

## Our Language Matters

The language we use matters, whether it is about mental health and mental illness, or substance use. Certain words or phrases can be hurtful. They shape opinions, create negative stereotypes, influence how people are treated by others and influence whether people seek treatment or support.

<b>Instead of:</b>	<b>Try:</b>	<b>Why?</b>
Addict, drug abuser, junkie, alcoholic, druggie, user, etc.	Person who uses substances OR Person with substance use disorder OR Person experiencing an alcohol/drug problem	These words can be hurtful, are judgmental and may have negative and incorrect connotations.
Crazy, psycho, insane, schizo, nuts	Person with a mental health challenge	
Committed suicide	Died by suicide	Suicide is not a crime. Commit implies a crime.
Clean/dirty needles	New or sterile/used needles	Clean & dirty are not accurate medical terms and imply that substance use is about cleanliness.
Happy pills, uppers, downers	Prescription drugs, medication, antidepressants	This can trivialize or belittle the condition.
I'm so depressed (when used in a casual way)	I am feeling unhappy or sad, or down	Using flippant language can trivialize the issue of depression and the people who have depression.
He/she is mentally ill	...has a mental health challenge; is experiencing or has experienced a mental illness; has a mental illness	A person's mental health is only one aspect of who they are. Put the person first in the sentence.
He/she is bipolar	...is living with bipolar disorder	A person isn't the disease, the person <u>has</u> an illness.
He/she is depressive	...has major depression	
He/she is obsessive-compulsive	...has an obsessive-compulsive disorder	
Methadone maintenance/opioid replacement	Medication assisted therapy, treatment	Replacement suggests the person is replacing one drug with another, doesn't support different treatment options.
Relapse/Lapse	Resumed using substances	Relapse/lapse can be shaming and could discourage people from getting support.
Someone is clean	Substance free, not using, abstinent	Clean/dirty has a moral judgment, suggests when you are not using substances, you are good and doing the right thing. Dirty suggests you are filthy and doing something wrong.
Someone is dirty	Actively using, using substances	
Substance abuse/misuse, drug habit	Substance use	This language can be judgmental. Suggests people who use substances deserve punishment instead of support.
Suffering with, or a victim of a mental illness	Experiencing OR Being treated for OR Has a diagnosis of OR Has a history of	The use of the word suffering or victim may disempower the person.