

#ShatterTheStigma with Person First Language



The way we use words prepares our brain for how we see a person. Using terms that highlight a disability first prepares our mind to focus on the disability above the individual.

Person first language prepares our brain to focus on the individual. It is a verbal reminder that we are dealing with another human being instead of focusing on the difference. When referring to individuals that use substances, be considerate when choosing your words. Focus on the person—and never use terms that label, generalize, stereotype, devalue or discriminate.

Every individual deserves to be treated with dignity and respect—regardless of the situation they are struggling with. Be the voice of equality, acceptance, and respect, use person first language.

LANGUAGE MATTERS: Using Affirmative Language to Inspire Hope and Recovery

Stigmatizing Language	Person First Language
abuser/ addict	a person with or suffering from a substance use disorder
addicted infant	infant with neonatal abstinence syndrome
addicted to [drug name]	has a [drug name] use disorder
alcoholic	person with an alcohol use disorder
clean	abstinent
clean screen	substance free
crack babies	substance-exposed infant
dirty	actively using
dirty screen	testing positive for substance use
drug abuser	person who uses drugs
drug habit	regular substance use
experimental user	person who is new to drug use
lapse/relapse/slip	resumed/experienced a recurrence
medication-assisted treatment (MAT)	medications for addiction treatment (MAT)
opioid replacement/ opioid replacement therapy	medications for addiction treatment (MAT)
pregnant opiate addict	pregnant woman with an opioid use disorder
prescription drug abuse	non-medical use of a psychoactive substance
recreational or casual user	person who uses drugs for non-medical reasons
reformed addict or alcoholic	person in recovery
substance abuse	substance use disorder
substance abuser	person with a substance use disorder
substance abusing mother	mother with a substance use disorder
substance misuse	substance use/non-medical use
victims/tiny victims	prenatally exposed to [drug name]