

Social Workers on the Front Line of the Opioid Epidemic

Student Quarterly Call #2
Use and Power of Language

AGENDA

Purpose of Call

Framing- Use and Power of Language

Discussion Activities

What's Next

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Purpose



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Welcome and Introductions



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Language



Language can be shaped, influenced, and created by:

- Public perception and attitudes
- Informal cohort groups
- Media and technology
- Political systems and interest groups
- Professional guilds
- Academia
- Others

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The Power of Language



For more than two centuries, people in America who are addicted have been the object of language created by others.

William White



Words are important.
If you want to care for something, you call it a flower.
If you want to kill something, you call it a weed.

Don Coyhis

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Stigma



A mark of disgrace or infamy, a stain, or a reproach, associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person.

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Tone

- Affirming
- Strength-based
- Non-pathologizing
- Positive
- Transformative
- Inclusive
- Person-first
- Recovery-oriented
- Trauma-informed



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Reforming the language we use to describe things related to addiction is not merely an exercise in semantics or political correctness. *Words can be an effective tool in helping to destroy the stigma encountered by people with addictions.*

In a field that is locked in moral combat with stigma, describing people with addictions as “*abusers*” of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs helps ensure that the onus of addiction remains solely upon the shoulders of the individual...

Bob Curley

“Wrong” Words Used to Define, Defame Addiction and Recovery
(Join Together Online, 2001)

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To refer to people who are addicted as *abusers* misstates the nature of their condition and calls for their social rejection, sequestration, and punishment. *There is no other medical condition to which the term abuse is applied.*



Referring to people by their shared medical diagnosis assumes any important differences have been lost to the homogenizing influence of their disorder. “Disease first” language, as opposed to *“people first” language*, obliterates individual differences and depersonalizes those to whom the label is applied.



The People We Serve: Flowers or Weeds?



Breakout Room Activity

Reflect on [Tom's Blog Post](#):

- What choices do you make around language related to substance use?
- What terms are you uncertain about?
- What experiences have shaped the language you use?



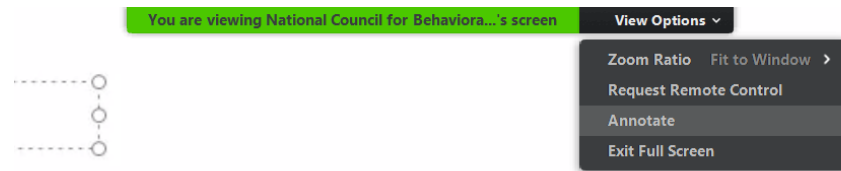
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Whiteboard #1

When you think of a person who uses drugs or has a substance use disorder, what words come to mind?

- Step 1: Open “View options” dropdown. Select “Annotate”



- Step 2: Select “Text” on toolbar then click on whiteboard to enter text.



Examining Some Commonly Used Words: What Do the Following Words Convey?

- Substance abuse
- Non-compliant
- Denial/Resistance
- Relapse
- Clean/dirty
- Enabling
- Untreated
- Alcoholic/Addict
- Patient/Client/Consumer
- Ex-offender
- High-functioning

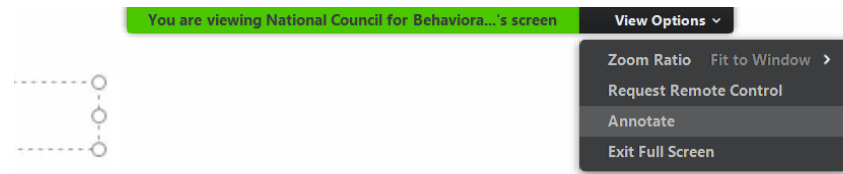


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Whiteboard #2

- What are some person-first, clinical descriptions/terms you could use when describing an individual with a substance use disorder?
- Step 1: Open “View options” dropdown. Select “Annotate”



- Step 2: Select “Text” on toolbar then click on whiteboard to enter



Poll Questions

1. Which of the following terms reflect a positive tone?

- Junkie
- Dirty urinalysis
- Person with a substance use disorder
- Chronic relapser
- Ex-offender

2. Which of the following do you agree with in regards to language used when working with those with substance use disorders or in the field:

- Respects the worth and dignity of all persons (“people-first language”)
- Focuses on the science of substance use disorders and treatment
- Promotes the recovery process
- Avoids perpetuating negative stereotypes and biases



Language Matters

Positive, Person-First Language	Stigmatizing Language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Person with a substance use disorder (SUD) ● Person who uses drugs (PWUD) ● Substance use / substance misuse ● Person in recovery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Substance Abuse / Substance Abuser ● Addict, Alcoholic, Junkie ● Recovering “addict, alcoholic, substance abuser, junkie, etc.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Person with justice-involvement; person that is justice-involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Criminal, Felon, Convict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Person experiencing homelessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Homeless
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Positive / Negative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clean / Dirty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SUD / OUD pharmacotherapy ● Medications for addiction treatment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Medication Assisted Treatment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Neonatal abstinence syndrome / Neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Addicted baby
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recurrence of use / recurrence of symptoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relapse

Substance Use Disorders Institute “Words Matter Pledge” (2019)

