

# PEOPLE MATTER, WORDS MATTER™

## ARE YOU USING **CARING AND CONCERNED LANGUAGE** **ABOUT CHILD & ADOLESCENT** BEHAVIORAL HEALTH?

Language matters in compassionate care, and that is not just limited to what we say in front of a patient. What you say behind closed doors can be the seed for stigma, and may lead people to distrust and avoid treatment.

Children and adolescents were already facing a behavioral health crisis before the COVID-19 pandemic began – and the pandemic has dramatically accelerated that crisis. Stigma often prevents children and adolescents from getting the help they need. What you say matters in helping youth feel safe, understood and willing to seek care.

### IF YOU HEAR THIS ...

- ▶ What do kids have to be depressed or anxious about? I bet they're faking it, or just not trying to cope with stressful situations.
- ▶ Kids today don't know how to behave — they're aggressive and disrespectful. Kids wouldn't act this way if they were disciplined.
- ▶ These kids aren't mentally ill; they just haven't been parented right.
- ▶ Why do these insane kids have to come here for treatment? I work here to help kids with real illnesses like cancer or heart disease.
- ▶ That kid doesn't need medication. They just need to be more motivated to act right.

[ THESE WORDS PROPAGATE STIGMA  
AND DON'T RECOGNIZE  
A YOUTH'S VALUE. ]

### CONSIDER RESPONDING WITH...

- Mental illness doesn't discriminate by age. In fact, 75% of all behavioral health disorders begin by age 24.
- Children and adolescents' misbehaviors are often caused by fear or unmet needs. Asking a child how you can help can go a long way in improving behaviors.
- Mental illness in youth is more common than you think. According to the Academy of Pediatrics, one in five of all children have an identified mental health condition each year.
- Behavioral health disorders are medical problems, just like heart disease or cancer. Using demeaning slang only exacerbates the stigma of seeking treatment.
- Medications, often combined with psychotherapy, can play an impactful role in treating behavioral health disorders, just like medications can impact cancer or diabetes.

[ THESE WORDS SHOW COMPASSION  
AND COMBAT STIGMA. ]

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