



## 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, 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, and risky use.

**Clean or Dirty**  
(for drug test results)

These words associate illness symptoms (i.e. positive drug tests) with filth.

Negative, positive, and 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, and active addiction.

**Replacement  
of 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, and medication.