

Why Language Matters?

Empathy Maximizes Healing.



Person-First Language Is Key

The language we use when referring to people speaks volumes about what we think about them. How we think impacts our attitudes and approaches when addressing people. Labeling someone with their condition not only reduces them to just that, it also perpetuates stigmatizing perceptions. Those perceptions influence the efficacy of our social and public health policies addressing people living with those conditions.

By placing the person first, their chronic condition is no longer the primary, defining characteristic, but one of several aspects of the whole person. We must speak, write, and think in a way that acknowledges the human being first.

Person-first language is proven to reduce stigma and improve treatment. It does not define a person based on any medical disorder they may have. It is non-judgmental, neutral, and the diagnosis is purely clinical.

Here's a sample of a few person-first phrases used to describe commonly heard stigmatizing terms:

Say This.

Person with substance use disorder
Person with alcohol use disorder
Substance use disorder
Testing negative for substance use
Testing positive for substance use
Person living with a mental health issue
Person living with schizophrenia
Living with HIV or diagnosed with HIV
Person living with HIV; PLHIV

Not That.

Addict
Alcoholic
Drug problem, drug habit
A clean drug screen
A dirty drug screen
Mentally ill person, crazy
Schizophrenic, Schizo
HIV infected
HIV or AIDS patient,
AIDS or HIV carrier

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