

USING PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE WHEN REFERRING TO INDIVIDUALS WITH MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS AND CONDITIONS

Examples of Person First Language	
<p>Say:</p> <p>He/She <u>has</u> bipolar illness (or a diagnosis of...)</p> <p>He/She <u>has</u> schizophrenia (or a diagnosis of...)</p> <p>He/She <u>has</u> a mental health condition</p> <p>He/She <u>has</u> a mental illness</p> <p>Person (singular) with a mental illness (singular);</p> <p>Persons/people/individuals (plural) with mental illnesses<u>es</u> (plural)</p>	<p>Instead of:</p> <p>He/She <u>is</u> bipolar</p> <p>He/She <u>is</u> schizophrenic</p> <p>He/She <u>is</u> emotionally disturbed/mentally ill</p> <p>He/She <u>is</u> mentally ill</p> <p>The mentally ill... OR People with mental illness (singular)</p>

General Rules By Which to Speak, Write, Respect and Empower	
Having vs. Being	<p>To HAVE an illness, or to have the diagnosis of an illness, is notably different than to BE the illness.</p> <p>When I “have bipolar illness,” I recognize that aspect of myself, much as I recognize that I “have brown eyes.” When I “am bipolar,” I take on the identity of BEING bipolar. It becomes me, and I become it.</p> <p>When we talk about an individual as separate from their mental health condition, we recognize the person first, and we acknowledge the person’s power to overcome that condition and live a full life separate from it. I often tell people, “I may have it, but it doesn’t have me!”</p>
Singular vs. Plural	<p>Mental illnesses are diverse; there are many of them, and many types of them. To say that “people” (plural) have “mental illness” (singular), misses the breadth and diversity of the nature of mental illnesses.</p> <p>Therefore, one person has one illness (“person with a mental illness”). More than one person has more than one illness (“persons with mental illnesses”).</p> <p>To use the singular (illness) when speaking in the plural (people/individuals/persons) reinforces stigma and discrimination. It implies that there is only one mental illness, that it is “one size fits all.”</p>