



People First Language at DMH

Treat People as Individuals

We all want to be accepted for being ourselves. Our talents and skills don't go away because we have a medical or mental health diagnosis. Labeling creates a "stigma" about a person based on one part. That's why it's important to recognize Missourians as individuals rather than a label. A person is not an illness or medical condition. We all deserve respect and acceptance.

What is Stigma?

Judging a person based on your own values creates a label. Labeling a person creates a negative image, also known as a "stigma." Stigma is the result of false ideas that people have when they describe someone they see as "different". Using a word, phrase or category that is judgmental can lead to unfair treatment.

Stigma comes in many forms. It can be simple and direct like a negative word directed at you. It can be subtle or hidden when a person thinks you cannot do your job, or that you are violent and dangerous because of your life experiences. Stigma can come from family and friends or from strangers and even sometimes from medical or mental health professionals. Sometimes, people can self-stigmatize by believing and accepting other people's false labels about them.

Avoid Stigma with People First Language

Rule 1. Call the person by their name.

Rule 2. If you speak with someone living with a health or mental health disability, remember to speak to the person first and then the disability second. Here are some examples:

Say:	Instead of:
People with disabilities	The handicapped or disabled
Bob's son has autism	Bob's autistic son
Susan's daughter has Down Syndrome	Susan's Down syndrome daughter
Brain injury	Brain damaged
Accessible parking, hotel room, etc.	Handicapped parking, hotel room, etc.
Deb uses a wheelchair/mobility chair	Deb is confined to a wheelchair or is wheelchair bound
Jim has bipolar disorder	Jim is bipolar
Mark has a substance use disorder	Mark is an alcoholic (or druggie, pothead, etc.)



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Words to Avoid

Harmful words are the driving force behind stigma. Some words can be hurtful and limit a person's full potential. Words can leave a person feeling rejected and alone. The stigma created by certain words and phrases can impact how someone lives their life by making them feel not "good enough" or "less than" others. Some words are still used today that reflect false beliefs about people with mental health and developmental disabilities.

We ask that you avoid these words in conversation, especially in regard to mental health and developmental disabilities. By avoiding the use of terms like these, you will be more respectful of people and assist us in our stigma reduction effort.

AVOID THESE TERMS					
Abnormal	Alcoholic	Birth Defect	Brain damaged	Brain Dead	Crazy
Cripple	Cuckoo	Delusional	Demented	Deranged	Disturbed
Druggie	Drunk	Emotionally disturbed	Handicapped	Head Case	High or low functioning
Insane	Issues	Looney	Loopy	Lunatic	Mad
Maniac	Mental	Mentally ill	Mentally Retarded	Mongoloid	Nuts
Odd	Out of it	Pothead	Psycho	Retarded	Screw Loose
Schizophrenic	Slow	Wacko	Wheel Chair Bound		

Remember, we are all People First!

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