

Project HOPE's Addiction Language Guide

- Addiction and substance-related conditions are highly stigmatized.
- Stigma and discrimination are barriers to acknowledging problem, accessing help and staying in recovery.
- Language/terminology of addiction influence perceptions and may affect policy and clinical care.

Stigma about people with substance use disorders exists even among clinicians. One study found that even mental health professionals judged an individual identified as a “substance abuser” more harshly than an individual identified as having a “substance use disorder.”

Language to Avoid ☹	Alternative Language to Use ☺
Addict	Person with a substance Use Disorder Person in Recovery
Alcoholic	Person with a Alcohol Use Disorder
Junkie, crack head, dope fiend	Person with a substance Use Disorder
Clean	Abstinent from illicit drug use
Dirty	Using illicit substances
Clean Urine Drug Screen	Testing negative for illicit drugs
Dirty Urine Drug Screen	Testing positive for illicit drugs
Compliant	Adherent
Medication Assisted Treatment	Pharmacotherapy or Medication Assisted Recovery

- Don't confuse “dependence” with “addiction”
- Don't confuse “drug use” with “substance use disorder”
- Remember that “Substance Use Disorder” is the official clinical term (Mild, moderate, severe)

Important Definitions	
Dependence	The development of tolerance and then withdrawal from a compound
Addiction	Uncontrollable, compulsive drug seeking and use, even in the face of negative health and social consequences
Lapse	A situation where someone has a very brief “slip” where they drink or use, but they stop quickly afterward, avoiding a full relapse into addiction.
Relapse	A full-blown return to a pattern of behavior that one has been trying to moderate or quit altogether
Drug Use	Single or limited consumption of a substance
Tolerance	Develops when an individual must use more of a compound in order to achieve the effects that were previously achieved at a lower dose – ie needing more and more of the substance to get the same result.
Withdrawal	The phenomenon experienced when the individual stops or reduces his or her intake of the specific compound.
Pharmacotherapy	Medication-Assisted Recovery - Practical, accurate, and non-stigmatizing term to describe addiction treatment with medically monitored pharmacological medications such as methadone, naltrexone, buprenorphine.
Ambivalence	Refers to a situation in which a person holds two opposing attitudes or feelings. The classic example of this is when one person both loves and hates the same individual. Another way of describing ambivalence is having both negative and positive feelings about someone or something.

- Sociologist Erving Goffman said: “Stigma isn't a thing. It isn't something unwanted that attaches to a person and travels with her wherever she goes. Rather, stigma is relational: a process by which the reaction of others spoils normal identity. It thrives, or dies, in the ways people treat one another.”