



# W · I · S · E

Workforce Integration Support and Education

Program Director | Dawniell A. Zavala, Esq.  
dzavala@nocalmha.org  
Program Coordinator | Stephanie Ramos  
sramos@nocalmha.org

## STRENGTH BASED LANGUAGE

### The old worldview hides in our language

Because the illness worldview still predominates, we will need to be very intentional with our language: It is how we best express our new worldview. So now is a good time to start rethinking how you refer to yourself and others. Although we will not prescribe terms or language that we all must use, we will challenge each other to consider language that strengthens our wellness worldview and avoid language that may undermine it. Old habits die hard and so do old worldviews, so let's challenge each other respectfully, but challenge each other nonetheless.

**The Power of Worldview:** The power of how we see things is sadly revealed in the way people interpret a person's behavior simply on the basis of their perception of that person as *normal* or *diagnosed*:

**You**

and

**Me**

You as "Normal"	Me as "Diagnosed"
If you are overly excited, you're happy	If I'm overly excited, I'm manic
If you imagine the phone ringing all day, you're just stressed out	If I imagine the phone ringing, I'm psychotic
If you're crying and sleeping all day, you're sad and need some time off	If I'm crying and sleeping all day, I'm depressed and need to get up
If you're afraid to leave the house at night you're cautious	If I'm afraid to leave the house at night, I'm paranoid
If you speak your mind and express your opinions, you're assertive	If I speak my mind and express my opinions, I'm aggressive
If you don't like something and mention it, you're being honest	If I don't like something and mention it, I'm being difficult
If you get angry, you're upset	If I get angry, I'm dangerous and need to get medicated or restrained
If you overreact to something, you're sensitive	If I overreact to something, I'm out of control
If you don't want to be around other people, you're taking care of yourself and relaxing	If I don't want to be around other people, I'm isolating and avoiding
If you talk to strangers, you're being friendly	If I talk to strangers, I'm being inappropriate
If you speak bluntly to others, you're being rude	If I speak bluntly to others, I have a behavior problem
If you don't follow orders, you don't like being told what to do	If I don't follow orders, I'm being noncompliant
If your house is messy, you probably don't like housework	If my house is messy, I need to learn some ADLs (Activities of Daily Living)
If you ask someone out, it's a date	When I ask someone out, it's an outing to learn social skills
<b>For all these behaviors you are considered to be a human being having a normal emotional response</b>	<b>For many of these behaviors, I'm told to take a pill, or hospitalized</b>

(Thanks to Elaine Popovic and Debbie Sesula)

And the difference between **You** and **Me** is our labels.

WISE is a program of NorCal MHA funded by the California Mental Health Services Act (Prop 63) and administered by the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development (OSHPD)





# W · I · S · E

Workforce Integration Support and Education

a program of NorCal MHA

1908 O Street

Sacramento, CA 95811

P. 916.366.4600 | F. 916.855.5448

**The Power of Language:** Language has the power to stigmatize and demean, or respect and uplift. Some people who receive mental health or substances abuse services use the term “consumer” to refer to themselves and others, while others prefer to be called “survivors.” Some people now prefer the term “peer” while others simply prefer to be referred to as a “person” or a “person who receives services” or “individual living with a mental health condition.”

However, as people who are truly seeking wellness, let’s consider the power that language has before we make our personal choices. Let’s look at words that can hurt or help people.

<b>Words that stigmatize, demean and pathologize and invite discrimination:</b>	<b>Words that uplift us: that recognize and respect our shared humanity and strength:</b>
Manipulation	Survival mode; overwhelmed and trying to get needs met
Low functioning, under developed	Coping, fighter flight
Case, Patient, client consumer	Person receiving services, person, individual living with a mental health condition
Decompensating	Becoming ill, things are breaking down; things aren’t working
Non-compliant (or compliant)	Independent, autonomous, taking personal responsibility, freely exercising rights
Frequent flyer	Trying to get it right. Giving lots of opportunities to help
Unmotivated	Not ready, not helpful
“A _____.” (fill in the blank with any diagnosis)	“A person who has been given the diagnosis of _____.”
Depressed	Sad, down in the dumps, worn out, need time to get well, anger/ fear
Symptomatic	Experiencing big feelings, intense feelings
Cutter	Experiencing pain through self-harm
Grandiose	Thinking big, expressing hopes and dreams, ambitious