

# STIGMA FREE LANGUAGE: TERMS TO USE + AVOID WHEN TALKING ABOUT ADDICTION

**INSTEAD OF...**

**SAY THIS...**

**WHY?**

Addict	Person with substance use disorder	It is important to avoid first-person language
User	Person with OUD or person with opioid addiction (when substance in use is opioids)	
Substance or drug abuser	Patient	The change shows that a person "has" a problem, rather than "is" the problem
Junkie	Person in active use; use the person's name, then say, "is in active use"	
Alcoholic	Person with alcohol use disorder	The terms avoid eliciting negative associations and attitudes, as well as individual blame
Drunk	Person who misuses alcohol/engages in unhealthy/hazardous alcohol use	
Former addict	Person in recovery or long-term recovery	
Reformed addict	Person who previously used drugs	

## INSTEAD OF...

## SAY THIS...

## WHY?

Habit	Substance use disorder  Drug addiction	Implies that a person is choosing to use substances or can choose to stop using  “Habit” may undermine the seriousness of the disease
Abuse	<p><b>For illicit drugs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use</li> </ul> <p><b>For prescription medications:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Misuse</li> <li>- Used other than prescribed</li> </ul>	<p>“Abuse” is generally a term that is associated with negative judgements and punishment.</p> <p>Prescription medications are limited to their indicated use and are only to be used by the person that they are prescribed to. Consumption outside. Consumption outside of these parameters is considered misuse.</p>
Opioid substitution replacement therapy  Medication assisted treatment (MAT)	Opioid agonist therapy  Pharmacotherapy  Addiction medication  Medication for those with a substance use disorder  Medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD)	<p>It is a misconception that medications substitute one drug or addiction for another</p> <p>The term (MAT) implies that medication should have a temporary role in treatment. Using “MOUD” aligns with the way that other psychiatric medications are used, as they are critical tools for patients and their treatment plans.</p>
Clean	<p><b>For toxicology screening results:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Testing negative</li> </ul>	Use clinically accurate, non-stigmatizing terminology the same way it would be used for other medical conditions.

	<p><b>For non-toxicology purposes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being in remission or recovery</li> <li>- Abstinent from drugs</li> <li>- Not drinking or taking drugs</li> <li>- Not currently or actively using drugs</li> </ul>	<p>Set an example with language when treating patients who might use stigmatizing slang.</p> <p>Use of terms such as “clean” may have negative cognitions.</p>
Dirty	<p><b>For toxicology screening results:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Testing positive</li> </ul> <p><b>For non-toxicology purposes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Person who uses drugs</li> </ul>	<p>Use clinically accurate, non-stigmatizing terminology the same way it would be used for other medical conditions.</p> <p>Could possibly decrease the patients' hope and motivation for change.</p>
Addicted baby	<p>Baby born to mother who used drugs while pregnant</p> <p>Baby with signs of withdrawal from prenatal drug exposure</p> <p>Baby with neonatal opioid withdrawal/neonatal abstinence syndrome</p> <p>Newborn exposed to substances</p>	<p>Babies cannot be born with addiction because addiction is a behavioral disorder – instead, they are born with withdrawal syndrome.</p> <p>Use clinically accurate, non-stigmatizing terminology the same way it would be used for other medical conditions.</p> <p>Using person-first language can reduce stigma.</p>

Most of these suggestions were provided by:

National Institutes of Health. (2022, April 10). *Words matter - terms to use and avoid when talking about addiction*. National Institutes of Health. Retrieved April 16, 2022, from <https://nida.nih.gov/nidamed-medical-health-professionals/health-professions-education/words-matter-terms-to-use-avoid-when-talking-about-addiction>