



## Language Matters - Reducing Stigma

*Knowing about something is not the same thing as knowing something. Increasing awareness around mental health is important; understanding and choosing the right language is even more important. This tool helps break down common words used to describe mental health, mental distress and mental illness. Understanding the differences between these words is essential in getting the right kind of support if needed and to be clear about the language used when telling others how you feel.*

Mental Health	Everybody has it. Taking care of your mental health is just as important as taking care of your physical health.
Mental Distress	<p>Mental distress refers to the common and expected responses to stress in your everyday life. Mental distress is normal, to be expected and happens to everyone at some point or another. It is necessary for adaptation and building resilience.</p> <p>Common examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship conflict (disagreements between friends or family members)</li> <li>• Performing below expectations in a task (doing poorly on a test or in an activity)</li> </ul>
Mental Health Problem	<p>A mental health problem describes the reactions you have to big life challenges that may impact your ability to adapt. Mental health problems may feel substantial and prolonged but they are not mental illness.</p> <p>Common examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moving to a new home or school</li> <li>• Loss of a relationship</li> <li>• World or community events</li> </ul>
Mental Illness	<p>Mental illnesses are clinically diagnosed or undiagnosed health conditions that involve changes in emotion, thinking and/or behavior. They require evidence-based treatments provided by trained health care providers.</p> <p>Common examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major depressive disorder</li> <li>• Generalized anxiety disorder</li> <li>• Bipolar disorder</li> </ul>

## Choose Language Carefully

*Avoid using words like "crazy," "psycho," "nuts," "junkie" or "loony." Phrases like "feeling bipolar," "being paranoid" or saying something is "OCD" can also add to stigma.*

*Stigma can lead people to label, stereotype and look down on someone with a mental health condition or addiction. This can contribute to feelings of shame and embarrassment for individuals and prevent them from getting proper care.*

## What works?

### Watch your language

Avoid using language or making comments that stigmatize people with mental illness or addiction.

### Ask questions

So much can be learned by asking questions of a mental health professional like a therapist, social worker or school counselor. If you have a friend with a mental illness, ask them what language they prefer to use and how you can best support them in their experience. Each person's experience is unique.

### Educate yourself

Resources are available online and in libraries to help educate you on mental illnesses and addiction. When you know more about mental health conditions and addiction, you can educate yourself and others and behave differently yourself. For more information about mental health and addiction, visit:

- [account.allinahealth.org/service/lines/826](http://account.allinahealth.org/service/lines/826)
- [nami.org](http://nami.org)
- [nimh.nih.gov](http://nimh.nih.gov)
- [samhsa.gov](http://samhsa.gov)
- [facesofrecovery.org](http://facesofrecovery.org)

### Speak out

If you have personal experience with mental illness or addiction, consider sharing your story with others. Help reduce stigma by speaking out when others stigmatize people with mental illness or addiction or spread misconceptions.