Activity Plan

NAME OF THE ACTIVITY: WORDS MATTER: LANGUAGE FOR HEALING & MENTAL HEALTH INCLUSION

OVERVIEW

THIS ACTIVITY IS FOR REPLACING HARMFUL MENTAL HEALTH TERMS WITH RESPECTFUL LANGUAGE, PRACTICE INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION, AND CREATE GROUP GUIDELINES TO REDUCE STIGMA AND IMPROVE SUPPORT

OBJECTIVES:

- IDENTIFY STIGMATIZING VS. EMPOWERING MENTAL HEALTH LANGUAGE.
- PRACTICE PERSON-FIRST, RECOVERY-ORIENTED PHRASING.
- DEVELOP CULTURALLY ADAPTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS.
- CREATE A GROUP "LANGUAGE CHARTER" FOR ONGOING SUPPORT.

GROUP SIZE:

15-30 MAX

TARGET GROUP:

EDUCATORS, HEALTHCARE WORKERS, OR MIXED GROUPS.
KEY CONSIDERATION: ADAPT FOR LITERACY LEVELS (USE VISUALS/ICONS IF NEEDED).
WARNING FOR POSSIBLE TRIGGERING MOMENTS

THEMES ADDRESSED:

- REDUCING STIGMA THROUGH LANGUAGE.
- CULTURAL HUMILITY IN COMMUNICATION.

MATERIALS:

- VISUALS: CONTRASTING PHRASES ON POSTERS.
- TECH: POLLS FOR REAL-TIME WORD VOTES (MENTIMETER).

RESOURCES:

- BASIC SUPPLIES
- PRINTED PHRASE EXAMPLES ("BAD" VS. "GOOD" LANGUAGE).
- PENS, STICKY NOTES, POSTERS.
- FACILITATOR TOOLS
- TIMER, SCRIPT/AGENDA.
- LIST OF LOCAL MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS.
- ROOM SETUP
- CHAIRS IN A CIRCLE, WALL SPACE FOR POSTERS.
- OPTIONAL EXTRAS
- EMOJI CARDS FOR FEEDBACK.
- FREE POLLING APP (LIKE MENTIMETER).
- VIRTUAL VERSION:
- SCREEN-SHARING FOR SLIDES, BREAKOUT ROOMS.

COMPLEXITY AND TIME:

LEVEL: MODERATE (REQUIRES NUANCE).
60-90 MIN

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Mental Health
Literacy

1. OPENING (15 MIN)
ACTIVITY: "WORD ASSOCIATION"
ASK: "WHAT WORDS COME TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR 'MENTAL HEALTH' ?"
WRITE RESPONSES ON A BOARD. CIRCLE EMPOWERING TERMS (E.G., "RESILIENCE"), BOX STIGMATIZING ONES
(E.G., "CRAZY").

2. MAIN ACTIVITIES (60 MIN)
ACTIVITY 1: "REWRITING THE NARRATIVE" (30 MIN)
STEP 1: CONTRASTING LANGUAGE
PROVIDE PAIRS WITH COMMON PHRASES TO REFRAME:
1. MOOD DISORDERS
STIGMATIZING: "SHE'S SO MANIC-DEPRESSIVE."
EMPOWERING: "SHE MANAGES BIPOLAR DISORDER."
LEARNING OUTCOME: AVOIDS DEFINING SOMEONE BY THEIR DIAGNOSIS.
STIGMATIZING: "HE'S SO MOODY—MUST BE OFF HIS MEDS."
EMPOWERING: "HE'S WORKING ON FINDING THE RIGHT TREATMENT BALANCE."
LEARNING OUTCOME: REDUCES SHAME AROUND MEDICATION.

2. SUICIDE & SELF-HARM
STIGMATIZING: "FAILED SUICIDE ATTEMPT."
EMPOWERING: "SURVIVED A SUICIDE ATTEMPT."
LEARNING OUTCOME: HONORS RESILIENCE, NOT "FAILURE."
STIGMATIZING: "CUTTING FOR ATTENTION."
EMPOWERING: "USING SELF-HARM TO COPE WITH OVERWHELMING PAIN."
LEARNING OUTCOME: RECOGNIZES IT AS A COPING MECHANISM, NOT MANIPULATION.

3. PSYCHOSIS & NEURODIVERSITY
STIGMATIZING: "HE'S SCHIZO."
EMPOWERING: "HE EXPERIENCES SCHIZOPHRENIA."
LEARNING OUTCOME: PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE REDUCES STIGMA.
STIGMATIZING: "SHE'S SO OCD ABOUT CLEANING."
EMPOWERING: "SHE HAS OCD, WHICH INCLUDES COMPULSIVE CLEANING."
LEARNING OUTCOME: AVOIDS TRIVIALIZING DISORDERS.

4. TRAUMA & PTSD
STIGMATIZING: "SHE'S SO TRIGGERED OVER NOTHING."
EMPOWERING: "SHE'S HAVING A TRAUMA RESPONSE."
LEARNING OUTCOME: VALIDATES PTSD AS A REAL NEUROLOGICAL REACTION.
STIGMATIZING: "JUST GET OVER IT."
EMPOWERING: "HEALING ISN'T LINEAR."
LEARNING OUTCOME: ACKNOWLEDGES THE COMPLEXITY OF TRAUMA RECOVERY.

5. SUBSTANCE USE
STIGMATIZING: "JUNKIE."
EMPOWERING: "PERSON WITH A SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER."
LEARNING OUTCOME: REMOVES DEHUMANIZING LABELS.
STIGMATIZING: "CLEAN" (VS. "DIRTY").
EMPOWERING: "IN RECOVERY" OR "NOT CURRENTLY USING."
LEARNING OUTCOME: AVOIDS MORALIZING LANGUAGE.
6. NEURODIVERSITY (AUTISM/ADHD)
STIGMATIZING: "HE'S SO WEIRD—MUST BE AUTISTIC."
EMPOWERING: "HE'S AUTISTIC, WHICH SHAPES HOW HE EXPERIENCES THE WORLD."
LEARNING OUTCOME: CELEBRATES NEURODIVERGENCE, NOT OTHERING.
STIGMATIZING: "JUST FOCUS HARDER!"
EMPOWERING: "WHAT STRATEGIES HELP YOU CONCENTRATE?"
LEARNING OUTCOME: ADHD IS A NEUROTYPE, NOT A WILLPOWER ISSUE.

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7. GENERAL MENTAL HEALTH
STIGMATIZING: "CRAZY/PSYCHO."
EMPOWERING: "LIVING WITH A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION."
LEARNING OUTCOME: REMOVES CRIMINAL/INSULTING CONNOTATIONS.
STIGMATIZING: "JUST THINK POSITIVE!"
EMPOWERING: "WOULD PROBLEM-SOLVING OR VENTING HELP MORE RIGHT NOW?"
LEARNING OUTCOME: TOXIC POSITIVITY DISMISSES REAL STRUGGLES.

ROLE-PLAY ACTIVITY
INSTRUCTIONS:
DIVIDE INTO PAIRS.
ASSIGN EACH PAIR ONE "BAD" PHRASE TO REWRITE AND PRACTICE DELIVERING THE "GOOD" VERSION.
GROUPS SHARE THEIR REFINED PHRASES WITH THE LARGER GROUP.
EXAMPLE ROLE-PLAY:
SCENARIO: A FRIEND SAYS, "YOU'RE SO BIPOLAR!" ABOUT SOMEONE'S MOOD SWINGS.
REFRAME: "IT SEEMS LIKE YOU'RE HAVING BIG EMOTIONAL SWINGS. WANT TO TALK ABOUT WHAT'S GOING ON?"

3. CLOSING (15 MIN)
SHARE KEY PRINCIPLES FOR EMPOWERED LANGUAGE
PERSON-FIRST: "PERSON WITH DEPRESSION" (NOT "DEPRESSED PERSON")
STRENGTHS-BASED: "MANAGING CHALLENGES" (NOT "SUFFERING FROM")
NON-JUDGMENTAL: "DIFFERENT ABILITIES" (NOT "PROBLEMS")
HOPEFUL: "IN RECOVERY" (NOT "VICTIM")
CULTURALLY AWARE: ASK PREFERRED TERMS

DEBRIEFING AND EVALUATION:

METAPHOR CHECK-OUT:
"IF OUR LANGUAGE TODAY WERE A TOOL, WOULD IT BE A HAMMER (HURTFUL) OR A BANDAGE (HEALING)?"

TIPS FOR FACILITATOR

- MODEL VULNERABILITY: "I USED TO SAY 'OCD' CASUALLY—NOW I SAY 'I'M PARTICULAR.'"
- USE ANALOGIES: "WORDS ARE LIKE SEEDS—THEY GROW THE ENVIRONMENT WE CREATE."
- OVERCORRECT PARTICIPANTS: GENTLY SUGGEST ALTERNATIVES.
- ASSUME PREFERENCES: ASK: "HOW WOULD YOU LIKE THIS DESCRIBED?"

FOLLOW UP

- "LANGUAGE ALLIES": PAIR PARTICIPANTS TO GENTLY CORRECT STIGMATIZING TERMS IN DAILY LIFE.
- GLOSSARY: PUBLISH THE GROUP'S EMPOWERING WORD BANK FOR THE COMMUNITY