**Language Guide**

Below follows a guide to the language that can be used to discuss mental health, including some reasoning related to using certain terms or phases instead of others. However, language is evolving all the time, and with time, this guide may begin to become outdated. It is far from the final word on words and should be considered alongside other ongoing developments in language both in a personal and professional context. If in doubt, you can always ask the person what words or language they prefer.

**Definitions**

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| Mental Health | Everyone has mental health, just as we all have physical health but not everyone has a mental health condition. Impacted by internal and external factors, so individual to everyone and fluid.  |
| Physical Health  | Everyone has physical health, just as we all have mental health but not everyone has a physical health condition. Impacted by internal and external factors, so individual to everyone and fluid. |
| Emotional Health  | Everyone has emotional health, just as we all have physical and mental health. Impacted by internal and external factors, so individual to everyone and fluid throughout life’s ups and downs. |
| Mental Health Condition | A Mental Health Condition is very common and can affect anyone, they are characterised by psychological and/or behavioural patterns that may or may not cause distress and/or disability.  |
| Mental Wellbeing | Mental Wellbeing is “Feeling good and Functioning Well” individuals can recognise their own potential and have the ability to self manage mental health and have an awareness of when this has been affected whether good or bad. |
| Resilience | Resilience is the ability to maintain good wellbeing and persist through life’s ups and downs using their own tool kit.  |

**Guidance and top tips around language to use…**

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| **Phrases you might not want to say/use** | **Why** | **Possible alternatives** | **Examples** |
| Suffering from | This risks reinforcing the misconception that people experiencing a mental health condition are powerless ie’ a victim to their experience. However, some people prefer to use this language when talking about themselves or their experiences. It can vary from person to person.  | * Experiencing
* Poor mental health
* Ill health
 | “An individual experiencing low mood.” |
| They are bipolar They are depressive  | Mental health conditions are something someone has, not something they are. Using phrases which define people by their poor mental health can be stigmatising and make them feel less like they are able to influence or chance their mental health in a positive way. Some people will choose to talk about themselves this way.  | * They have bipolar
* They have been diagnosed with depression
 | “They have been diagnosed with depression and anxiety”“She has depression” “So you have anxiety?” |
| Completed Suicide or Failed suicide | The word ‘committed’ refers to when completing suicide was against the law. In addition, the word ‘completed’ can make it sound as if the individual has had a success.  | Taking their own life\***There is no issue in using the word “suicide”** | “The individual has taken their own life.”“Died by suicide.”“Attempted suicide.” |
| SuicidalHe/she is suicidalThey are suicidalSuicidal thoughts | Using this phrase or phrases can accidentally exclude some people who are thinking about suicide. They might not believe their thoughts are ‘serious’ enough to count as suicidal and miss the opportunity for intervention or support. It can also feel as if the person being spoken about or to is defined by or is their thoughts e.g “he is suicidal.” Poor mental health is something someone has not something they are.  | Having thoughts about suicideThinking about suicide | “Are you thinking about suicide?”“Is she thinking about ending her life or that she would be better off dead?”“He is having thoughts of suicide” |
| Mental Illness | This can strengthen the medical model which can forget and disempower the person, but again some people will use this when talking about themselves or loved ones.  | Mental Health ConditionPoor mental health | “The individual is experiencing poor mental health at the moment.” |
| It’s been “crazy/manic” in here today“I’m a bit OCD/schizo” | Using mental health terms as metaphors or to add emphasis in everyday language can accidentally normalise the misconceptions reinforcing discrimination and stereotypes, e.g create or add to existing stigma | Try to think of alternatives and what you really are trying to say by using these words or phrases | “I am organised”“I like to be tidy”“It’s been incredibly/unbelievably busy here today” |

**It’s important not to let the words we use get in the way of having conversations about mental health**

Judging ourselves too harshly if we say something we know might not be the ‘right’ word or phrase isn’t helpful, all we can do is our best, and changing habits takes time. It is especially important to avoid correcting others with lived experience if they use the ‘wrong’ words or phrases when they share their own stories. *What* they are saying is more important than *how,* and the aim of using language with care is to support and respect those people, not to tell them how to think or talk about their own experiences.

The aim of *empathetic support and respect* should be at the heart of responding to others with poor mental health and wellbeing, whether through words or action. Language choice is just one way of doing that, and it can also mean respecting differences in personal views on language among those impacted by poor mental health or wellbeing.