

Promoting Child Health with Medically Accurate Language

Below is a summary of the American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP) recent guidance on appropriate terminology for those who work with youth and families affected by substances use disorders. Through this guidance, the AAP aims to "dismiss harmful stereotypes and avoid the use of stigmatizing language" to promote child well-being.



Say this:



Not that:

Substance use disorder

Drug or substance abuse/dependence

DSM-5 combines substance abuse and substance dependence into substance use disorder (SUD). "Addiction" is still appropriate with a severe SUD.

Unhealthy, hazardous, or problematic substance use

Substance abuse, drug habit, or vice

Not all substance use constitutes a diagnosable disorder, but may still pose health threats. This is more specific than "misuse".

Nonmedical prescription opioid, drug, or medication use

Prescription opioid or drug use

Refers to using prescription medications for nonmedical purposes or by a person for whom they were not prescribed.

**Intoxicated or in withdrawal
Using or drinking**

Strung out, tweaking, high, drunk, etc.

Getting high or getting drunk

Uses medically-accurate terms and reduces stigma when talking about a person who uses substances to reach intoxication.

Person with a substance use disorder, Person who uses [substance]

Substance abuser, junkie, addict, stoner, crackhead, drinker, [substance] user

Choose person-first language to indicate that individuals are not defined by using a substance,

Treatment was not effective, needs higher level of treatment

Patient who failed treatment, or is non-compliant or non-adherent

Acknowledging that treatment did not meet the patient's needs, or that the patient needs additional services, without indicating indignance or failure.



Alinsky, R. H., Hadland, S. E., Quigley, J., & Patrick, S. W. (2022). Recommended Terminology for Substance Use Disorders in the Care of Children, Adolescents, Young Adults, and Families. *Pediatrics*, 149(6).



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Say this:



Not that:

Person with multiple recurrences or treatment admissions

Recidivist, Frequent flyer

Reduces stigma for those with multiple recurrences of a substance use disorder, rather than referring to it as criminal.

Baby with neonatal withdrawal symptoms or born substance-exposed

Addicted baby, Drug endangered, Neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS), crack baby

An infant cannot be diagnosed with a SUD although they can develop physiologic dependence to a substance such as opioids in utero.

Concerned loved one

Enabler

Reduces stigma for those who support someone with a SUD and may sometimes protect them from the negative consequences of their substance use.

Medication for addiction treatment, Medication for opioid use disorder

Medication-assisted treatment, opioid substitution or replacement therapy

Medication is a treatment, rather than an assistant to another treatment. Maintains the commonly used "MAT" and "MOUD" acronyms.

In early or sustained remission, in or entered recovery

Clean or got clean

Reduces stigma for those who have previously used substances.

Negative or positive test result, [substance] detected

Clean or dirty test/urine

Refers specifically to medical toxicology, rather than using words that imply judgement.



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