

# What We Say Matters

## Changing the Script of Addiction



**Be a  
Recovery  
Advocate!**

### Did You Know

Some words carry bigger meanings than you may realize. Saying substance abuser, drug user, or addict, can make it sound like the person being described is nothing more than their illness – or even imply some sort of moral failing.

So, saying “person with a substance use disorder” is more accurate. It means you’re describing a real, complete, and complex person – one who just happens to have a chronic illness.



### Knowledge Domain

People with substance use disorder often face significant social, systemic, and self-stigma based on a lack of understanding about the disease. That’s why the language we use to describe behavioral health is so important. By using more accurate, neutral language to describe the disease, we can help reduce stigma and keep people on the path to recovery.

### Recommended Group Activity

This activity’s focus is to discuss the impact of language on patients who have a substance use disorder. Are there any words that you strongly associate with substance use that can be harmful? How might those word choices harm or support your patients?

Instead Of	Try This Non-Judgmental Alternative
Addict	Person with a substance use disorder
Clean	Abstinent
Dirty	Actively using
Drug habit	Substance use disorder
Enabling	Working with
MAT	Pharmacotherapy
Relapse	Recurrence of use
Sober	Well, healthy

### To Learn More

#### What is Clinical Empathy?

<http://bit.ly/SUDstigma4>

#### The Role of Empathy in Healthcare

<http://bit.ly/SUDstigma5>