



Say This, Instead of That:

Why Language Matters When Talking About Addiction

Stigma remains the biggest barrier to addiction treatment faced by patients. The terminology used to describe addiction has contributed to the stigma .

Changing the stigma will benefit everyone. It will allow patients to more easily regain their self-esteem, allow lawmakers to appropriate funding, allow doctors to treat without disapproval of their peers, allow insurers to cover treatment, and help the public understand this is a medical condition as real as any other. Choosing the words, we use more carefully is one way we can all make a difference and help decrease the stigma.

Say This:

Person(s)/ People With...

Used in terms such as person(s) or people with addictive disorders, with addictions, or with addictive disease, these modifiers give identity to individuals as people, rather than labeling them by their illness.

Addiction

This widely understood term describes “uncontrollable, compulsive drug seeking and use, even in the face of negative health and social consequences.” Addiction involves both social and health problems, whereas physical dependence only involves health.

Addiction Free

Indicates the patient is free from the dangerous compulsive behaviors of addiction. Less stigmatizing than “clean” or “sober” yet shows the person is no longer in active addiction.

Not That:

Addict, User, Junkie

Habit/ Drug Habit

Clean/ Dirty