





# MENTAL HEALTH LANGUAGE GUIDE

ISSUE	PROBLEMATIC 	PREFERRED 
Language that presents suicide as a desired outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'successful suicide'</li><li>• 'unsuccessful/failed suicide'</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'took their own life'</li><li>• 'ended their own life'</li><li>• 'died by suicide'</li><li>• 'attempted suicide'</li></ul>
Phrases that associate suicide with crime or sin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'commit'/'committed suicide'</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'died by suicide'</li><li>• 'took their own life'</li></ul>
Language that glamorizes a suicide attempt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'failed suicide'</li><li>• 'suicide bid'</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'made an attempt on their own life'</li><li>• 'suicide attempt'</li><li>• 'non-fatal suicide attempt'</li></ul>
Gratuitous use of the term 'suicide' out of context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'suicide mission'</li><li>• 'political suicide'</li><li>• 'suicide pass' (in sports)</li></ul>	Refrain from using the term 'suicide' out of context
Certain language sensationalizes mental illness and reinforces stigma	<b>Terms such as:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'mental patient'</li><li>• 'mental'</li><li>• 'nut'</li><li>• 'lunatic'</li><li>• 'psycho'</li><li>• 'schizo'</li><li>• 'deranged' etc.</li></ul>	<b>A person:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'is living with'</li><li>• 'has a diagnosis of'</li><li>• 'has experienced a mental health issue/problem'</li></ul>
Terminology that suggests a lack of quality of life for people with a mental illness	<b>Referring to someone with a mental illness as:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'a victim'</li><li>• 'suffering from'</li><li>• 'afflicted with a mental illness'</li></ul>	<b>A person:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'is being treated for'</li><li>• 'has a mental health issue/problem'</li></ul>
Labeling/identifying a person by their mental illness	<b>A person is:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'a schizophrenic'</li><li>• 'an anorexic'</li></ul>	<b>A person:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'has a diagnosis of'</li><li>• 'is being treated for'</li></ul>
Descriptions of behavior that imply existence of mental illness or are inaccurate	<b>Using words such as:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'crazed'</li><li>• 'deranged'</li><li>• 'psychotic'</li></ul>	<b>A person's behavior is:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'unusual'</li><li>• 'erratic'</li></ul>
Colloquialisms about treatment that undermine people's willingness to seek help	<b>Using words or phrases such as:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'happy pills'</li><li>• 'shrink'</li><li>• 'mental institution'</li><li>• 'nut house'</li></ul>	Accurate terminology for treatment; e.g. antidepressants, psychiatrist, psychologist, mental health hospital
Terminology used out of context adds to misunderstanding and trivializes mental illness	Using 'bipolar' or 'schizophrenic' to denote duality, such as a 'schizophrenic economy'	Reword any sentence that uses psychiatric or medical terminology incorrectly or out of context