

National Communications Charter

Tool One: Language guide - mental illness

Do say	Don't say	Why?
✓ A person is 'living with' or 'has a diagnosis of' a mental illness	✗ Stigmatising terms such as 'mental patient', 'nutter', 'lunatic', 'psycho'	Because using language that sensationalises mental illness can reinforce stigma
✓ A person is 'being treated for' or 'someone with' a mental illness	✗ Someone with a mental illness as a 'victim' or 'suffering from'	Because terminology can suggest a lack of quality of life for people with mental illness
✓ A person 'has a diagnosis of', or 'is being treated for' schizophrenia	✗ A person is 'a schizophrenic', 'an anorexic'	Because it can label a person by their mental illness
✓ The person's behaviour was unusual or erratic	✗ Words that describe a person as 'crazed' or 'deranged'	Because it is inaccurate and can imply the existence of a mental illness
✓ Accurate terminology for treatments e.g. antidepressants, psychiatrists, mental health hospital	✗ Words such as 'happy pills', 'shrinks', 'mental institution'	Because using colloquialisms about mental illness can undermine help-seeking behaviour
✓ Seek help and support via help-seeking resources and services	✗ Language that trivialises mental illness, such as 'weak' or 'snap out of it'	Because terminology used out of context can trivialise mental illness