

## Tip Sheet: Words Matter

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, or NAMI, one in five people is affected by a mental health concern each year. For too many, however, a combination of stigma and lack of accessible care leaves people feeling like they don't have anywhere to turn for help. The One in Five Campaign focuses on normalizing the need for mental health resources and removing the stigma for those who want to access care.

Conquering the discomfort associated with talking about mental health is key. Approaching this topic with someone can seem intimidating. You may feel uncomfortable, unsure of what to say and even afraid of offending them. And yet, these discussions are crucial in reducing stigma and breaking down barriers that keep individuals from seeking support and treatment.

### Talking about Mental Health

Choosing words wisely can help with expressing thoughts and ideas that are respectful, supportive and person-centered.

- Instead of saying “someone is mentally ill”, which equates the person with their illness and perpetuates negative labels and stereotypes about having a mental health condition, use person-first language such as “**someone has mental illness**”
- Likewise, rather than calling someone an “addict” or “drunk”, say that someone “**has an alcohol or drug problem**”
- Avoid words or phrases that suggest pity, such as “suffering from,” “being afflicted with,” or “a victim of mental illness.” Instead say “**has a history of,**” “**is being treated for,**” or “**lives with**” mental illness.
- The phrase “committed suicide” refers to the outdated notion that suicidal actions were crimes and ignores the fact that suicide is often the consequence of an unaddressed illness. “**Died by suicide**” removes fault, blame and stigma from the person who has lost their life and for their loved ones.
- Refrain from using derogatory words or phrases that drive stigma surrounding mental health issues. Examples of these include crazy, psycho, nuts, deranged, wacko, disturbed or low functioning.
- One of the most common issues is using diagnostic or mental health terms to explain everyday traits or common behaviors, such as “that’s my OCD” or “I’m so ADHD”

Word choices — whether intentional or unintentional — have much broader implications. These guidelines address general considerations, but it is important to respect each individual’s preferences for how they wish to discuss mental health. Follow their lead and if you have any concerns, ask for their guidance.

The chart on the next page has been included for easy reference.

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NO	YES
Someone IS mentally ill	Someone HAS mental illness
Addict, drunk	Has an alcohol or drug problem
Suffering from, being afflicted with or a victim of mental illness	Has a history of, is being treated for or lives with mental illness.
Committed suicide	Died by suicide

AVOID
Words like crazy, psycho, nuts, disturbed, etc.
“That’s my OCD” or “I’m so ADHD”