

National Communications Charter

Tool One: Language Guide - Mental Illness

Do say

- ✓ A person is 'living with' or 'has a diagnosis of' a mental illness
- ✓ A person is 'being treated for' or 'someone with' a mental illness
- ✓ A person 'has a diagnosis of', or 'is being treated for' schizophrenia
- ✓ The person's behaviour was unusual or erratic
- ✓ Accurate terminology for treatments e.g. antidepressants, psychiatrists, mental health hospital
- ✓ Seek help and support via help-seeking resources and services

Don't say

- ✗ Terms such as 'mental patient', 'nutter', 'lunatic', 'psycho', 'schizo', 'deranged', 'mad'
- ✗ Someone with a mental illness is a 'victim', 'suffering from', or 'afflicted with' a mental illness
- ✗ A person is 'a schizophrenic', 'an anorexic'
- ✗ Use words such as 'crazed', 'deranged', 'mad', 'psychotic'
- ✗ Use words such as 'happy pills', 'shrinks', 'mental institution'
- ✗ Terms like 'psychotic dog', using 'schizophrenic' to denote duality such as a 'schizophrenic economy'

Why?

- Because using language that sensationalises mental illness can reinforce stigma
- Because terminology can suggest a lack of quality of life for people with mental illness
- Because it can label a person by their mental illness
- Because it is inaccurate and can imply the existence of a mental illness
- Because using colloquialisms about mental illness can undermine help-seeking behaviour
- Because terminology used out of context can trivialise mental illness