

Language Matters

Language is powerful – especially when talking about addictions.
Stigmatizing language perpetuates negative perceptions.

“Person first” language focuses on the person, not the disorder.

When Discussing Addictions...

SAY THIS

Person with a substance use disorder
Person living in recovery
Person living with an addiction
Person arrested for drug violation
Chooses not to at this point
Medication is a treatment tool
Had a setback
Maintained recovery
Positive drug screen



NOT THAT

Addict, junkie, druggie
Ex-addict
Battling/suffering from an addiction
Drug offender
Non-compliant/bombed out
Medication is a crutch
Relapsed
Stayed clean
Dirty drug screen



Language of Addiction. Why Words Matter.

Many people who are unfamiliar with Substance Use Disorder (SUD), may find themselves unintentionally using **words** that **perpetuate** negative **stigmas**. These words shape the opinions of others, **reinforce** longstanding **stereotypes**, and have been found to adversely **affect** quality of care and **treatment outcomes**. They may also deter help-seeking among those with substance use disorders **and their families**.



Remember, people are more than their health problems. Substance Use Disorder does not describe what a person is, but rather describes what a person has.

REPLACE

USE

Addict, Abuser, Junkie, User

Clean sample, Dirty drug test

Staying Clean

Habit or Drug Habit

Opioid Replacement or
Methadone Maintenance

Binge Drinking

Suffering from/a victim of a
mental illness



Person with a Substance Use Disorder

Negative test, Positive test

Maintaining Recovery, Substance-Free

Substance Use Disorder,
Substance Use

Treatment, Medication-Assisted Treatment,
Medication

Heavy Alcohol Use

Experiencing/being treated for/a diagnosis/history of
mental illness