

The Importance of Language in Stopping the Stigma of Addiction

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COLUMBUS
PUBLIC HEALTH

The Power of Words

- *“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.”*
- **Graffiti Activity**
 - Is it easier to think of the negative or the positive?
 - What stands out to you?

What is Addiction?

- Addiction is a **chronic, relapsing brain disease.**
- Addiction is not a disease of one's character, but of **the brain.**
- It is a **complicated** chronic condition.



Continuum of Addiction

3 Levels as Described in the DSM-5:

- Substance Use Mild
 - Presence of 2-3 symptoms
- Substance Use Moderate
 - Presence of 4-5 symptoms
- Substance Use Severe
 - Individual experiences 6 or more symptoms

Symptoms can include:

- Using in spite of consequences
- Recurrent use under hazardous conditions
- Change in Tolerance
- Withdrawal symptoms
- Cravings

Why Does Language Matter?

- **Addiction affects everyone.**
- **Columbus** is in the midst of a complex opiate epidemic.
- As the **epidemic changes**, so should our language.

Perception

“How does it feel to be a problem...It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”

Implicit Bias Activity

- What situations, words, phrases, questions have been used that made you feel uncomfortable?
- How could this have been different for you?

Language impacts Everyone

Language Can Promote Stigma

- Reflects bias
- Forms public opinion
- Labels and alienates the individual
- Promotes judgement, moral statements and shame
- Encourages negative self-talk and criticism
- Shapes our thinking and behaviors
- Deters people from entering treatment

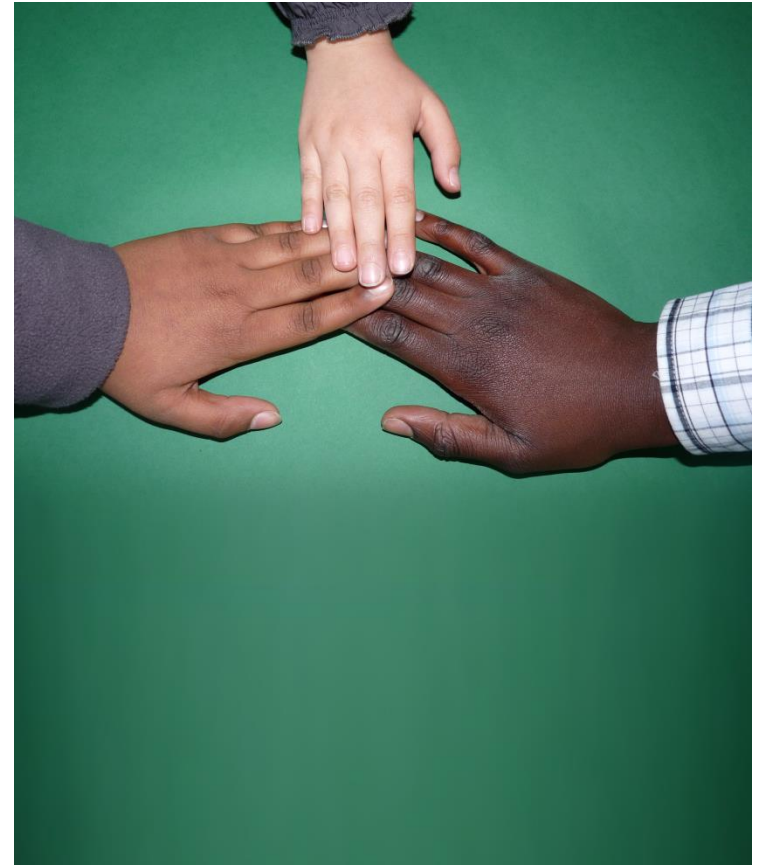
Moving toward Empathy to Heal

“Shame is the most powerful, master emotion. It’s the fear that we’re not good enough. It corrodes the very part of us that believes we are capable of change.” ~ Brené Brown *Listening to Shame*

[What is Empathy?](#)

We Can Change Our Language

- Educate yourself and others about substance use disorders
- Use words that are non-judgmental
- Avoid labels
- Explore internal biases
- “Be Impeccable with your words” – the 4 Agreements



The Positive Impact of Appropriate Language

- Decreases discrimination
- Promotes individual self-esteem
- Encourages strengths-based interventions
- Stops the blame
- Promotes recovery



Talking About People

Words to Avoid:

- Addict
- Abuser
- Junkie
- User
- Alcoholic

Words to Use:

- Person in active addiction
- Person with a substance use disorder
- Person experiencing an alcohol/drug problem

Language of Understanding & Acceptance: Talking About Addiction

Words to Avoid:

- Abuse
 Problem
- Clean/Dirty
- Habit

Words to Use:

- Misuse
- Hazardous use
- Harmful use
- Problem use
- Risky use
- Negative/positive/substance free (drug screens)

Language of Understanding & Acceptance:

Talking About Recovery

Words to Avoid:

- Replacement or Substitution Therapy
- Lapse/Relapse
- Relapse Prevention Program

Words to Use:

- Treatment
- Medication assisted treatment
- Medication
- Recurrence, remission
- Recovery support program

Recovery is:

- Emotional
- Financial
- Social
- Spiritual
- Occupational
- Physical
- Intellectual
- Environmental

Language Matters

- Individuals and families affected by Substance Disorders need to embrace the language that works for them.
- Words take on different meaning
 - How would you describe yourself?
 - What language helps empower you?
- Allow people to define their own Language
- Meet people where they are at
- Own our mistakes to build relationships

You Can Make a Difference.

“If we share our story with someone who responds with empathy and understanding, shame can’t survive.”

~ Brene Brown



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