

PEOPLE MATTER,TM WORDS MATTER

ARE YOU USING **CARING AND COMPASSIONATE** LANGUAGE ABOUT **EATING DISORDERS**?

Language matters in compassionate care, especially in behavioral health care, and is not limited to what we say in front of patients and families. What we say behind closed doors with co-workers can be the seed for stigma and perpetuate discrimination against a person based on a physical or mental health disorder.

According to a 2020 report from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, one person dies as the direct result of an eating disorder every 52 minutes. When we talk about eating disorders, we might unintentionally hurt or trigger somebody who is struggling, even when our comments are well-intentioned. Sometimes there is a discrepancy between what we mean to say and how others perceive our statements.

INSTEAD OF SAYING THIS...

- ▶ You look great! Did you gain/lose weight?
- ▶ You're not overweight/underweight, so you can't have a serious eating disorder.
- ▶ Why don't you just eat normally?
- ▶ I've never seen you binge, purge, or deprive yourself of food – you can't be sick.
- ▶ You can't have an eating disorder; only young white women have eating disorders.
- ▶ You just need to make better choices about diet and exercise.

CONSIDER SAYING THIS ...

- You seem happier and brighter. / You look confident about yourself — and it suits you.
- Thank you for trusting me enough to share that you're struggling. This is difficult and I'm here to help.
- I know everyone's relationship with food is different and while I may not have experienced what you're going through, I do care and I'm here to support you.
- I know much of the struggle happens behind closed doors. I'm here to listen if you want to share.
- Can I help you find resources that speak to you?
- I'm concerned about how this has physically and psychologically impacted you. Would you be interested in some resources to learn more about the impact on your health?

Thank you to Sheppard Pratt for being a source of information and talking points on this topic.