# Talking about mental ill-health

The language we use when talking about mental ill-health or mental illness can fuel stereotypes and stigma. It is therefore important that we are using safe and respectful language when talking to people about mental ill-health, whether they have a mental illness or not.

The below table is a useful guide to help get you thinking about what you should and should not say when talking about mental health. It will help you avoid using stigmatising and unhelpful language.

| Issue | Problematic | Preferred |
|---|---|---|
| Language that exaggerates 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 |
| Language that suggests a lack of quality of life for people with mental ill-health | Referring to someone with a mental illness as a '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 mental ill-health or are inaccurate | Using words such as 'crazed', 'deranged', 'mad', 'psychotic' | The person's behaviour was unusual or erratic |
| Language around treatments that can undermine people's willingness to seek help | Using words such as 'happy pills', 'shrinks', 'mental institution' | Accurate terminology for treatments e.g., antidepressants, psychiatrists or psychologists, mental health hospital |
| Language used out of context that adds to misunderstanding and trivialises mental ill-health | Terms like 'psychotic dog', using 'schizophrenic' to denote duality such as 'schizophrenic economy' | Reword any sentence that uses psychiatric or medical terminology incorrectly or out of context |

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