

This **Inclusive Language Guide** is designed to help your team replace stigmatizing terms with person-first, supportive language. Using inclusive language is a key step in building a "Stigma-Free Workplace" and ensuring psychological safety for all employees.

# Inclusive Language Guide: Fostering a Supportive Workplace

## I. The Core Principle: Person-First Language

Stigma is a primary reason people delay mental health treatment for 8 to 10 years. By putting the person before the condition, you foster an environment where employees feel safe to seek help without fear of being defined by their challenges.

Instead of...	Use...	Why it Matters
Addict / User / Junkie	<b>Person with a substance use disorder</b>	Removes the "moral failing" label and acknowledges it as a medical condition.
The Mentally Ill / Crazy	<b>Person managing a mental health condition</b>	Emphasizes the person's identity over their diagnosis.
Committed Suicide	<b>Died by suicide</b>	Removes the criminal connotation associated with the word "committed."
Suffering from [Condition]	<b>Living with / Managing [Condition]</b>	Focuses on the person's active management and resilience rather than victimhood.



Schizophrenic / Bipolar	<b>Person with [Condition]</b>	Avoids defining an entire person by a single medical label.
Normal / Healthy people	<b>People without mental health conditions</b>	Avoids implying that those with conditions are "abnormal."

## II. Communicating with Empathy

When managers or peers discuss mental health, the way something is said is as important as the words used.

- **Use "I" Statements:** Instead of "You seem stressed," try "I have noticed you haven't seemed like yourself lately, and I wanted to check in".
- **Active Listening:** Focus on understanding the employee's perspective without immediately jumping to "fix" the problem.
- **Validate, Don't Dismiss:** Avoid phrases like "Just stay positive" or "It could be worse." Instead, use "I hear you, and that sounds like a lot to manage".

## III. Area-Specific Language Guidance

### 1. Suicide Prevention

- **Avoid:** "Suicide threat" or "Suicide gesture."
- **Use:** "Experiencing suicidal thoughts" or "Thinking about self-harm".
- **Action:** Directly discuss concerns about changes in behavior rather than using vague or coded language.

### 2. Supporting Caregivers

- **Avoid:** Assuming a caregiver's "distraction" at work is due to a lack of commitment.
- **Use:** Acknowledging the "Double Shift" and asking "What can I do to help you feel supported?".
- **Context:** Recognize that 1.7 million Ohioans are balancing these roles and may need flexible language around their schedules.

### 3. Addressing Disparities

- **Avoid:** Generalizations that ignore systemic bias or financial barriers.



- **Use:** "Culturally competent care" and "Upstream interventions" when discussing resources for diverse workforces.
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## **IV. Glossary of Key Terms**

- **Psychological Safety:** An environment where individuals feel safe to discuss challenges without fear of reprisal.
  - **Presenteeism:** Reduced productivity while at work, often due to unmanaged mental health conditions.
  - **Recovery:** A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness and strive to reach their full potential.
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**Visit the Resource Library for more tools for building your resilient workforce.**