

Language Matters

SPEAKING ABOUT SUBSTANCE USE

The words we use to describe people who use drugs can be a barrier to them seeking help.

Use person-first language. Labels such as “addict” dehumanize people and takes away from our individual identity. We are not defined by our health conditions.

Avoid slang and idioms. They are usually negative and stigmatizing.

Use language that is inclusive, positive and empowering.

Reinforce the medical nature of the issue. Avoid language that suggests a personal or moral failing.



Instead of ...	Try ...
Drug overdose	Toxic drug poisoning
Overdose crisis	Drug poisoning crisis
Addict	Person who uses drugs
Druggie	Person with a substance use disorder
Dirty needle	Used needle
Reformed addict	Person in recovery
Clean and sober	Substance free, or in recovery
They, them, those people	We, us, people, individuals
Victim, suffering from addiction	Person experiencing, or being treated for addiction

