



Words Matter When We Talk About Addiction

Why is it Important to Use Healing Words?

Research studies show that language matters when we talk about opioids. When we use stigmatizing language, they are less likely to connect and give good care to people addicted to opioids.

People with opioid addiction benefit from community support, non-judgemental healthcare providers, and a strong circle of relatives and relations who can walk the path to recovery with them. In order to be a good support for people with opioid addiction, it is important to use kind and respectful language.



Whole Person Language

Kind and respectful language honors people with opioid addiction as whole people. It does not define them only by their opioid use.

How to Use Whole Person Language

Instead of saying "drug user," "addict," or "junkie," it is better to say "person who uses drugs," "person with an opioid use disorder," or "person with a substance use disorder."

Why?

Words like "drug user," "addict," and "junkie" are stigmatizing. They label a person by only one activity they do in life. The truth is that people who use drugs have families, hobbies, interests, histories and futures outside of their drug use. Honor them as whole people.



**Tribal Opioid
RESPONSE**
Healing our Nations Together



NPAIHB
Indian Leadership for Indian Health

Avoiding Stigmatizing Language

Below are stigmatizing words and phrases you should avoid, as well as terms you should consider using instead.



Stigmatizing Language:

Clean, dirty

(when referring to drug test results)

These words associate a positive drug test with filth. Anyone can become addicted to opioids and having a problem with opioids does not make a person (or their test results) dirty.



Recommended Language:

Negative, positive, or substance free test result.



Stigmatizing Language:

Drug Habit

This term suggests that a person with opioid addiction simply needs more willpower to stop using opioids. The problem: opioid use disorder is a medical condition that impacts the brain. Recovery often requires medical treatment to help with cravings and behavior change.



Recommended Language:

Substance use disorder, opioid use disorder.



Stigmatizing Language: **Abuse**

This term doesn't acknowledge that an addictive disorder is a medical condition. It blames the illness on the individual, ignoring environmental and genetic factors, as well as the ability of substances to change the way our brain works.



Recommended Language:

Misuse, harmful use, inappropriate use, problem use, risky use.

Everyone is Vulnerable

Opioid addiction is a health issue that impacts many people. It is not a moral failing or weakness. Nor is it a mark of bad character. It can happen to anyone.

People with opioid use issues are often surprised by the sneaky ways drugs or alcohol crept into their lives. The reason for this is simple- addictive substances (like opioids and alcohol) actually change the way our brain works. In fact, one of the first brain changes that occurs is that opioids hijack the part of our brain that controls our cravings, tricking us into wanting opioids more frequently and in larger amounts.



Love and Kindness is Key

Blaming ourselves or our loved ones for addiction is not useful. For many people, recovery requires help from a health care provider, counseling, and medications. Judgment and unkindness only stand in the way of those who are struggling. But kindness and community support opens doors and save lives.



There is Hope

We can heal our communities through educating ourselves and others, supporting each other, and seeking help when we need it.



Text '**OPIOIDS**' to 94449 to receive videos, quizzes, facts, and more to grow your knowledge about opioids.



Visit the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board's website at www.npaihb.org/opioid to learn more about treatments, reversing an overdose, and other important topics.