

# MENTAL HEALTH: EVERYONE HAS IT!



## Stigma: Language Matters

### Stigma is about disrespect:

It hurts, punishes and diminishes people.

It harms and undermines all relationships.

It appears in behavior, language, attitude and tone of voice.

It happens even when we don't mean it.

### Disrespectful Language:

- Crazy, lunatic, deficient, wacko, loony tune, psycho etc.
- Manic depressive (when referring to a person.)
- Schizophrenic.
- Handicapped person.
- Slow, low functioning.
- Normal.

### Respectful Language:

- Mental illness or psychiatric disability.
- Person with bipolar disorder or manic depressive illness.
- Person who has schizophrenia.
- Person with a disability.
- Person who has cognitive difficulties.
- Nondisabled person.

### Some Rules of Thumb:

- ✓ Don't focus on a disability. Focus instead on issues that affect the quality of life for everyone, e.g., accessible transportation, housing, affordable health care, etc.
- ✓ Don't portray successful persons with disabilities as super humans. This carries expectations for others and is patronizing to those who make various achievements.
- ✓ Don't sensationalize a disability. This means not using terms such as "afflicted with," "suffers from," "victim of," and so on.
- ✓ Don't use generic labels such as "the retarded," "our mentally ill," etc.
- ✓ Don't use psychiatric diagnoses as metaphors for other situations, e.g., a "schizophrenic situation." This is not only stigmatizing, but inaccurate.
- ✓ Do put people first, not their disabilities. Say for example, "person with schizophrenia" rather than "schizophrenic."
- ✓ Do emphasize abilities, not limitations. Terms that are condescending must be avoided.

Source: Adapted from SAMHSA, Center for Mental Health Services and "Removing Bias in Language: Disabilities," APA Style Manual.  
<http://alexandriava.gov/uploadedfiles/health/info/Stigma-LanguageMatters.pdf>

