



MARYLAND Department of Health

WORDS MATTER

Language matters. Individuals with a Substance Use Disorder (SUD) face discrimination and prejudice due to the lack of understanding about the disease. The stigma surrounding SUDs can be reduced by using language that more accurately describes the chronic brain disease of addiction. Because stigma can be directed at the individual by others (social stigma), internalized (self-stigma), or systematic (structural stigma), everyone should pay attention to the language used regarding behavioral health and people with behavioral health disorders. Sometimes people directly affected by behavioral health disorders may choose to self-identify in different ways, and those choices should be respected, but it is important to recognize that stigma keeps people from seeking help.

CHANGE THE SCRIPT

Instead Of	Try this Non-Judgmental Alternative
Abstinence-based or abstinence-only	Not including a medication
Addict or Junkie	Person with a substance use disorder; or Person with a serious substance use disorder
Alcoholic	Person with an alcohol use disorder; or Person with a serious alcohol use disorder
Clean	Abstinent; or Abstaining from
Clean (urine test)	Negative for substance X; or As expected
Dirty	Actively using; or Positive for substance use
Dirty (urine test)	Positive for substance X; or Unexpected
Drug-free	Not including a medication
Habit or Drug habit	Substance use disorder; or Compulsive or regular substance use

Substance Abuser	Person with a substance use disorder; or Person who uses substances (if does not qualify for a diagnosis of substance use disorder)
Enabling	Working with
Former/reformed Addict/Alcoholic	Person in remission or recovery; or Person in sustained remission or long-term recovery
Graduated	Stabilized
Mentally ill	Person with a mental health disorder
Methadone clinic	Opioid Treatment Program (OTP)
Non-compliant	Use descriptive terms geared towards stage of change (eg: thinking about quitting use)
Not ready	Use descriptive terms geared towards stage of change (eg: thinking about quitting use)
Opioid replacement or opioid substitution therapy	Treatment that includes a medication/treatment with X (name of medication)
Recreational, casual, or experimental users (as opposed to those with a substance use disorder)	People who use drugs for non-medical reasons; or People starting to use drugs; or People who are new to drug use
Self-help	Self-directed; or Mutual aid
Sober	Well; or Healthy
Drug Abuse or Substance Abuse	Substance use disorder

To learn more about prevention and treatment, visit: MDDestinationRecovery.org