

What is person-first language and why use it?

Using person-first language means that we make our best efforts to use language that describes the lived experience of people without reinforcing harmful stigmatizing labels. These labels imply that one group is inferior to the other and separate “us” from “them,” which can contribute to people feeling marginalized and excluded.

We promote person-first language because it prioritizes the person instead of the condition and is less likely to perpetuate stigma. Decreasing stigma is key because it is the biggest barrier to care and often described as one of the worst parts of living with a mental health condition.

Instead of Saying This	Say This	Why It Matters
<p>“The guests at the front desk are driving me crazy with their constant demands!”</p> <p>“This new menu is nuts!”</p>	<p>“The people at the front desk are frustrating me with their constant demands.”</p> <p>“The new menu is interesting / complicated.”</p>	<p>These statements can belittle people’s experience with mental illness. Using person-first language fosters inclusivity and empowers people who live with mental illness to speak more openly about their experience without fearing judgement.</p>
<p>“My colleague suffers from depression.”</p> <p>“I’ve heard that our manager is mentally ill.”</p>	<p>“My colleague lives with depression.”</p> <p>“I’ve heard that our manager is living with a mental health problem.”</p>	<p>Updating this language matters because we don’t want to paint the person as a victim or define who they are solely by their mental illness.</p>
<p>“They committed suicide.”</p> <p>“They had a failed suicide.”</p>	<p>“They died by suicide.”</p> <p>“They attempted suicide or survived a suicide attempt”</p>	<p>Using the word commit is problematic because it implies criminality and that it’s a personal or selfish act. Also, success in the context of suicide is stigmatizing as it frames it as an achievement or a tragic event.</p>
<p>“People who abuse substances.”</p> <p>“They are a junkie or an addict.”</p>	<p>“People who use substances.”</p> <p>“They are in recovery.”</p>	<p>Stigma toward substance use is persistent. It stems from misinformation about the root of substance use disorder, which is a medical condition, not a personal failing.</p>