

Words to Avoid	Why	Preferred Terminology
Addict, Abuser, Junkie, User	These terms are demeaning because they label a person solely by his/her illness or behavior and imply a permanency to the condition	Person in active addiction, or with a substance use disorder, or experiencing an alcohol or drug problem
Abuse	This negates the fact that addictive disorders are a medical condition; it blames the illness solely on the individual, ignoring the environmental and genetic factors, as well as the ability of substances to alter brain chemistry; it absolves those selling and promoting addictive substances of wrong doing; and it feeds into the stigma experienced by the individual, the family, and treatment providers	Misuse harmful use hazardous use problem use risky use
Clean or Dirty (for drug test results)	These words associate illness symptoms (i.e. positive drug tests) with filth	Negative, positive, substance-free
Habit or Drug Habit	These terms deny the medical nature of the condition and imply that resolution of the problem is simply a matter of willpower in being able to stop the habitual behavior	Substance use disorder alcohol or drug disorder active addiction
Replacement or substitution therapy	These words imply that treatment medications are equal to street drugs like heroin and suggests a lateral move from illegal addiction to legal addiction; this does not accurately characterize treatment	Treatment, medication-assisted treatment, medication



Source: The Words We Use Matter, Reducing Stigma through Language. [www.naabt.org/documents/naabt\\_language.pdf](http://www.naabt.org/documents/naabt_language.pdf)