



Words Matter

How Language Shapes Mental Health

In the discourse around mental health, we often hear that the *way* we talk about mental health matters. But what does that look like in practice? What language do we use to recognize our experiences, to shape how we understand them, and to guide how we feel about sharing them?

Let's dive into the language practices you can use to reduce stigma, empower you to talk about your own mental health, and ask for help.

Practical Examples That Reduce Stigma

Simply shifting one or two words in common phrases we use to talk about mental health can reduce stigma. This is called **person-first language**. It emphasizes that someone is a person who has an experience, not an identity defined by a condition.

Instead of...

"She is anxious."

"They are schizophrenic."

*"Suffers from", "afflicted with",
or "mentally ill"*

Consider saying...

"She is living with anxiety."

"They have schizophrenia."

*"Lives with", "has", or
"experiences"*

This shift may seem small, but it reduces judgment and makes conversations feel safer and more respectful.

How to Express Your Own Feelings

Using **simple sentences to describe anxiety, depression, and stress** allows you to clearly understand what you are feeling and to communicate your experience to others. Clinical language is not needed, and clear, everyday words often work best.

Instead of vague or minimizing statements:

- *"I'm fine."*
- *"I'm just stressed."*
- *"I'm bad at handling pressure."*

Consider sentences that state simply but specifically what you're feeling.

- *"I'm feeling on edge and having trouble relaxing."*
- *"My thoughts are racing, and it is hard to focus."*
- *"I feel low, tired, and disconnected lately."*
- *"I'm overwhelmed and having trouble keeping up."*

Because simple sentences are just that (simple), when you can use them to explain the complex feelings you are having, those feelings seem less complex. You can better locate the root of the feelings and the impact they are having.

Asking for Help

Asking for help can be scary and unsettling and often, we tend to fall on downplaying language that minimizes our need. It can be helpful to communicate what your needs are specifically, without statements of invalidation such as *"but I'm fine"* or *"but I can manage."*

It's okay to ask for what you need. Here are a few clear examples:

- **To communicate the need for emotional support:** "I'm not looking for solutions, I just need someone to listen and understand."
- **To ask for flexibility:** "I'm managing some mental health challenges and may need flexibility or extra support this week, so I can stay well and productive."
- **To take the next step toward care:** "I'm feeling ready to talk with someone about what I'm experiencing and would like to explore available resources."

It might sound or feel unnatural at first, but with practice it will begin to feel normal and comfortable.

Remember...

Language sets the tone for what's possible. When we choose words that are **respectful, specific, and human**, we make it easier to speak up, seek support, and support others.

You don't have to say things perfectly. You just need language that moves the conversation forward.

When you're ready, we're here to help. Reach out to your EAP to get the support you need.

We're Here to Help.

Call: **800.395.1616**

Visit: **members.uprisehealth.com**