

Cooper Center for Healing Substance Use Disorder Language Guide

Substance Use Disorder (SUD) and SUD-related medical conditions are highly stigmatized. Let's work together to shift the paradigm.

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Content dedicated to all people in all stages
of recovery and healing, and to all people
who are working to end overdose and save lives







For Communities Everywhere
Updated as of January 2023



1 Stigmatizing Language: Harm Reductionist Dialects

Language pertaining to substance use and SUD matters and can appropriately change. Person-first language empowers individuals by putting the individual first and one aspect of their personhood second. Being cognizant of stigmatizing language to avoid, and intersectional language to consider, can help reduce stigma and harm towards individuals experiencing substance use and SUD.



STIGMATIZING LANGUAGE TO AVOID	VS	INTERSECTIONAL LANGUAGE TO CONSIDER
Substance Abuser; Addict; User; Junkie; Crack Head; Dope Fiend		Person Who Uses Drugs; Person with Substance Use Disorder
Clean Dirty		Abstinent from Substance Use Using Substances
Clean Urine Drug Test Dirty Urine Drug Test		Tested Negative for Substance Use Tested Positive for Substance Use
Clean Needles Dirty Needles		Unused Syringes Used Syringes
Addicted Babies; Crack Babies		Neonatal Withdrawal Syndrome Baby with Prenatal Exposure
Criminal; Convict; Felon Has a Record		Person Experiencing Incarceration Person Recently Released from Incarceration

2 Substance Use Disorder: Important Clinical Definitions

DEFINED	
Substance Use; Drug Use	Single or limited consumption of a substance
Substance Dependence Alcohol Dependence	The development of tolerance and then withdrawal from a substance(s) and/or alcohol
Addiction	Uncontrollable drug and/or alcohol seeking and use, while experiencing negative consequences
Substance Withdrawal Alcohol Withdrawal	The physical and emotional effects when an individual stops or reduces their intake of a compound(s)
Lapse	When an individual experiences a "slip" and uses substance(s) or drinks alcohol—but stops quickly afterward
Relapse	Full-blown return to a pattern of behavior that an individual has been trying to moderate or stop
Medication for Addiction Treatment (MAT)	Evidence-based addiction treatment with FDA-approved medically monitored medications

About the Cooper Center for Healing

At the Center for Healing, we believe that all people struggling with pain, psychological trauma, and/or substance use are deserving of compassionate and evidence-based care grounded in safety, dignity, and respect.

The Center for Healing is recognized by the State of New Jersey as a MAT Center of Excellence. Clinical services include MAT, Empowering Mothers to Parent and Overcome with Resilience (EMPOWR) for pregnant and parenting women, and full coverage services for SUD and mental health for uninsured and underinsured people and those experiencing undocumented status. To learn more, visit cooperhealth.org/recovery or call our Bridgeview Building clinic at 856.342.3040.