

CASRA Core Values Learning Series

Language: What We Say Matters!

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"If you treat an individual as he is, he will stay as he is, but if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be and could be, he will become what he ought and could be."

- Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

So much of what happens in "helping professions" is based on a deficit model. The assumption is that the person is lacking something that needs to be "installed." The implicit message is, "I have what you need and I'm going to give it to you" be it knowledge, insight, diagnosis, wisdom, reality, rationality or coping skills. Our evaluations often become focused on detecting deficits to be corrected by professional expertise. This approach is reasonable in auto repair or treating infections but it usually doesn't work well when recovery is the focus.



2

Language



"Words, like the chisel of the carver, can create what never existed before rather than simply describe what already exists. As a man speaks, not only is the thing which he is declaring coming into existence, but also the man himself."

(Martin Heidegger)

"Speaking isn't neutral or passive. Every time we speak, we bring forth a reality. Each time we share words we give legitimacy to the distinctions that those words bring forth."

(Freedman and Combs 1996)



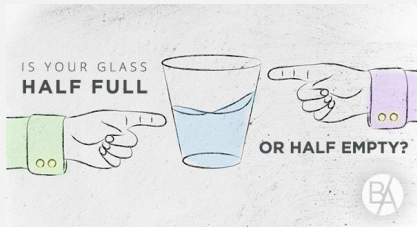
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The Power of Language



4

The Glass Half Empty...The Glass Half Full Exercise
Translate the Deficit-based Language into
Strengths-Based, Person-Centered Language



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"Member / Client / Participant claims current daily usage is 5 - 7 beers on the weekdays and up to 12 beers on the weekends."

"He/She describes his/her current daily usage as 5 - 7 beers/day on weekdays and up to 12 beers/day on the weekends."



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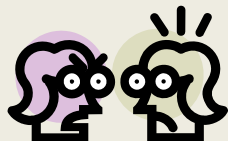
"It is not our job to pass judgment on who will and will not recover from mental illness and the spirit breaking effects of poverty, stigma, dehumanization, degradation and learned helplessness. Rather our job is to participate in a conspiracy of hope."

Patricia Deegan, Ph.D.



8

What We Say Matters!



How will you stay aware of your use of language when others continue to use medical words?

How will you respectfully challenge the mental health language of someone else?



9

CASRA Person-Centered Language: What We Say Matters! References

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