

Stigma: Language Matters

“You finally decide to get help and then you're punished for it - pigeonholed into a diagnosis, shamed, labeled and discriminated against for life. The stigma can be worse than the illness.”

Stigma Is About Disrespect:

- It hurts, punishes and diminishes people
- It harms and undermines all relationships
- It appears in behavior, language, attitude and tone of voice
- It happens even when we don't mean it

Disrespectful Language:

- Crazy, lunatic, deficient, wacko, looney tune, psycho, afflicted, nut bar...
- Manic Depressive (when referring to a person)
- Schizophrenic
- Handicapped person
- Slow, low-functioning
- Normal (this is a setting on a dryer)

Respectful Language:

- Mental illness or psychiatric disorder
- Person with bipolar disorder
- Person who has schizophrenia
- Person with lived experience
- Able person

Remember...

Always put people first, not their disabilities. For example, remember to say, “Person with schizophrenia” rather than “schizophrenic”.

Always emphasize abilities, not limitations. Terms that are condescending must be avoided.

Never focus on a disability. Rather, focus on issues that affect the quality of life for everyone - accessible transportation, housing, community supports, etc.

Never portray successful persons with disabilities as “super humans”. This carries unrealistic expectations for others and is patronizing to those who accomplish something of importance or significance.

Never sensationalize a disability. This means not using such terms as “afflicted with”, “suffers from”, “victim of”...and so on.

Never use generic/stereotype labels/terms. Terms like “the retarded”, “the mentally ill”, etc. are unacceptable.

Never use a psychiatric diagnosis as metaphors for other situations. Terms like “a schizophrenic situation” are not only stigmatizing, but also inaccurate.

For more information, contact the [Manitoba Schizophrenia Society, Inc.](http://www.mss.mb.ca)
100-4 Fort Street, Winnipeg, MB R3C 1C4
Tel: (204) 786-1616 • Fax: (204) 783-4898 • Toll Free: 1-800-263-5545
E-mail address: info@mss.mb.ca
Website: www.mss.mb.ca

