

# Your Language Matters

## Schizophrenia and Psychosis

**The words you use matter.** You can break down negative stereotypes and give people hope by choosing words that are more relatable and promote understanding. This simple but caring approach will help people feel more comfortable and willing to talk openly about experiences with mental illness, such as schizophrenia, and reach out for support and treatment.

When talking about a person with schizophrenia, remember that the **diagnosis is just one aspect of the person** – not the whole person. The language below reflects some examples of how to use neutral, person-first language specific to schizophrenia and other conditions involving psychosis.

### Mental health condition

- A person with schizophrenia
- A person experiencing schizophrenia
- A person experiencing delusions

## RESIST

When talking about the care, support, and treatment a person with schizophrenia may receive, choose language that respects the individual experience and reflects the broader healthcare environment surrounding a person.

For instance, think about using “treatment engagement” or “treatment adherence” vs “treatment compliance” or “noncompliance” when talking about receiving medical care. A treatment resistant condition can also be mistaken for, and thereby mischaracterized as, noncompliance. Proactively engaging a person in all aspects of the treatment process keeps the focus on them and their strengths rather than viewing challenges or ineffective treatment as something the person is doing wrong and should be blamed for.

Seek opportunities to challenge stigmatizing language in everyday life. Consider the following examples, and other ways you can change the words you use.

- Instead of calling someone “delusional” or “psychotic” when they’re wrong or have a different opinion, think about using different terms – mistaken, incorrect, way off base.
- Avoid using the term “crazy” – it’s often used in everyday language to describe something that is significant or noteworthy. Find better, more precise language that doesn’t promote outdated ideas about mental illness.

## AVOID

**Avoid** language that entirely defines a person by their diagnosis, or frames it in a negative way. Examples of what to avoid include the following:

- A person is schizophrenic
- A person suffering from schizophrenia
- A psychotic person

**You can help foster a culture of understanding and support by choosing words that are clearer and more neutral.**