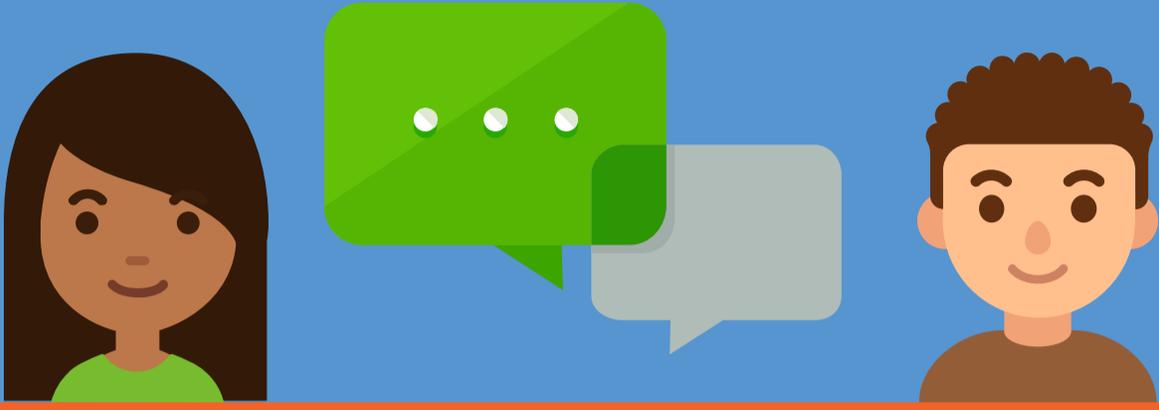


WORDS MATTER

Language to Use (and Avoid) When Talking About Addiction



Language matters, and what you say makes a profound difference in the outcomes of patient care. It's important to use person-first, recovery-centered language to combat stigma and inspire and support your patients. Remember, your thoughts become your attitudes and actions, so the language used in front of coworkers or friends is just as important as the language used in front of patients.

What Stigma Looks Like

- Negative attitudes, judgements and stereotypes
- Problematic labels and language use
- Negative client-provider interactions
- Shame and the internalization of addiction
- Punitive and exclusionary policies and practices

Promising Approaches to Tackling Stigma

- Education on addiction, treatment and recovery
- Interventions focused on building client-provider trust
- Social contact as a key stigma reduction tool
- Training in trauma-informed practice and care
- Inward-facing training to build resilience and mitigate burnout
- Address system gaps and barriers

How Stigma Gets in the Way

- Affects how we conceptualize, frame and prioritize the current crisis
- Leads to hiding and creates barriers to seeking help
- Contributes to ongoing system mistrust and avoidance of services, particularly among marginalized populations
- Results in poorer quality care and response

Sources of Stigma and Contributing Factors

- Punitive views about addiction, treatment and recovery
- Illegality of illicit opioids and other drugs
- Viewing people with opioid use disorder through a paradigm of worthiness and deservingness
- Trauma, compassion fatigue and burnout

WORDS MATTER

Language to Use (and Avoid) When Talking About Addiction



Terms to Use

Terms to Avoid

person with a substance use disorder	addict, abuse, user, junkie, druggie
person with an alcohol use disorder	alcoholic, drunk
person with an opioid use disorder	oxy-addict, meth-head
person in recovery	ex-addict, former alcoholic
negative/positive result(s)	clean/dirty (drug test)
addiction, substance use disorder	addictions, addictive disorders, habits
medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) or pharmacotherapy	opioid substitute/replacement therapy
baby exposed to substances	addicted baby

Phrases that Show Compassion

Phrases that Perpetuate Stigma

I understand what you are saying	It's all in your head
Their life is worth saving	They are a lost cause
We have treated this patient before	They are a frequent flyer in the emergency department
A person can be a good mom/dad/ parent and be in recovery	They can't be a good parent while in recovery
They have a substance use disorder	They are a junkie/addict/alcoholic
Their recovery should be celebrated, and we should continue supporting them	They are just going to relapse
We should focus on both their acute conditions and their substance use disorder	They have a substance use disorder, but we should only focus on their high blood pressure
Person who uses illicit drugs/misuses prescription drugs	Person who abuses drugs

Sources: American Hospital Association, American Society of Addiction Medicine, NIH National Institute on Drug Abuse, University of Texas at Austin, Dell Medical School