

LANGUAGE *Matters*



The way language is used can stigmatize or clarify. It can deepen understanding or it can broaden division. It can reinforce misinformation or erase stereotypes. In short, language matters.

Behavioral health as well as sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression, also referred to as SOGIE, are two fields in which language use is being reframed for accuracy and respect. It is advised, for example, to say someone is challenged by mental health symptoms that interfere with daily life rather than refer to them as a “mentally ill” or “emotionally disturbed” person or someone who has had a “nervous breakdown.”

Taking the person-first approach acknowledges someone is managing a medical condition and its symptoms and does not label them as an “addict” or “psycho.” Similarly, it is recommended to say someone is in recovery rather than to describe them as a “former alcoholic.”

How language is used can impact how mental health conditions are perceived as well as how those experiencing them feel about themselves and their conditions.

Anyone can be impacted by poor mental health and seeking treatment to manage it is no different than seeking treatment for any other medical condition and language should be supportive of this effort.

Using language that does not discriminate or shame encourages open discussions about behavioral health and the seeking of evidence-based treatment for it.

While mental health and substance use conditions are found across populations, groups at high risk include sexual minorities due to the discrimination and violence they frequently encounter. Honoring and understanding language used by those who identify as LGBTQ+ is important for positive engagement.

For more information, the **National Family Support Technical Assistance Center** has a ***Combined Reframing Language Guide*** at www.nfstac.org/resources.

For more information on **MiraVista Behavioral Health Center**, which offers inpatient psychiatric care to adults and adolescents and outpatient recovery services, visit www.miravistabhc.care/.