

WORDS MATTER!

Reducing Stigma Through Alternative Terminology

Our words have power, especially when it comes to substance and opioid use disorders (SUD/ODU). Use this resource to identify stigmatizing language, and improve your vocabulary to help stop stigma in its tracks!

Instead of...

Try...

✘ Addict, alcoholic, drug abuser, drunk, junkie, tweaker, drug user; chemically-dependent

✘ Addicted infant

✘ Clean

✘ Co-dependency; enabling

✘ Crack baby

✘ Denial

✘ Dirty

✘ Dope sick

✘ Drug habit

✘ Experimental user

✔ A person with or suffering from a substance use disorder; a person misusing substances

✔ An infant with or suffering from neonatal abstinence syndrome

✔ A person abstinent from substance use, in remission, and/or in recovery; substance-free; free from illicit and non-prescribed medications; negative urine toxicology results

✔ These terms are discouraged because they pathologize family members' concern for their loved one and can imply shame, so they should be avoided altogether

✔ An infant exposed to cocaine or other psychostimulants

✔ Present lack of acknowledgement, sometimes used as a defense mechanism or coping strategy

✔ A person actively using substances; positive urine toxicology results

✔ Experiencing withdrawal symptoms from opioids

✔ This term refers to regular substance use. However, addiction is defined as a treatable, chronic medical disease that is complex. People with addictions use substances and engage in behaviors that become impulsive, despite harmful consequences. Therefore, the use of this term is discouraged.

✔ A person who is new to substance use or a person who is experimenting with using substances.

Instead of...

- ✗ Graduate from treatment
- ✗ Opioid Replacement Therapy
- ✗ Prescription drug abuse
- ✗ Reformed addict and/or alcoholic
- ✗ Rehab
- ✗ Relapse; slip
- ✗ Relapse prevention
- ✗ Resistant to treatment
- ✗ Sober
- ✗ Substance abuse
- ✗ Treatment is the goal

Try...

- ✓ While people may complete and/or graduate from a specific treatment program, substance use disorder is a chronic disease that may require ongoing treatment and recovery support. Avoid thinking of this as an isolated treatment event, as completing treatment could occur more than once in a person's lifetime
- ✓ The evidence-based treatment for opioid use disorders include FDA-approved medications. When this intervention is used, it is referred to as Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) or Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT)
- ✓ Prescription drug misuse
- ✓ Person in recovery
- ✓ Treatment for a substance use disorder
- ✓ Returned to use; resumed or experienced a recurrence
- ✓ Recovery management
- ✓ Choosing not to undergo treatment
- ✓ A person abstinent from substance use, in remission, and/or in recovery; substance-free; free from illicit and non-prescribed medications; negative urine toxicology results
- ✓ Substance misuse or a diagnosed substance use disorder
- ✓ Treatment is one of the pathways to recovery. It is important to consider that not every person wants or needs treatment and there are many pathways to recovery

Key Takeaway: It is important to use person-first language. People should be acknowledged as people first, before any other words are used, rather than referring to them in terms of a diagnosis or condition. For example, as it pertains to OUD/SUD, this means someone is a "person with a substance use disorder," rather than the more stigmatizing term, "addict."

Choose your words wisely to address stigma surrounding OUD/SUD. Together, we can make a difference!