

Mental Health Stigma Language Guide



DENVER
PUBLIC HEALTH &
ENVIRONMENT

WHAT YOU SAY MATTERS.

Your words may hurt people experiencing mental health conditions. Instead of spreading stigma, show your support, love, kindness, and empathy by choosing your words more carefully.

For more information visit www.DenverGov.org/WhatYouSayMatters.

Use this guide as a starting point to voice your support in a more considerate and thoughtful way. What is listed below isn't comprehensive, but shows you a few ways you can avoid every day instances of mental health stigma.

Stigma		Try saying
Using a mental health condition as an adjective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The weather is so bipolar." • "You're being so OCD." 		Using a condition as an adjective can minimize or stigmatize someone's experience. Try saying what you mean without comparing it to a behavioral health condition.
Disrespectful	"You sound like a lunatic." "You're acting psycho."	"Talk me through some of the thoughts you're having." "Can you tell me how you are feeling?" "You seem upset; is there anything I can help you with?"
	"You need therapy."	"Have you thought about talking about this with someone who can help?" "Have you sought help?" "Are you comfortable seeking help?"
	"Mom is so dysfunctional."	"Mom is feeling a lot of emotions at once." "Mom is dealing with a lot." "Mom seems upset; how can I help?"
	"Get yourself together."	"You are not alone. How can I be there for you?"
Minimizing	"Of course you're depressed. Everyone is these days."	"Having depression is real and you are not alone in this experience."
	"You'll be fine."	"What do you need to feel better?" "It's powerful to feel things fully."
	"Therapists aren't real doctors."	"I'm proud of you for seeking the help you need." "I'm so proud of you for taking care of yourself. You're important to me."
	"Things could be worse."	"What you're going through sounds really difficult. You are not alone."
	"It's all in your head."	"Your experience is valid." "Your feelings are real."
	"Have you tried acupuncture/ yoga/ going for a walk?"	"How can I support you?"
Invalidating/ dismissive	"I know what you're going through."	"How are you feeling?" "I may not know exactly what you are going through, but you are not alone."
	"What's wrong with you?"	"How are you feeling?" "I want you to feel safe with me. How can I be there for you?"
	"Everything happens for a reason."	"Let's figure this out together." "I may not know why this is happening, but we can get through it together." "I'm here for you."
	"You need to figure this out."	"What do you need to feel better?"

If you don't know what to say or you feel you have nothing to say, try responding with, "Can I support you in any way?"