

# What to Say/Not to Say

SAY THIS	NOT THIS	WHY
<p><i>You don't seem like yourself. Do you want to talk about it?</i></p>	<p><i>You need to cheer up/change your attitude. Stop being so negative; just start living.</i></p>	<p>Mental illness is not a choice. A person can't will themselves out of it. Negative thinking is a symptom of mental illness and as difficult to change as symptoms of other illnesses. Like other illnesses, managing symptoms requires treatment such as therapy or medication. Instead of shutting the person down with platitudes, you want to open up conversation so you can direct them to help.</p>
<p><i>It seems like you're going through a tough time. How can I help?</i></p>	<p><i>Everyone feels that way sometimes.</i></p>	<p>Minimizing or downplaying a person's experience is demotivating.</p>
<p><i>I'm worried about you. Can we talk about what's bothering you?</i></p>	<p><i>Just pray about it.</i></p>	<p>Many people seek their faith to help guide them in their moments of struggles, but it's not the only answer. Consider the person hearing this may feel you are suggesting they haven't been trying hard enough. Faith can be very healing but we should not shame people for seeking other tools such as such as medications and therapy.</p>
<p><i>Are you comfortable talking about this? If not, is there someone else you can talk to? Can I help you reach out to them?</i></p>	<p><i>You should just (fill in the blank.) Snap out of it. Shake it off.</i></p>	<p>Mental illness is not something a person has chosen or can resolve quickly. Giving pat answers downplays the seriousness of the problem and invalidates the person's experience. You may think they're being ridiculous, but if you want to keep lines of communication open, you'll shift your tone and words.</p>
<p><i>How can I/we support you?</i></p>	<p><i>Why are you acting so weird?</i></p>	<p>Words like weird, crazy, nuts, etc., are demeaning and makes a person feel they are to blame. We want to empower, not discourage.</p>
<p><i>Do you know where you can go for help?</i></p>	<p><i>You have the same illness as (fill in the blank.)</i></p>	<p>Shifting the discussion away from their story to another person's story eclipses the other person's story. You want to give them the space to talk. Also, it's inappropriate to talk about another person's illness. It's not your story to tell.</p>

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<i>Are you thinking about harming yourself?</i>	<i>Nothing</i>	Yes, it's okay to ask. It's a myth to think that you will put the idea in their head. Asking is actually the first step to prevention. Having the conversation can help saves lives.
<i>It sounds like you're feeling hopeless. Do you know where to go to for help? I can sit with you while you call EAP if you like.</i>	<i>You have so much to live for. Think about your children, parents, etc.</i>	Individuals experiencing suicidal thoughts do not do so by choice. Suicidal thoughts are a terrifying experience and are symptoms resulting from mental illness or a difficult life situation. Shaming the person is unlikely to help and highly likely to cause them to stop sharing with you or anyone. You want them to seek help, not retreat into their dark place.
<i>Nothing, let them have the floor</i>	<i>The same thing happened to me!!</i>	Rushing in with your own story eclipses the other person's story. You want to give them the space to talk.
<i>In my experience, what worked for me is...</i>	<i>You should... You need to... You ought to...</i>	Should, would, could, must, need to, ought to, have to, are all words you should see as warning signs you' may be heading into shame, blame, and guilt territory.
<i>I suffer from OCD. I have bipolar disorder. I have schizophrenia.</i>	<i>I am OCD. I am bipolar. I am schizophrenic.</i>	We treat our illness as an illness. Our illness doesn't define us, it's just one part of us. Our value as a person is not equated with our illness. We would never say "I am cancer" or "I am Crohn's".
<i>She was having thoughts of suicide.</i>	<i>She was suicidal.</i>	Suicidal thoughts are very powerful and can seem like they define a person, but they do not. We want to acknowledge that people are not their thoughts, they are complex, valuable human beings.
<i>He died by suicide. He attempted to end his life and survived.</i>	<i>He committed suicide. He attempted suicide and failed.</i>	We want to combat the age-old stigma of blaming people for having a mental illness. Consider how saying "he committed or attempted" insinuates blame on the person, whereas the first examples state fact.

# What to Say/Not to Say

## About National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

NAMI was founded in 1979 and has become the nation's voice on mental health. We are an association of hundreds of local affiliates, state organizations and tens of thousands of volunteers who work together to raise awareness and to provide support and education. In Florida, our state NAMI office is located in Tallahassee. NAMI Florida and NAMI Jacksonville join together to offer NAMI programs in your area free of charge to all participants. If you would like to learn more about NAMI, go to our website (Jacksonville: [www.namijax.org](http://www.namijax.org), National: [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)).

## NAMI Programs

All NAMI programs are free to the public. More programs are available. For Jacksonville-based programs go to: <https://namijax.org/programs/>. Outside of Jacksonville locate your local NAMI: <https://nami.org/Find-Your-Local-NAMI/Affiliate?state=FL>

## NAMI Peer-to-Peer

8-week class led by trained peers to help individuals with mental illness better understand their condition and build a journey toward recovery. Registration required.

- Jacksonville: <https://namijax.org/peer-to-peer-class/>

## NAMI Family-to-Family

8-week class led by trained family members who have been there to help families understand their loved one's mental illness, strategies for handling crises, and gain empathy and coping skills. Registration required.

- Jacksonville: <https://namijax.org/family-to-family-class/>

## NAMI In Our Own Voice

40/60/90-minute presentations from people with lived experience who talk openly about what it's like to live with a mental health condition. These presentations change attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs. Any organization can request the presentation be held at their organization.

- <https://namijax.org/in-our-own-voice/>

## NAMI Basics

6 session online education program for parents, caregivers and other family who provide care for youth (ages 22 and younger) who are experiencing mental health symptoms. Self-paced and available 24/7.

- <https://namijax.org/basics-on-demand/>

## NAMI Homefront

6 session educational program for families, caregivers and friends of military service members and veterans with mental health conditions. Taught by trained family members of service members/veterans.

- <https://namijax.org/homefront-on-demand/>

## NAMI Ending the Silence

50-minute presentation designed for middle and high school students that include warning signs, facts, and statistics, and how to get help for themselves or a friend. Conducted upon request.

- <https://namijax.org/ending-the-silence/>