Some Words about Words

The Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities-National Training Center makes an effort to use inclusive and respectful language whenever possible. The following statement describes the language guidelines that we will follow. These guidelines will be updated as needed.

Plain Language

In an effort to provide information that is accessible to all, we will use terms and language that do not require special knowledge to understand. We understand that it can seem disrespectful when some writers and speakers oversimplify difficult concepts or avoid words over a certain length. Instead, we will provide definitions for key words and thorough explanations of central concepts.

Person-First and Identity-First Language

We will make every effort to accommodate the preferences and access needs of different groups (people with various disabilities, including psychiatric disabilities, people of different cultures, backgrounds, and experiences). When necessary, we will consult with members of relevant groups to determine what words to use. When sharing individual stories, we will abide by the preferences of the individual(s) telling the story.

- **Person-First Language** – The use of person-first language (PFL) serves as a respectful reminder that a person is more than their disability. In person-first language, disabilities are spoken of as a single characteristic of a person and not as the identity of a person. Examples of person-first language are, "person with cerebral palsy", "person with a developmental disability", or "person with Down syndrome." This practice originated among people with disabilities and is preferred by many subgroups of the disability community. (Learn more about person first language on The Arc website at https://thearc.org/)

- **Identity-First Language** – There are also disability groups that prefer identity-first language (IFL). These include the Deaf and Autistic communities, as well as others who do not see their disabilities as separate from who they are. These communities use identity-first language as an expression of pride and solidarity. We will use identity-first language to discuss these groups, except when writing about an individual who prefers person-first or another type of language. (Learn more about identity-first language on the ASAN website at https://autisticadvocacy.org/about-asan/)

Mental Health Issues/Mental Illness

When possible, we will avoid the use of the term "mental illness". Mental illness is commonly used by clinicians to refer to specific conditions. We prefer to use the term "mental health issues" to refer to the broad spectrum of experiences that constitute mental health. When talking about mental health issues, we will use

person-first language, such as: "person with schizophrenia", or "person with major depression" except for when writing about an individual who prefers identity-first language.

Non-judgmental Language

Some words that are commonly used in discussions of mental health issues and disabilities can be triggering for those who have experienced abuse or mistreatment because of their diagnosis. For example, we will not use the word "symptom" in describing characteristics of autism. We will not use the word "commit" when discussing suicide, as it implies a criminal act. The choices we have made acknowledge the importance of language in shaping thought and action; they are not chosen for "political correctness," but are an intentional choice to demonstrate solidarity with people who are working to improve systems of support for people with disabilities and mental health concerns. There may be words not discussed in this section that can cause distress for people using our services. We will do our best to reduce potential distress by using non-judgmental or triggering language whenever possible.

Reclaimed Language

Sometimes people may use seemingly derogatory language toward themselves and others in their group. Examples include "mad," "crazy," and "crip." If you do not identify in those groups, it is very disrespectful to use these words. People who are interviewed or write their own stories for this project may do so to describe themselves. If you are not a member of those groups, use person-first language as your standard.

Gender and Gender Identity

For all individuals interviewed or written about for this project, we will respect their self-identified pronouns. When discussing someone whose gender identity is unknown, we will use "they/them" pronouns unless told otherwise.

Cultural Humility

We will practice cultural humility in all of our interactions. Cultural humility is being open to new ideas and experiences, appreciating the culture of others, accepting cultural practices that may be different than our own, and being flexible in how people experience their own culture . We will do our best to educate ourselves on a variety of cultural topics, but we are still limited in our knowledge and will not know about every person's unique circumstances. Because we strive to include and understand diverse perspectives in our content and language, please send us feedback about our website material. We want everyone to feel welcome in our online community.