



# Substance Use why words matter!

Sometimes the words we use to describe substance use can cause stigma that hurts our community. These words shape opinions, create negative stereotypes, influence how people are treated, and can stop people from getting support.

When we say...	People hear...	Instead try...
Addict, drug abuser, junkie, alcoholic, druggie, user, etc.	"It's all your fault and people only see you as an "addict". You're not even a person in my eyes. There's no hope for you."	Person who uses substances
Clean/Dirty needles	These words suggest that substance use has something to do with cleanliness and are not accurate medical terms.	New or sterile/Used needles
Relapse/Lapse	"You're a failure and went back to bad habits." This language can be shaming and discourage people from getting support.	Resumed using substances
Someone is <i>clean</i>	"When you don't use substances you are good/clean and doing the right thing." This language has a moral judgement.	Substance-free, Not using, Abstinent
Someone is <i>dirty</i>	"When you use substances, you're filthy/dirty and doing something wrong." This language has a moral judgement.	Actively using, Using substances
Methadone maintenance Opioid replacement	"Aren't you just replacing one drug with another?" This language does not support different treatment options.	Medication assisted therapy, Treatment
Substance abuse/misuse Drug Habit	"What you're doing is wrong! You're making bad choices." This language suggests that people who use substances deserve punishment instead of support.	Substance use

Try to use neutral words when talking about substance use. Language is a powerful tool in our community. It can either build people up or tear them down.



What will you do with your words?

