Mental Health and Addiction *Words Matter*

DIVISION OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

QUARTERLY MEETING

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Key Points

- The Power of Words
- Stigma, Prejudice, Discrimination
- Person-First Language
- Ways to Make a Difference

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words have power

"They have the power to teach, the power to wound, the power to shape the way people, think, feel and act towards others."

Otto Wahl

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Stigma

- A mark or sign of disgrace that sets a person or group apart.

- Social groups are devalued, rejected, and excluded based on socially discredited health conditions.

- Stigmatizing words often discourage, isolate, misinform, shame, and embarrass.

- Language can advance people's understanding of mental and substance use disorders as public health issues, medical issues, or as a disease.

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Stigma

- Using the word, "stigma," however tends to create or reinforce discrimination.

- Reinforces "other" – that people with behavioral health conditions are somewhat different than us.

- Many people living with mental health and substance use conditions state the stigma they face is often worse than the condition itself.

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Stigma….

- One of the biggest barriers to addiction and mental health treatment faced by individuals is stigma.

- Research has shown that people with substance use disorders are viewed more negatively than people with physical and psychiatric disabilities.

- Many people do not seek help due to shame and concerns about social, economic, and legal consequences.

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Defining People by their Disorder
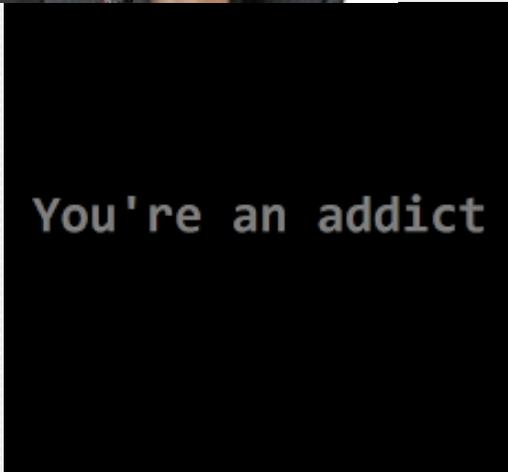
Sensationalizing Addiction
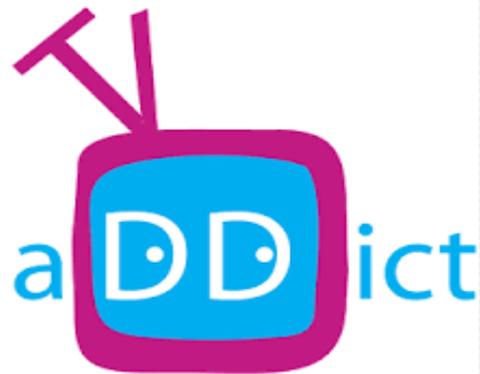
Sensationalizing Mental Illness
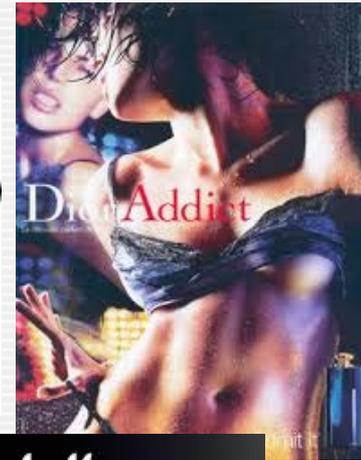
Generalizing Mental Illness
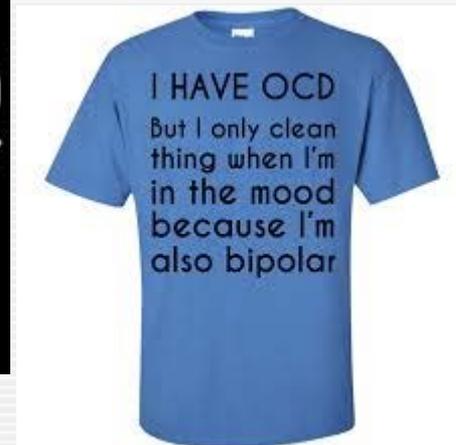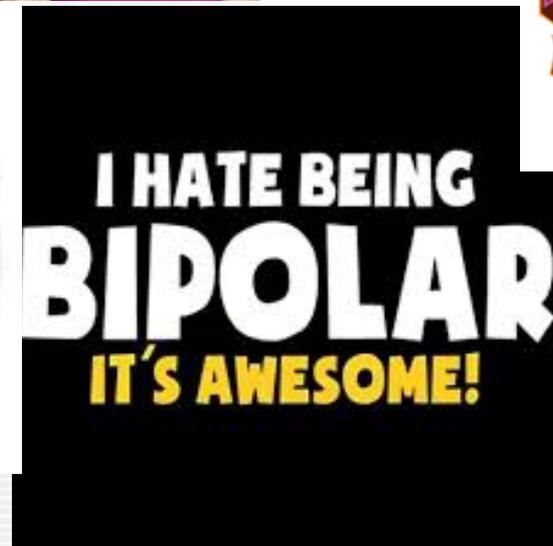
Using Words as Metaphors

- "I have an addictive personality."

- "I can't focus. It's my ADD."

- "The weather is so bipolar today."

- "I'm so OCD."

- "I'm so addicted to....."

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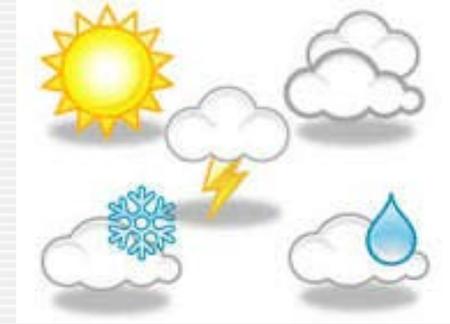
We Can all be Part of the Solution by..

taking a stand against discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping

- by changing the way we think about, talk about and treat people with behavioral health conditions.

- helping others view individuals living with substance use and mental health conditions (physical or other condition) beyond a lens of illness, diagnosis, and hopelessness.

- modeling principles of recovery and resiliency through our language choices.

- demonstrating our commitment to being culturally and linguistically appropriate in all our communication.

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Person First Language

- Person First Language refers to the individual first and the disability second.

- An objective way of acknowledging, communicating and reporting on disabilities. It eliminates generalizations, assumptions, and stereotypes by focusing on the person rather than the disability.

- While some people may not use preferred terminology, it's important not to repeat negative terms that stereotype, devalue, or discriminate.

- Equally important, ask if the disability is even relevant and if it needs to be mentioned when referring to individuals.

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Person First Language

Words to Avoid	Preferred Language
- Addict - Junkie - Substance User	- Person with a substance use disorder/condition - Person engaged in the risky use of substances - Person in active addiction - Person with lived experience
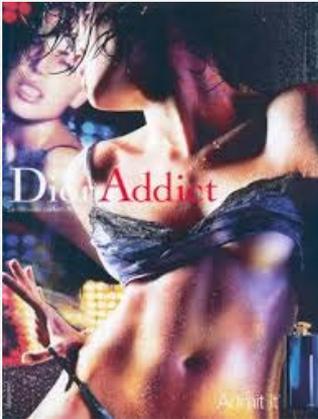
"Addict"

- It is not for us to define how individuals who have a substance use disorder or those in recovery choose to identify themselves.

- For many people the term "addict" is a helpful way of identifying symptoms and issues and finding a way to connect and bond in a healthy way that promotes change.

- However, the addict label suggests that the whole person is the problem rather than the problem being the problem.

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Person First Language

Words to Avoid	Preferred Language
▪ User	▪ Person with a substance use disorder/condition
▪ Abuse	▪ Person in active addiction.
▪ Abuser	▪ Person with an alcohol use disorder/condition.
▪ Alcoholic	
▪ Stoner	▪ Person engaged in the risky (unhealthy, excessive) use of substances
▪ Problem Drinker	
▪ Using	

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Person First Language

Words to Avoid	Preferred Language
- Habit - Drug Habit - Getting Clean - Clean/Sober	- Substance use disorder/conditon - Alcohol and drug disorder/condition - Alcohol and drug disease - Drug free/Free from illicit and non-prescribed medications

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Person First Language

Words to Avoid	Preferred Language
- Crazy, Lunatic, Spazz, Psychopath, Insane - Hysterics - Disturbed, Nuts, Retard, Psycho, Freak	- A person with a mental health disorder/condition - A person with lived experience

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Person First Language

Words to Avoid	Preferred Language
▪ Challenged, Handicapped	▪ A person living with a mental health disorder
▪ Not Normal/Normal	▪ A person with lived experience
▪ Sufferer, suffers from…	
▪ Victim	
▪ Afflicted with…	

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Person First Language

Words to Avoid	Preferred Language
• Clean/Dirty in regards to drug testing	• Testing negative for substance use
	• A person not currently using substances
	• Testing positive for substance use
	• A person who is currently using substances

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Person First Language

Words to Avoid	Preferred Language
- She's bipolar - Committed suicide - Drug Overdose	- A person with bipolar disorder/condition - Died by suicide - Lost by suicide - Drug Poisoning

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Person First Language

Words to Avoid	Preferred Language
▪ Substitution Therapy	▪ Medication Assisted Treatment
▪ Replacement Therapy	▪ Medication
▪ Drug	▪ Treatment
	▪ Medication Assisted Recovery

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Person First Language

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Current Language	Preferred Language
• Clients, Patients, Consumers	• The people in our program
	• The people we serve
• Drug of Choice	• Drug of use
• Relapse Prevention	• Recovery Management
• Relapse	• Recurrence/ Return to Use
	• Setback

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Ways to Make a Difference

- Look at our own negative, biased feelings, words, or behaviors.

- Focus on the person; not the condition.

- Not using mental health and addiction terms as metaphors.

- Challenge inaccuracies and stereotypes in media depictions.

- Educate others by providing factual information.

- Talk to someone with a mental illness and/or addiction condition face-to-face.

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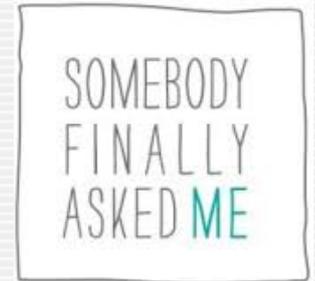
Ways to Make a Difference

- Encourage and empower people with mental health and addiction conditions.

- Tell someone who doesn't know your story of mental illness or addiction, or help others tell their story.

- Seek direct contact by volunteering for a behavioral health agency.

- Think about how to personally support and treat people who are living with a mental illness or substance use condition.

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