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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