Changing the Way We Talk About Substance Use Disorders

Using alternative terms provides the opportunity to reduce the barriers to recovery for a person experiencing substance use disorder. Adjusting language can help to avoid judgmental and negative assumptions of people with substance use disorder – it is a small change with the potential for a big impact.

For example, the medical community has been transitioning a language shift to *use the term* ***substance use disorder*** *instead of* ***drug abuse or addiction*** as it acknowledges problematic substance use as a medical condition.

Below is a list of alternative terms to use instead of potentially stigmatizing terms when discussing issues related to substance use with the reasoning to inform the shift in language.

	Use Alternative Terminology	Instead of Stigmatizing Terminology
Person centered language	▪ Person with a substance use disorder	Addict
	▪ Has an X use disorder	Addicted to X
	▪ Person with an alcohol use disorder	Alcoholic
	▪ Person in recovery	Former or Reformed Addict
	▪ Individual not yet in recovery ▪ Person who is actively using X	Untreated Addict
	▪ People who use substances for non-medical reasons ▪ People starting to use X substance	Recreational, Casual, or Experimental Users (as opposed to those with a use disorder)
	▪ Substance exposed infant	Drug addicted infant
Neutral and objective language	▪ Substance Free ▪ Abstinent	Clean or Sober
	▪ Testing negative for substance use	Clean Screen
	▪ Actively using ▪ Positive for substance use	Dirty
	▪ Testing positive for substance use	Dirty Screen
	▪ Substance use disorder ▪ Regular substance use	Drug Habit
	▪ Use of X substance	Drug of Choice or Abuse
	▪ Misuse	Hazardous, Risky, or Harmful substance use
	▪ Ambivalence	Denial
Opportunity Focused Language	▪ Recovery Management	Relapse Prevention
	▪ Return to use ▪ Recurrence of use	Relapse
	▪ Medication for addiction treatment (MAT) ▪ Medication for opioid use disorder	Opioid Replacement or Methadone Maintenance

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