



Language Matters

It's important to recognize the power behind our words and understand the contributions it can have to breaking down stigma related to substance use and addictions. Outdated language is being used in discussion with family and friends and in social media. It is our responsibility to advocate for change, using the appropriate language when speaking with others.

The below table can be used as a guide to assist in changing your language to 'Persons First' Language. 'Persons First' Language recognizes the patient as a whole, and removes stigma related to their illness or disorder.



Instead of This....	Say This...
Abuser, Addict, Junkie, User	Person with a Substance Use Disorder
Abuse	For illicit substances: Use For prescription medications: Misuse Used other than prescribed
Substance or drug abuser	Patient
Alcoholic	Person with alcohol use disorder.
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
Drug Habit	Regular substance use, Substance Use Disorder
Addicted Baby	Baby born to a mother who used substances while pregnant Newborn exposed to substances
Clean	For toxicology screen results: • Testing negative For non-toxicology purposes: • Being in remission or recovery • Abstinent from substances • Not consuming alcohol or taking substances • Not currently or actively using substances
Dirty	For toxicology screen results: • Testing positive For non-toxicology purposes: • Person who uses substances
Dirty needle	Used needle