

Language Normalization

A Resource for Providers

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Normalizing Language in Mental Health

Normalization is a cognitive behavioral therapy strategy that may help patients understand their feelings and experiences are often felt by others, even those not diagnosed with a mental health condition. Normalizing patients' issues and concerns may help support recovery. The key messages of normalization are:

- The patient is not alone
- Many people experience mental health issues and symptoms every day
- Symptoms may be effectively managed and/or treated

You can help provide an understanding and accepting view to patients managing a mental health condition. You can help them see that they are not alone with their thoughts and feelings by pointing out that their experience of emotional distress may be common and understandable.

The goals of normalization aim to help the patient:

- Develop healthy thoughts and knowledge about his or her condition
- Minimize self-criticism
- Embrace a problem-solving way of thinking



- Regard health care providers as allies in recovery treatment and management

In normalization, it is common to share with patients that many famous people—actors, politicians, artists, and writers—cope with mental health conditions. Many have shared their stories to help overcome associated mental health stigmas. You may want to encourage patients to look online for these postings or books.



Examples of normalizing statements:

- *“It is common for a person to forget to take or miss a dose of his or her medication.”*
- *“Your mental health condition is a medical condition like diabetes: the more you understand the condition and manage the symptoms, the better you may do.”*
- *“It is okay to need a shot or pill to manage your condition. Almost everyone needs medicine at some point in his or her life.”*
- *“People with mental health conditions have meaningful lives with healthy relationships, lots of interests, and positive daily activities and experiences.”*
- *“It is easy to get confused when we are under stress.”*
- *“The road to wellness, can take time, and everyone’s time frame and course may be different.”*



Normalization is a strategy that can be used to support a strong therapeutic relationship. As the provider, your role in that relationship should reflect:

- Friendliness
- A relaxed approach
- Respect
- Honesty
- Empathy

Helping patients understand that their experiences and thoughts are similar to others may encourage them to accept their condition, diminish self-criticism, and motivate them to work toward a healthy recovery.



Engagement strategies can help support patient care.

Reference: Wright JH, Turkington D, Kingdon DG, Ramirez Basco M. Cognitive-Behavior Therapy for Severe Mental Illness: An Illustrated Guide. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association Publishing; 2009.