Family, friends, community and me.

Words matter

One in five Americans experiences a mental health disorder in any given year. Do you feel equipped to talk to them without saying something potentially hurtful or inadvertently discouraging them from seeking the help they need?

Help increase awareness and reduce stigma — use these stigma-free ways to talk about mental health.

1. **REMOVE**

    If you use words like crazy, nutty, head case, lunatic, psycho, schizoid, etc., you're reinforcing stereotypes and minimizing the importance of understanding mental health conditions. Simply remove these words from your vocabulary. Instead, be specific.

2. **REWORD**

    Rephrase how you describe the situation, keeping in mind a mental health condition does not define the person. So, for example, say: "someone who lives with a mental health condition" or "someone who is affected by a mental health condition." Don't say: "Someone who suffers from a mental health condition."

3. **RETHINK**

    Don't use the disease to describe the person. Instead, use a person-first approach. For example, say: "a person living with schizophrenia" or "someone diagnosed with schizophrenia." Don't say: "A schizophrenic person."

REMEMBER: No matter how much we care for someone or how well-intended we might be, the words we use matter.

DON'T SAY	DO SAY
Abuse, abuses	**Use, uses** Example: Person who uses drugs
Addict	**Person with substance use disorder**
Afflicted with	**Living with, diagnosed with, with, who has, etc.** Example: Person who has schizophrenia
Alcoholic	**Person with alcohol use disorder**
Alcohol problem	**Alcohol use disorder** More broadly: Substance use disorder
Anorexic, anorexics	**Person who has anorexia, someone diagnosed with anorexia, etc.**
Capitalize conditions or disorders, e.g., General Anxiety Disorder Exception: Conditions preceded by a name should be capitalized, e.g., Asperger syndrome, Tourette syndrome	**Anxiety, depression and other conditions should not be capitalized unless the words appear in a headline.**
Clean	**Abstinent, not actively using**
Clean drug screen	**Tested negative for substance use**
Committed suicide	**Died by suicide**
Dirty	**Actively using**
Dirty drug screen	**Tested positive for substance use**
Drug abuse	**Drug misuse, harmful use**
Drug abuser, drug addict, druggie, etc.	**Person with substance use disorder**
Drug problem, drug habit	**Substance use disorder**
Former/reformed addict/alcoholic	**Person in recovery, person in long-term recovery**
Mentally ill, mental illness	**Diagnosed with a mental health condition, mental health condition** Example: Person with a mental health condition
Problem Example: His wife was concerned he had a drinking problem.	**Concern, condition, issue** (depending on context) Example: His wife was concerned he was living with alcohol use disorder.
Suffers from	**Living with, diagnosed with, with, who has, etc.** Example: Person who has schizophrenia
Victim of	**Living with, diagnosed with, with, who has, etc.** Example: Person who has schizophrenia

For more information about mental health, visit: CX.optum.com/mentalhealthmonth