SAY:

Living with a mental health condition  
/Thriving with a mental health condition.

Source:

- [Active Minds](#)
- [Bring Change to Mind](#)
- [DBSA](#)
- [Mental Health America](#)

# 2. STOP THE SHAME



The way we talk about mental health conditions often puts blame on the individuals experiencing the disorders. We can play a role in alleviating some of this blame while also using language to reduce the distance between “us” (without mental health conditions) and “them” (with mental health conditions) because everyone has mental health.

## STEER CLEAR:

“She is abusing drugs.”

## SAY:

“She is a person with a substance use disorder.”

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## STEER CLEAR:

“Those people have mental health conditions.”

## SAY:

“Individuals with mental health conditions.”

Source:  
DBSA

# 3. BE SENSITIVE



Many issues and experiences pertaining to mental health are profound, personal and/or involve trauma. Before we talk about topics like suicide, we want to consider the emotions of the people on the other end of the conversation. We explain this through the examples below

## STEER CLEAR:

“Committed suicide.”

## SAY:

“Died by suicide / Lost to Suicide.”

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## STEER CLEAR:

“Failed or unsuccessful suicide attempt.”

## SAY:

“Suicide attempt survivor / she did not die in a suicide attempt.”

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## STEER CLEAR:

“Anna’s brother committed suicide.”

## SAY:

“Anna is a suicide loss survivor, her brother died by suicide.”

Source:

- [NAMI](#)
- [JED Foundation](#)
- [Active Minds](#)

# 3. BE SENSITIVE



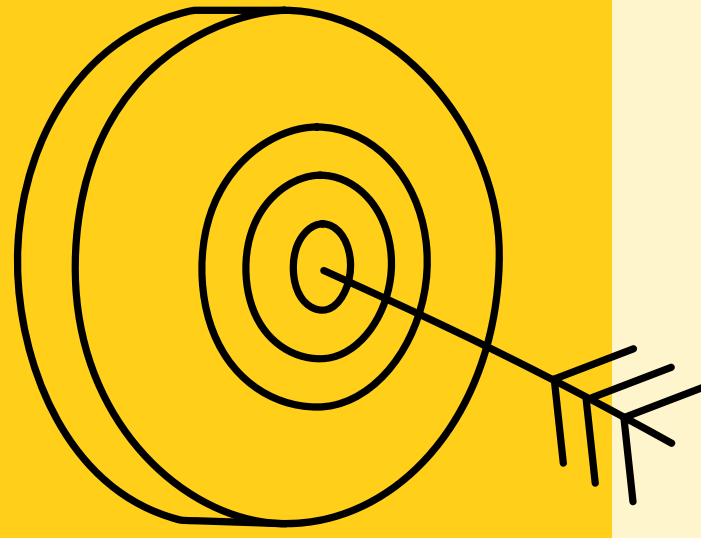
## THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

- Avoid using death by suicide as an “epidemic/crisis: or using dramatic terms like “skyrocketing or “trend” (JED)
- Avoid sharing quotes from suicide notes (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline)
- Avoid sharing explicit details of methods used in suicides or suicide attempts, as they may be used as tips by others (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline)
- Refrain from describing suicide as “inexplicable” or “without warning” most people who die by suicide exhibit warning signs (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline)

### Source:

- [Active Minds](#)
- [NAMI](#)
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)
- [JED Foundation](#)
- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#)

# 4. GET SPECIFIC



“Mental health condition” is a general term and doesn’t offer much information about what an individual is experiencing. Specific disorders or types of mental health conditions should be referenced whenever possible.

**STEER CLEAR:** “He is / was mentally ill”

**SAY:** “He was diagnosed with bipolar disorder”

Source:  
American Psychiatric Association

# 5. YOU DO YOU



Always allow for personal choice: If an individual with a mental health condition prefers to be referred to in a certain way, then that’s their choice, and we should respect it.



# ANTI GLOSSARY

We should all be mindful of using the following terms and phrases some people use in their daily lives. Taking caution with our words is the first step to creating and fostering a stigma-free environment where everyone can feel empowered to take care for their mental health.

- Crazy / Nuts / Disturbed
- Insane / Mental
- ‘I’m so depressed’
- Lunatic
- “I am so OCD...”
- Psycho
- Retarded

**“YOU’RE  
CRAZY”**

**“HE’S  
PSYCHO”**

**“YOU’RE  
NUTS.”**

Source:

- [Active Minds](#)
- [Bring Change to Mind](#)

**THANK YOU.**