



Your Language Matters

The words you use matter. You can better reach youth, break down negative stereotypes and give teens hope by choosing words that are more relatable and promote understanding.

This simple but caring approach may help youth feel more comfortable and willing to talk openly about mental health and to reach out for support early.

Your presentation will resonate more effectively and honestly by choosing the best words for your audience. Included here are suggested words and phrases to help teens be more open and receptive to your message.

It only takes one person to make a difference. Lead by example. Be that person.

A person is not their mental health condition. You wouldn't say someone "is cancer," so we wouldn't say someone "is bipolar." Use words like "has," "lives with" or "experiences" instead. Talk about mental health in a way that encourages hope and empowers youth. Words like "brain disorder/disease," "mentally ill" and "suffers from" can be intimidating to teens and give the illness the power.

Tips for Talking to Youth

Consider saying

Instead of

Mental health condition

Brain disorder or brain disease

Mental health

Mental illness

My daughter has bipolar disorder

My daughter is bipolar

Person with a mental health condition

Consumer, client or patient

Lives with, has or experiences

Suffers from, afflicted with or mentally ill

Tips for Talking About Suicide

Consider saying

Instead of

Suicide attempt/
attempted suicide

Failed suicide or
unsuccessful attempt

Died by suicide/
suicide death

Successful or
completed suicide

Took their own life

Committed suicide

Died as the result of self-
inflicted injury

Chose to kill
him/herself

Disclosed

Threatened

When talking about suicide, consider other meanings your words may have. For example, "committed suicide" implies that suicide is a crime. You can help eliminate the misunderstanding and stigma that prevent people from speaking up and getting support by choosing words that are more clear and neutral.



NAMI Ending the Silence



National Alliance on Mental Illness

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