

Language

The language used when communicating about mental ill-health plays a big role in keeping alive stereotypes, myths and stigma.

It is important that all organisations and individuals discussing mental ill-health avoid using stigmatising terminology and language.

In many cultures 'mental illness' is a foreign and ambiguous concept. If understood at all, it can be heavily stigmatised and the idea of recovery is almost unknown.

Mindframe has recommendations for communicating about mental ill-health and what language may present inaccuracies and further perpetuate stigma.

Consider the language you use around mental ill-health

Issue	Problematic	Preferred
Certain language sensationalises mental ill-health and reinforces stigma	Terms such as 'mental patient', 'nutter', 'lunatic', 'psycho', 'schizo', 'deranged', 'mad'	A person is 'living with' or 'has a diagnosis of' a mental illness
Terminology that suggests a lack of quality of life for people with mental ill-health	Referring to someone with a mental illness as 'victim', 'suffering from' or 'afflicted with' a mental illness	A person is 'being treated for' or 'someone with' a mental illness
Labelling a person by their mental illness	A person is a 'schizophrenic', 'an anorexic'	A person 'has a diagnosis of' or 'is being treated for' schizophrenia.
Descriptions of behaviour that imply existence of	Using words such as 'crazed', 'deranged', 'mad', 'psychotic'	The person's behaviour was unusual or erratic

Issue	Problematic	Preferred
<p>mental ill-health or are inaccurate</p>		
<p>Colloquialisms about treatment can undermine people's willingness to seek help</p>	<p>Using words such as 'happy pills', 'shrinks', 'mental institution'</p>	<p>Accurate terminology for treatments e.g. antidepressants, psychiatrists or psychologists, mental health hospital</p>
<p>Terminology used out of context adds to misunderstanding and trivialises mental ill-health</p>	<p>Terms like 'psychotic dog', using 'schizophrenic' to denote duality such as 'schizophrenic economy'</p>	<p>Reword any sentence that uses psychiatric or medical terminology incorrectly or out of context</p>