The Language of Recovery
Stand Up to Stigma, Blame and Shame

Refer to people as people

Language is a powerful tool. It can inform, clarify, encourage, support, enlighten and unify. But it can also judge, show bias, divide and discourage.

The words we use shape how people in or seeking recovery see themselves and their ability to change. That's why it's important to stop using harmful terms and start using destigmatizing, person-first language.

For example, referring to people who have a substance use disorder as "addicts" or "abusers" misrepresents their condition and fuels judgment. It suggests substance use is a choice rather than a symptom of a debilitating disease.

Instead of	Use
Addict / Alcoholic	Person with a substance use disorder
Clean / Dirty (when referring to drug test results)	Positive / Negative / Inconsistent results
Clean / Sober (when referring to a person)	Drug free / Substance free
Client (when referring to a person receiving treatment services)	Patient
Drug of choice / Drug of abuse	Drug of use
Habit / Drug habit / Bad habit	Substance use disorder / Alcohol and drug disorder / Active addiction
Relapse	Recurrence / Return to use
Relapse is part of recovery	Recurrence / return to use may occur as part of the disease
Relapse prevention	Recovery management
Replacement therapy / Substitution therapy	Treatment / Medication-assisted treatment / Medication-assisted recovery
Self-help group	Mutual aid group
Substance abuse	Substance use disorder / Substance misuse
Treatment is the goal / Treatment is the only way into recovery	Treatment is an opportunity for initiation into recovery / Treatment is one of multiple pathways into recovery
User	Person who misuses alcohol or drugs / Person engaged in risky use of substances

Lead with an Open Heart 💜

Whether you're supporting a loved one, standing as an ally or in recovery yourself, using the Open Heart signals that you're a safe person to turn to for help, free of judgment. Add the Open Heart emoji to your social bios, use it in texts or otherwise display the symbol to help make support for recovery more visible.