LANGUAGE GUIDE

Your Words Matter

DESCRIBING A PERSON

Deficit-Based Language	Strength-Based, Person-First Language
Schizophrenic, bipolar, EBD	Person diagnosed with... person who experiences the following... in recovery from...
Addict, junkie, substance abuser	Person who uses substances; a person with substance use issues
Consumer, patient, client	Person in recovery, a person working on recovery, a person participating in services, person with lived experience
Frequent flyer, super utilizer	Frequently uses services and supports, is resourceful, a good self-advocate, attempts to get needs met

DESCRIBING BEHAVIOR

Good/bad, right/wrong	Different, diverse, unique
High- vs. low-functioning	Doing well vs. needs and supports
Suffering from, afflicted with	Person is experiencing, living with, working to recover from
Acting-out, crazy, having behaviors	Person's behaviors may indicate a trauma memory has been triggered, person is upset, person is dysregulated
Attention-seeking	Seeking to get needs met, seeking assistance to regulate
Criminogenic, delinquent, dangerous	Specify unsafe behavior, utilizing unsafe coping strategies
Denial, unable to accept illness, lack of insight	Person disagrees with diagnosis (honor the individual's perception of self)
Manipulative	Resourceful, trying to get help, able to take control in a situation to get needs met, boundaries are unclear
Oppositional, resistant, non-compliant, unmotivated	Constraints of the system don't meet the individual's needs, services and supports are not a fit for that person
Danger to others, danger to self, general danger	Describe behaviors that are threatening
Entitled	Person is aware of her/his rights, empowered

DESCRIBING SERVICE ACTIVITY

Deficit-Based Language		Strength-Based, Person-First Language
Baseline	⇒	Self-determined quality of life that was established at the first meeting
Clinical decompensation, relapse, failure	⇒	Person's needs have increased or changed
Discharged to aftercare	⇒	Person is connected to long-term recovery support
Maintaining clinical stability, abstinence	⇒	Promoting and sustaining recovery, building resilience
Treatment works	⇒	Person uses treatment to support his/her recovery
Case manager	⇒	Support coach, support guide, care coordinator ("I'm not a case, and you're not my manager")
Enable	⇒	Empower through empathy, emotional authenticity, and encouragement
Front-line staff, in the trenches	⇒	First responder, first point of contact

TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE

Failed suicide, unsuccessful attempt	⇒	Suicide attempt, attempted suicide
Successful or completed suicide	⇒	Died by suicide
Committed suicide	⇒	Took their own life
Chose to kill themselves	⇒	Died as a result of self-inflicted injury
Threatened	⇒	Disclosed

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- Assume people do well if they can
- People should not be reduced to acronyms
- Crisis is an opportunity to develop and apply coping skills
- Recovery is not linear - relapse is expected and support is increased as necessary
- Avoid using war metaphors and develop language that promotes strong relationships
- Honor people's preferences and identifications