



Substance Use Health

Safer Language: Compassionate and Stigma-Free



1

Person-first language ensures the person is seen as a person first, not as a specific health condition or behaviour. ¹

Instead of:

- ✗ **Drug users**
- ✗ **Addicts**
- ✗ **Drug abusers**

Say:

- ✓ *People who use substances*
- ✓ *People with a substance use disorder*
- ✓ *People struggling with their substance use health*

2

Choosing to counteract stigma with the words we use can help to break down barriers. ¹

Instead of:

- ✗ **Referring to people as clean or dirty**
- ✗ **Relapse, slip, used again**
- ✗ **Drug abuse, misuse or habit**

Say:

- ✓ *People with lived experience*
- ✓ *Recurrence of substance use disorder*
- ✓ *Substance use*

3

Stigma can be in the form of language and can isolate people who use substances. You can reduce stigma by changing the words you use to talk about substance use health. ²

Instead of:

- ✗ **Recreational drug users**
- ✗ **Problematic substance use**

Say:

- ✓ *People who occasionally use substances*
- ✓ *Higher-risk substance use*

4

Some terms convey shame or are stigmatizing related to individuals who use substances. Here are some examples of more appropriate alternatives. ²

Instead of:

- ✗ **Binge-drinker**
- ✗ **Drug of choice**
- ✗ **Black market**
- ✗ **Non-compliant**

Say:

- ✓ *People who engage in heavy episodic drinking*
- ✓ *Substances used*
- ✓ *Unregulated market*
- ✓ *Not ready at this time to consider recovery options*

5

When talking about substance use health, champion compassionate language without policing oneself or others on language choices. ³

Stigmatizing language is often used habitually (versus deliberately) and can take time and practice to change.

Great RIVER
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HEALTH TEAM



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Kaniatarowanénhne Kaniataríio Ata'karitéhtshera Raotinénra



Sources:

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