

Changing the language: a guide to language for mental health

Communication toolkit

March 2025



Download the guide at bit.ly/40tkJAA

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1. Changing the language: a guide to mental health language

A new guide has been developed to help encourage positive conversations and an improved understanding of the impact that language, words and phrases can have on people when they are accessing mental health support.

Launched by Sussex Health and Care, a partnership of organisations across Sussex, the '[Changing the language: a guide to language for mental health](#)', has been coproduced by people with an interest in supporting a positive change of the language we use. This has included people with lived and living experience of mental health difficulties and using services, experts by experience, families and carers, and people working in health and care services across Sussex.

Developing a guide

Originating as part of the [community mental health transformation programme in Sussex](#), the Mental Health Language Reference Group was formed to provide a forum for further learning and resources to be developed.

The group has written the guide together which brings together local learning and feedback from over 100 people that have been involved in the work throughout the last two years.

To find out more, please email spft.communitytransformation@nhs.net.

Who the guide is for, and how it should be used

The aspiration is that the guide will be used in conversations, workplace meetings, clinical appointments, and staff training. The guide does not provide a list of do's and don'ts, but instead offers suggestions of things we can all do to be more aware of the language we use.

As well as mental health language, the guide also provides guidance on communicating with specific groups of people, including people who speak English as an additional language or do not speak English, people who have accessibility needs and/or a disability, and people who are neurodivergent.

Throughout the guide there are also references to other useful resources and guidance to help support learning.



2. Sharing the guide

Printed materials

We have developed a poster and a 'top 10 tips' version of the guide, both of which direct people to view the full version of the guide online.

You can download and print these locally, or if you would like printed versions sent to you, please email: spft.communitytransformation@nhs.net.

- [Download poster](#)
- [Download 'top 10 tips' double-sided flyer](#)

Digital screens and screensavers

We have developed some graphics to be used on digital screens/televisions and screensavers. If you have access to these in your locations, for example GP surgeries, we would appreciate it if you can please display these.

- [Download digital screen graphic](#)

Social media

We have developed a range of example social media posts and graphics which you can use on your organisational social media channels. Please use these posts from **Thursday 6 March 2025**.

You can also help support the launch of the guide by liking and resharing posts shared by other colleagues and using the hashtag **#ChangingTheLanguage**.

Making social media accessible

Please use image description and alt text to make your social media accessible for blind and partially sighted people. Please refer to the [RNIB's accessibility checklist](#) for guidance.

- [Social media graphics - X, Facebook and Bluesky](#)
- [Social media graphics - Instagram](#)

Post copy	Graphic
A new guide has been launched to help encourage positive conversations and an improved understanding of the impact that language, words and phrases can have on people when they are accessing mental health support #ChangingTheLanguage	Facebook, X, Bluesky and LinkedIn: Choose a graphic Instagram: Choose a graphic

Intranet story and staff newsletters

Another way that you can help to promote the launch of the language guide is through your internal staff channels, including staff intranet and staff newsletters. Please see below an example of a message you can use:

Changing the language: a guide to mental health language

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Launched by Sussex Health and Care, a partnership of organisations across Sussex, the '*Changing the language: a guide to language for mental health*', has been coproduced by people with an interest in supporting a positive change of the language we use. This has included people with lived and living experience of mental health difficulties and using services, experts by experience, families and carers, and people working in health and care services across Sussex. The group has written the guide together which brings together local learning and feedback from over 100 people that have been involved in the work throughout the last two years.

The '*Changing the language: a guide to language for mental health*' is now available at: www.sussex.ics.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2025/01/Changing-Language-Guide-2025_28_01_25_Interactive.pdf.

If you have any questions or would like to get involved in this project, please email spft.communitytransformation@nhs.net.

About the Mental Health Language Reference Group

The Mental Health Language Reference Group is a collaboration of NHS, VCSE, and people with lived/living experience. The following organisations are members of the reference group and contributed to the development of the changing the language guide:

- BHT Sussex
- Capital
- NHS Sussex
- People Participation Team
- Possability People
- Southdown
- Sussex Coproduction and Lived Experience (SCALE) Network
- Sussex Health and Care
- Sussex Interpreting Services
- Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- West Sussex County Council
- West Sussex Mind

Contact us

To find out more about this project or to join the Mental Health Language Reference Group, please email spft.communitytransformation@nhs.net.



