

Inclusive Language Guide for Educators: Mental Health and Suicide

Tips on language to use and language to avoid:

<u>Inclusive Language:</u>	<u>Use</u>	<u>Avoid</u>
Is person-centered	“People with a mental illness” “They are living with a mental health issue” “He lived with a mental illness”	“They are mentally ill” “They are an addict” “He was mentally ill”
Isn’t discriminatory or insulting	“They are not themselves” “They are experiencing hallucinations”	“They are acting crazy; they are insane” “They have lost their mind” “They are psychotic”
Doesn’t equate diagnosis with identity	“They have schizophrenia” “Their name is Jack” (no mention of their mental illness)	“They are schizophrenic” “They are bipolar”
Doesn’t sensationalize	“They are living with anorexia”	“They are a victim of their anorexia” “They suffer from anorexia”
Doesn’t equate suicide as a crime or as a success	“They died by suicide” “They attempted to take their own life”	“They committed suicide” “They had a failed attempt at suicide” “They were successful at suicide”

Source: <https://ab.211.ca/inclusive-language-and-mental-health/>

Tips on language to use and language to avoid:

Do

- Say: “person with a mental health condition”
- Say: “a person who has been diagnosed with”
- Say: “a person with a mental health issue” or “person experiencing a mental health issue”
- Say: “X lives with a mental health condition”
- Consider the behaviors or attributes you are trying to describe and use those words instead i.e. unpredictable, erratic, impulsive, fastidious, meticulous, uncertain

Don't

- Don't say: “they are mentally ill” or “they were not normal”
- Don't define the person by their mental health issue
- Don't use terms like “suffer” or “suffering”
- Don't say: “X is/was mentally ill”
- Don't use insensitive and hurtful words like bonkers, crazy, nutter, loopy, loony bin, psycho, deranged, insane, mad, mental, manic.
- Don't use terms like schizophrenic, bipolar, OCD to describe behaviors or traits.

Source: <https://www.stampdestigma.org/stop-stigma/language-guide>

Tips for Art Educators:

- Say: “Van Gogh lived with unstable mental health” or “Van Gogh experienced mental illness” or “Van Gogh’s mental health fluctuated”
- Say: “Van Gogh experienced...”
- Say: “Van Gogh died by suicide.”
- Say “Van Gogh spent time in a psychiatric hospital”

Further Reading: <https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/stories/on-the-verge-of-insanity#17>

Video on Van Gogh and Mental Health: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/ey-exhibition-van-gogh-and-britain/van-gogh-challenging-myth>