

# TIPS FOR REPRESENTING MENTAL HEALTH IN LANGUAGE & IMAGERY



In partnership with Getty Images, **Be Vocal: Speak Up for Mental Health** is helping to reframe how mental health is represented. Help us change the conversation by **using more mindful language and imagery**, while keeping in mind that individuals often have their own preferences about how mental health is discussed. While there is no “one-size-fits-all” standard, this document reflects general areas of consensus.

## LANGUAGE

- Use non-judgmental “people first language,” describing people as individuals rather than defining them by their mental health conditions.<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>

INSTEAD OF THIS <sup>2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10</sup>	TRY THIS
“He is mentally ill”	“He is living with a mental health condition”
“She is schizophrenic”	“She has schizophrenia / She is living with schizophrenia”
“He is psychotic / disturbed / crazy”	“He is disoriented / hallucinating / experiencing symptoms of psychosis / experiencing psychosis”
“She is afflicted with / suffers from / is a victim of bipolar disorder”	“She is living with bipolar disorder / She has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder”

- Provide context when discussing those who are living with mental health conditions, as a diagnosis does not define them or their lives.<sup>5</sup>
  - For example, describe people living with mental health conditions through their personal roles, such as being a daughter, friend or teacher.<sup>1</sup>
- Don’t make assumptions about a person’s mental health diagnosis,<sup>2,3</sup> and respect a person’s decision if they choose not to discuss their diagnosis openly.

“Sometimes, without even knowing it, the images and words we use can be hurtful or inaccurate—particularly when it comes to mental health. If we as a society make the effort to be a little more mindful about the imagery and language we use, we have the power to help change perceptions of mental health in America. While some things are common sense, there are other tips I’ve learned as an advocate that I want to share with others.”

– Demi Lovato, Singer, Songwriter & Mental Health Advocate

## KNOW THE FACTS

Inform others about the facts to help reduce discrimination & raise awareness.<sup>2,3</sup>

- ANYONE**, regardless of age, gender, sex, ethnicity or race, can develop a mental health condition.<sup>11,12,13</sup>
- ONE IN FIVE ADULTS**, or approximately 43.4 million Americans, will experience a mental health condition in any given year.<sup>14</sup>
- PERCEPTIONS OF MENTAL HEALTH CAN VARY** across different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.<sup>7</sup>
- An individual with a mental health condition is **TEN TIMES MORE LIKELY** to be the target of a violent crime as opposed to a person without a mental health condition.<sup>15</sup>



# IMAGERY

- Attitudes and beliefs can be shaped by visuals. Using realistic imagery of people living with mental health conditions is important.<sup>11,16</sup>
- Images of people living with mental health conditions often only portray individuals as sad or unstable; however, we can change these perceptions by using images that reflect various experiences / emotions.<sup>2,7</sup>
- Using powerful images is crucial in telling a story, according to Getty Images. To reframe imagery surrounding mental health, use visuals that:<sup>17</sup>
  - » Depict people going about their lives
  - » Represent a diverse range of people
  - » Don't only showcase individuals by themselves
  - » Feature settings / emotions that are relatable

*Be Vocal* has created a collection of photos of ten individuals living with mental health conditions in an effort to promote authentic and responsible representations of mental health. These photos are available for free editorial use through Getty Images, which can be accessed [here](#).

“ Using the right visuals is essential when telling a story; it can change the way we perceive one another and make us more empathetic to each other's experiences. This is particularly true when it comes to stories involving mental health—imagery has the power to shift the conversation, inform our understanding and dissolve stigma around this topic once and for all. ”

– Pam Grossman,  
Director, Visual Trends, Getty Images

“ At the end of the day the decision comes down to how we can best represent ‘regular’ people and their mental health conditions. The deciding line is always what is most respectful, yet artistically appealing. ”

– Joanne Doan,  
Publisher, *bp* Magazine & *esperanza*

To learn more about how you can advance mental health in America and help reframe the conversation, visit [BeVocalSpeakUp.com](http://BeVocalSpeakUp.com)

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