

The Words You Choose Can Fight Stigma

Eliminating the stigma of addiction is difficult, in part, because it's embedded in aspects of our culture. Even someone with the best intentions can indirectly reinforce stereotypes and negative connotations if they're using stigmatized words.

Non-stigmatizing language are simple, easy to understand terms that don't have a negative impact that improve communication with people in recovery.

| Instead of.... | Use.... | Because... |
|---|--|--|
| Addict, junkie, crackhead, user | Person with a substance use disorder (SUD) (or opioid use disorder, OUD) | Person-first language shows the person having a problem, rather than being "the" problem. |
| Substance or Drug Abuser | Patient if in a clinical setting | |
| Alcoholic, drunk | Person with alcohol use disorder | |
| Untreated addict | Person who is using X | |
| Sober | In recovery, getting well/healthy | |
| Former addict, ex-addict, reformed addict, clean person | Person in recovery or person in long-term recovery | |
| Drug Offender | Justice involved person | |
| Medication as a crutch, trading one drug for another | Medication is one tool for treatment and one part of recovery process | We should use clinically accurate non stigmatizing terminology as we would with any other disease. |
| Clean (clean specimen, clean drug test) | Substance free; Testing negative for substances | |
| Dirty (dirty specimen, dirty drug test) | Testing positive, the results didn't come back as expected | |

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|--|---|--|
| Detox | Withdrawal management | We should use clinically accurate non stigmatizing terminology as we would with any other disease. |
| Addicted baby, crack baby | Baby with neonatal withdrawal syndrome | |
| Opioid/Alcohol replacement or substitution | Medication for opioid use disorder, medication for alcohol use disorder | |
| Relapse, lapse, slip | Returned to use; Resumed substance use, experienced a recurrence of substance use | We do not want to decrease a patient's sense of hope or self-efficacy for change. |
| S/he has a drug problem, drug habit | S/he is abstinent from alcohol/drugs | |
| S/he is addicted to X | S/he has a substance use disorder | |
| Habit/ Drug Habit | Drug addiction or substance use disorder | |
| Drug of Choice | Drug or Preference, or Use of X | |
| Abuse | For illicit drugs, we say use. For medication, we say misuse. | We do not want to decrease a patient's sense of hope or self-efficacy for change. |
| Getting high/stoned | Being intoxicated, being under the influence | |
| Shooting up | Intravenous drug use/ using intravenously | |
| Being in rehab/detox | Participating in a recovery program | |
| Methadone Clinic/Treatment | Medication-Assisted Treatment Facility/Program | While methadone clinic may be accurate, it has negative connotation associated with it. |
| Dependence | Substance use disorder, addiction | Nonjudgmental, neutral language |

| Instead of... | Use... | Because... |
|--|--|---|
| Adherent | Compliant | Nonjudgmental, neutral language |
| Non-Adherent | Non-Compliant | |
| Offender, Inmate, Felon, Criminal, Convict, Prisoner, Delinquent | S/he is a person with justice involvement | Person or individual: with justice system involvement; impacted or affected by the justice system |
| Sex Offender | S/he has a sex offense history | Person or individual with sex offense conviction(s); Person previously convicted of a sex offense(s) |
| Ex-offender, Ex-con, Ex-prisoner | S/he has a history of justice involvement; S/he is formerly incarcerated | Person or individual: with prior justice system involvement; previously incarcerated; or with justice history |
| Parolee, Probationer, Detainee | S/he is under judicial supervision | Person or individual on parole; Person or individual currently under parole supervision; Person or individual on probation; Person or individual in detention |
| Juvenile Offender, Juvenile | S/he is a young justice-involved person | Young person with justice system involvement; Young adult impacted by the justice system |
| Sex Offender | S/he has a sex offense history | Person or individual with sex offense conviction(s); Person previously convicted of a sex offense(s) |
| Mentally Ill | S/he has a mental illness; S/he has a mental health condition | Person or individual with mental health needs; Person or individual in need of/currently receiving mental health services |

| Instead of... | Use... | Because... |
|---|---|---|
| Homeless | S/he is experiencing homelessness | Person currently or previously experiencing homelessness |
| HIV/AIDS patient; Infected with HIV/AIDS | S/he is living with HIV; S/he is living with AIDS | Person or individual living with HIV; Person or individual living with AIDS |

To change the conversation about addiction treatment and recovery, we need to change the way we talk about these topics. Visit <https://brightviewhealth.com> for more information.