



## **Humanizing Language to Reduce Stigma**

**Presented by the Anti-Stigma Committee**

Stigma means that people have negative ideas about something, like stereotypes, and this can hurt others. When it comes to substance use disorder, stigma creates a lot of problems for people's well-being. The words we use can shape how the world sees and treats people, so it's important to be careful with the things we say. Everyone can make a difference in someone else's life.

Remember, language changes, and it's important to listen to how people want to be identified. We should respect their preferences and use the words that they feel comfortable with, even if it's different than what is on this guide.

<b>Stigmatized Language</b>	<b>Preferred Language</b>	<b>Why?</b>
User/Drug Abuser	Person who uses substances	Using person-first language recognizes that a person's situation doesn't define who they are.
Addict/junkie/alcoholic/drunk/druggie/etc.	Person with substance use disorder or person in active use	Stigmatized words take away a person's humanity. Using person-first language recognizes that a person's situation doesn't define who they are.
Alcoholism	Alcohol overuse	Since SUD is a medical condition, use words that are correct in a medical context.
Former addict/reformed addict	Person in recovery or person who previously used substances	Using person-first language recognizes that a person's situation doesn't define who they are.
Habit	Substance use disorder	The word "habit" doesn't show how serious the disorder is and makes it seem like a choice.
Abuse	Use/use other than prescribed	The word "abuse" has negative meanings that can make people blame and punish individuals.
Opioid substitution/replacement therapy, medication assisted treatment (MAT)	Medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD), medication for substance use disorder, SUD care	The stigmatized language makes it seem like medication is just replacing the substance or is a temporary part of treatment.
Clean/dirty, pass/fail (for urine toxicology)	Negative/Positive	Use words that are neutral and fair without making judgements.

Clean (not using), sober	In remission/recovery, abstinent, not in active use	Use words that are neutral and fair without making judgements.
Addicted baby	Neonatal abstinence syndrome	SUD is a condition that affects behavior, and babies can't be born with it.
Detox	Withdrawal management	Since SUD is a medical condition, use words that are correct in a medical context.
Drug of choice (DOC)	Primary substance, use of (x) substance	DOC can make it seem like SUD is a choice.
Problem/issue	Circumstance, experience	The words "problem" and "issue" can sound negative and make people feel blamed.
Relapse/lapse/slip	Return to use, return of SUD symptoms	Use words that are neutral and fair without making judgements.
Relapse Prevention	Recovery management	The term "relapse prevention" might make it sound like going back to substance use is inevitable.
Prescriber	Provider	The word "prescriber" might make it seem like the provider will only give medication.
Mentally ill/crazy	Person with a mental health condition	Using person-first language recognizes that a person's situation doesn't define who they are.
Homeless	Unhoused or unsheltered	The word "home" can mean different things to different people. It's better to use language that includes everyone's experiences.
Bum/transient	Person experiencing homelessness	Words like "bum" or "transient" take away a person's humanity; using person first language recognizes that a person's situation doesn't define who they are.
Refused	Declined	The word "refused" can make it seem like someone is being defiant and doesn't have a choice in their treatment.
Non-compliant	Unable to engage in activity/etc. as discussed	The word "non-compliant" can make it seem like the person doesn't have a choice in their treatment.
Felon/criminal/justice involved	Person with legal involvement.	Words like "felon" and "criminal" take away a person's humanity. "Justice" is subjective. Using person-first language recognizes that a person's situation doesn't define who they are.