Person-First Language as a Person-Centered Practice

Holly Fullmer, MS, CDCORP, CTCM
Trauma-Informed Policy and Training Specialist
Office of Mental Health Coordination

July 2024

1

Agenda

TEXAS
Health and Human Services

- Introductions
- Overview of Person-First Language
- Person-First Language in Context

2

2

Introduce Yourself (1 of 2)

- We will introduce ourselves in a way that encourages us to go deeper into reflecting on and sharing who we are as human beings.

- **Share three stories about yourself.** Please share what comes up in the moment or what feels most important; you don't need to include all details.

TEXAS
Health and Human Services

3

3

Introduce Yourself (2 of 2)

TEXAS
Health and Human Services

1. **Place:** What is a place that has shaped you? That could be where you grew up, where you live now, or any other place that has meaning to you. It could be your own story, the story of your ancestors, and/or the story of people who lived on the land.

2. **Name:** Who named you, and why did they name you? What is the journey you have been on with your name? Your name is part of your origin story and situates you in the context of your family, community, and world.

3. **Intention:** What are you willing to take responsibility for? What are you willing to receive today? What are you willing to give?

4

4

Person-First Language

How to put the person first in conversations about supports

5

5

Why Person-First Language?

- Respect and dignity
- Focus on the individual
- Impact on perception
- Inclusive communication
- Promoting positive outcomes
- Educational importance
- Policy and practices
- Critiques and alternatives

6

6

Examples of Diagnosis- or Deficit-First Language vs. Person-First Language

TEXAS Health and Human Services

Diagnosis or Deficit-First	Person-First
Addict	Person with a substance use disorder, person in recovery
High (or low)-functioning	Specifically describe what's going on for the person
They are ADHD or hyperactive	They are working with ADHD or hyperactivity
Frequent flyer	Uses our services when they need to
People are suicidal or having suicidal ideation	People impacted by suicide or experiencing thoughts of suicide
She committed suicide	Death by suicide, killed themself
He is severely mentally ill	He has a mental health diagnosis
Suffers with, suffers from	Person with, who has a diagnosis of
Non-compliant, non-adherent	Chooses not to because …

7

7

Reframe Problems or Symptoms into Needs

TEXAS Health and Human Services

Instead of:

- **Those with serious mental illness**
  - ▶ They need supports to navigate their emotional wellness and mental health
- **They are manic or has mania**
  - ▶ Describe what that means or looks like for the person
- **They have behavioral problems**
  - ▶ They need behavioral supports or could benefit from emotional navigation strategies
- **They have reading problems**
  - ▶ The need individual support with reading
- **They isolate and withdraw**
  - ▶ They could benefit from more friends and genuine supports
- **They have anger issues or are aggressive**
  - ▶ They need a safe space for physical release when ignited with intense emotions

8

8

Impacts of Not Using Person-First Language

- Fosters pity and low expectations
- Perpetuates negative stereotypes and reflects prejudice
- Devalues and disrespects people as individuals
- Limits the person's identity
- Defines the person by their diagnosis
- Robs the person of the opportunity to define themselves
- Increases bias, stigma, and shame

TEXAS
Health and Human Services

9

9

Person-First Language in Context

Person-first language is part of a larger person-centered approach to thinking, planning, and practice

TEXAS
Health and Human Services

10

Person-Centered Approaches

Person-centered thinking
- A foundational principle requiring consistency in language, values, and actions
- The person and their loved ones are experts in their own lives
- Equal emphasis on quality of life, well-being, and informed choice

Person-centered practices
- Alignment of services and systems to ensure the person has access to the full benefits of community living
- Service delivery that facilitates the achievement of the person's desired outcomes

Person-centered planning
- A methodology that involves learning about a person's preferences and interests for a desired life and the supports (paid and unpaid) to achieve it
- Directed by the person, supported by others selected by the person

NCAPPS — National Center on Advancing Person-Centered Practices and Systems

TEXAS
Health and Human Services

11

11

How Do We Think About Person-Centered Practices and Systems?

Negative perspectives on illness and disability have led to a 'SYSTEMS focus.'

- Person-centered approaches draw from human rights approaches to health and wellbeing.
- A person-centered system of support builds the capacity of each person based on who they are.

TEXAS
Health and Human Services

12

12

Trauma/Recovery Model

Non-Person-Centered	Person-Centered
Assumes mental health problems are biologically based	Assumes that mental health problems are complex and not fully understood; environmental, developmental, cultural and other factors are major contributors
What's wrong with you?	What happened to you?
Focus on illness, weaknesses	Focus on wellness, strengths
Emphasis on the brain in isolation	Emphasis on the person with experiences and interests
Recovery means symptom reduction	Recovery means a full life
Maladaptive or unhealthy behaviors viewed as defiant	Maladaptive or unhealthy behaviors viewed as coping attempts
Medications are central to symptom reduction	Medication is seen as equally important to psychosocial and other supports (people, places, purpose) for recovery
People are encouraged to comply with treatment interventions	People are empowered to take charge of their own recovery
The helper is the expert and the client is dependent on the helpers' expertise	The client is the expert and the helper is a coach

Adapted from the July NCAPPS webinar "The Three Legs of the Stool: A Framework for Person-Centered Community Mental Health Services"

13

13

Living with Mental Illness
Why Person-First Language?

https://youtu.be/DanoV5vlc4o?feature=shared

14

14

Reflection

- How did Ronald Banks' poem make you feel?

- Did any of these characterizations seem familiar?

- How could you incorporate more person-centered approaches in your daily work?

TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

15

15

TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Thank You!

Holly Fullmer, MS, CDCORP, CTCM
Holly.Fullmer@hhs.texas.gov

16

16