



PERSON FIRST LANGUAGE

UNDERSTANDING STIGMA

Many of us hear stigma every day and may not even realize that we are promoting the messages that can encourage somebody with substance use disorder to seek help or continue to live in disease. One of the most common is that individuals choose to live with their substance use disorder.

Other stigmatizing attitudes include:

- Equating a person's identity with their use
- Belittling a person's value because of their use
- Using negative labels or names to describe use or behaviors of use.

Stigma related to substance use disorder can impact people with lived experience, as well as their families. It often starts with negative and derogatory language that can make people feel shame.

Substance Use Disorder is a medical condition and the language we use should reflect this so that both individuals and families can feel more comfortable seeking the life-saving services they need at all stages of their disease. The World Health Organization international studies show hazardous alcohol and drug use disorders are among the most stigmatized conditions. i Historically, those who have a substance use disorder (SUD) have been viewed more negatively than those with physical and psychiatric disabilities. ii Individuals may not seek treatment because of the shame they feel, may feel they will not receive help if they ask for it because of judgment of their use, and that when they have asked for help, they have not been heard, seen or cared for by family and/or professionals.

PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE

Using person-first, non-stigmatized language encourages people to seek help, increases the availability of and access to quality healthcare services, and encourage unbiased, effective policy. Person-first language uses words that respects the dignity of people with substance use disorder by addressing concerns through a medical lens and focusing on physical and mental health. Person-first simply means use person before describing any attributes i.e. instead of "addict" use "person with substance use disorder". By doing this we are constantly reminded of the individual we are working with and by using this language in front of them and their family we encourage them to see their disease and the behaviors associated as secondary to the person, not as defining the person. There are many charts available, we have included two to give ideas of how to change language:

LANGUAGE MATTERS

Language is powerful – especially when talking about addictions. Stigmatizing language perpetuates negative perceptions.

"Person First" language focuses on the person, NOT the disorder.

When Discussing Addictions:

SAY THIS

Person with a substance use disorder
 Person living in recovery
 Person living with an addiction
 Person arrested for drug violation
 Chooses not to at this point
 Medication is a treatment tool
 Had a Setback
 Maintained Recovery
 Positive Drug Screen

NOT THAT

Addict, Junkie, Druggie
 Ex-Addict
 Battling/Suffering from an Addiction
 Drug Offender
 Non-Compliant/Bombed Out
 Medication is a Crutch
 Relapsed
 Stayed Clean
 Dirty Drug Screen

