

Person-first language for talking about addiction

Instead of...	Use...	Because...
Addict, user, substance or drug abuser, or junkie	Person with a substance use disorder (SUD), person with an opioid use disorder (OUD), or person with opioid addiction	Person-first language helps emphasize that SUD is a medical condition. It also shows that a person <i>has</i> a problem or illness, not that they <i>are</i> the problem. It doesn't blame the individual for their disorder.
Alcoholic or drunk (noun)	Person with alcohol use disorder (AUD) or person who misuses alcohol or engages in unhealthy/hazardous alcohol use	Person-first language helps emphasize that SUD is a medical condition. It also shows that a person <i>has</i> a problem or illness, not that they <i>are</i> the problem. It doesn't blame the individual for their disorder.
Former or reformed addict	Person in recovery or person who previously used drugs	Person-first language helps emphasize that SUD is a medical condition. It also shows that a person <i>has</i> a problem or illness, not that they <i>are</i> the problem. It doesn't blame the individual for their disorder.
Dirty, failing a drug test	Testing positive (on a drug screen)	Using medically accurate terminology helps people stay hopeful that they can make a change.
Habit	SUD or drug addiction	Describing an SUD as a habit may make it seem less serious than it is and may imply living with an SUD is a choice.
Abuse	Use (for illicit drugs) or misuse (for prescription medications used other than as prescribed)	The word "abuse" brings on negative judgments and associations with punishment.
Clean	Being in remission or recovery, abstinent from drugs, not drinking or taking drugs, or testing negative (on a drug screen)	Saying someone is "clean" inappropriately suggests that if they're not in recovery, they are "dirty."
Addicted baby	Baby born to a parent who used drugs while pregnant, baby with signs of withdrawal from prenatal drug exposure, newborn exposed to substances, or baby with neonatal abstinence syndrome	Babies cannot be born with addiction because addiction is a behavioral disorder. Emphasize the medical condition without judgment.