Experiences/has been treated for Emotional, Mental and/or Behavioral Health Challenges

Emotionally Disturbed
Being diagnosed, experiencing symptoms of or having been treated for a mental illness is a common part of the human experience. The term disturbed perpetuates bias and creates a barrier to treatment.

Family Support Workforce
family support peers, clinicians, and others who support families
The Family Support Workforce should be thought of as professional and a respected career choice as much as clinicians, care managers, etc.

Family Peer Support
Peer Support applies to adult peer support alone
There are specific differences between adult peers and family peers. They have different lived and systems navigation experience.

Person who Experiences /Living with or Diagnosed with a Mental Illness
A person living with a mental health condition
A person with substance use challenges

Completed Suicide, Died by Suicide
Former Addict; Former Alcoholic; Drunk
The term committed is associated with crime and/or a religious sin.

Person in Recovery
The Family Peer workforce should be thought of as professional and a respected career choice as much as clinicians, care managers, etc.

EXPERIENCING MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS THAT INTERFERE WITH DAILY LIFE/ACTIVITIES
Experiencing Mental Health Symptoms that Interfere with Daily Life/Activities
Emotional breakdown; Nervous breakdown
Using terms that don’t acknowledge an individual’s symptoms perpetuates avoidance of needed support and treatment that promote recovery.

The terms we use to describe mental illness matter. We have all heard derogatory terms used to describe someone who has a mental illness. Here are a few to jog your memory: Cuckoo; Mad as a hatter; Screwy – having a screw loose; Bananas; Loopy; Crackers; Wacko (whacko); Loony; Nuts; Freak; Crazy; Weirdo. Can you imagine mocking someone with an illness such as cancer or heart disease?

Here’s how we can do better.

Person-first phrases
• A person living with a mental health condition
• A person with substance use challenges
• My son diagnosed with bipolar disorder
• My daughter with schizophrenia
• My neighbor who has autism
• The client I’m treating for depression
• My father who has alcoholism

Phrases that hinder recovery
• The mentally ill; psycho, crazy, unclean
• Addict; meth head, tweaker, burnout, druggie, junkie
• My son is bipolar
• My schizo daughter
• The autistic boy down the street
• My depressed client
• My alcoholic father

Updated Language
OUTDATED LANGUAGE
Bias and Discrimination
Stigma
Acceptance
Awareness
Experiencing or Living with a Mental Illness
Suffering from a Mental Illness
Experiences/has been treated for Emotional, Mental and/or Behavioral Health Challenges
Emotionally Disturbed
Person Experiencing /Living with or Diagnosed with a Mental Illness
Mentally Ill Person; referring to someone with a diagnosis as schizophrenic, autistic, bipolar, OCD, etc.
Person who Experiences Substance Use Challenges
Drug Abuser; Alcoholic; Addict. Substance Abuse

WHY IT MATTERS
Bias refers to thinking, discrimination refers to action - both can be changed.

Avoid words that suggest a lack of quality of life for people with substance use concerns. Terms like addict reduce a person’s identity, deny dignity/humanity and imply powerlessness or the inability to recover.

People who experience mental health conditions can and do live healthy, fulfilling lives. Suffering implies one is unwell, unhappy or can’t recover.

Being diagnosed, experiencing symptoms of or having been treated for a mental illness is a common part of the human experience. The term disturbed perpetuates bias and creates a barrier to treatment.

Certain language exaggerates mental illness and reinforces bias. Always use person-first language.

The importance of using person-first language when talking about mental illness and substance use cannot be overstated. This is true for members of the media, support and treatment professionals, family members, friends and the community at large. Person-first language separates the individual from the symptoms they experience - maintaining their identity as people with strengths who have the power to recover. Here are a few examples.

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Emphasize strengths and the ability to recover, not limitations.

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Think before you act. Think twice before you speak. Your words matter.