



Language Matters

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 components is essential in getting the right kind of support if needed and to be clear about the language used when telling others how we feel.

Mental Health	We all have it. Taking care of our mental health is just as important as taking care of our physical health.
Mental Distress	<p>Mental distress refers to the common and expected responses to stress in our everyday lives. 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"> • Relationship conflict (disagreements between friends or family members) • Performing below expectations in a task (doing poorly on a test or in an activity)
Mental Health Problem	<p>Mental health problems describe the reactions we have to big life challenges that may impact our ability to adapt. Mental health problems may feel substantial and prolonged but they are not mental health disorders.</p> <p>Common examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving to a new home or school • Loss of a relationship • World or community events
Mental Disorder Illness	<p>Mental disorders and 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"> • Major depressive disorder • Generalized anxiety disorder • Bipolar disorder