

Addictionary

Stigma Alert!

These terms were given a stigma alert. This information was gathered from the Recovery Research Institute. To see their entire Addictionary, go to <https://www.recoveryanswers.org/addiction-ary/>.

ABUSER

(Stigma Alert) A person who exhibits impaired control over engaging in substance use (or other reward-seeking behavior, such as gambling) despite suffering severe harms caused by such activity.

In experimental research, the word “abuser” was found to increase stigma, which can affect quality of care and act as a barrier to treatment-seeking in individuals suffering from addiction. Instead, many have recommended the use of terms that reflect a disorder (e.g., “substance use disorder”) and the use of [“person first” language](#). Consequently, instead of describing someone as a “drug abuser,” it may be less stigmatizing and more medically accurate to describe them as “a person with, or suffering from, addiction or substance use disorder.”

ADDICT

(Stigma Alert) A person who exhibits impaired control over engaging in substance use (or other reward-seeking behavior, such as gambling) despite suffering severe harms caused by such activity. While this language is commonly used, in order to help decrease stigma associated with these conditions, it has been [recommended to use “person first” language](#); instead of describing someone as an “addict,” describe them as “a person with, or suffering from, addiction or substance use disorder.”

ALCOHOLIC

(Stigma Alert) A person who exhibits impaired control over engaging in alcohol use despite suffering severe harms caused by such activity.

While this language is commonly used, in order to help decrease stigma associated with these conditions, it has been [recommended to use “person first” language](#); instead of describing someone as an “addict,” describe them as “a person with, or suffering from, addiction or substance use disorder.”

CLEAN

(stigma alert) A reference to a state of a person being abstinent from drugs of misuse. It may also be used in describing urine test results that are not positive for substance use. The term has been viewed as potentially stigmatizing because of its pejorative connotation, with the opposite being “dirty.” Instead, many in the field advocate for use of proper medical terminology such as describing someone as an individual in remission or recovery and describing urine toxicology test results as either negative or positive.

CO-DEPENDENCY

(stigma alert) Immoderate emotional or psychological reliance on a partner. Often used with regard to a partner requiring support due to an illness or disease (e.g. substance use disorder).

The term has been viewed as stigmatizing as it tends to pathologize family members' concern and care for their loved one and may increase their shame.

DIRTY

(stigma alert) A reference to a urine test that is positive for substance use. A person still using substances. This term is viewed as stigmatizing because of its pejorative connotation. Instead, it is recommended to use proper medical terminology such as an individual having positive test results or currently to exhibit symptoms of substance use disorder.

DOPE SICK

(stigma alert) A slang term used to reference withdrawal symptoms from opioids, such as heroin. It is preferable to use more accurate terminology such as suffering from withdrawal.

DRUG

(stigma alert) Drug can mean either a "medication" or a "non-medically used psychoactive substance." The term drug has a stigma alert due to the ambiguity of the term. This ambiguity may create a barrier to accessing prescription (psychoactive) medications in cases where their use IS medically appropriate. Many advocate instead to use "medication" or "non-medically used psychoactive substances" to decrease stigma and communicate with greater specificity.

DRUG ABUSE

(stigma alert) A term sometimes used to describe an array of problems resulting from intensive use of psychoactive substances. It has also been used as a diagnostic label. According to the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV), "substance abuse" is defined as a maladaptive pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress as manifested by one (or more) of the following, occurring within a 12-month period:

1. Recurrent substance use resulting in a failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school, or home (such as repeated absences or poor work performance related to substance use; substance-related absences, suspensions, or expulsions from school; or neglect of children or household).
2. Recurrent substance use in situations in which it is physically hazardous (such as driving an automobile or operating a machine when impaired by substance use)
3. Recurrent substance-related legal problems (such as arrests for substance related disorderly conduct)
4. Continued substance use despite having persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems caused or exacerbated by the effects of the substance (for example, arguments with spouse about consequences of intoxication and physical fights).

DRY DRUNK

(stigma alert) Originating in the 1970's book, [The Dry Drunk Syndrome](#), by R.J. Solberg, the term is defined as the presence of actions and attitudes that characterize the individual with the alcohol use disorder prior to recovery.

Widely adopted by the [Alcoholics Anonymous](#) and [peer support communities](#), this term identifies individuals who no longer utilize alcohol, but continue to behave dysfunctionally (e.g. express rage/anger, intense fear), or regress in personal growth or within their recovery program.

ENABLING

(stigma alert) Actions that typically involve removing or diminishing the naturally occurring negative consequences resulting from substance use, increasing the likelihood of disease progression. Term has a stigma alert, due to the inference of judgement and blame typically of the concerned loved-one.

LAPSE

(stigma alert) A non-technical term, also referred to as a "slip". It implies a short-term resumption of substance use or heavy/hazardous use (e.g., for a night or a day) that is followed by a return to the original goal of moderate use or abstinence.

This term has a stigma alert due to the term's potentially moral meanings rooted in morality and religion (e.g. lapse in grace), and implied "accidental" manifestation (e.g. lapse in judgement). Many advocate instead to use the terms "resumed," or "experienced a recurrence" of substance use or substance use disorder symptoms.

MEDICATION ASSISTED TREATMENT

(stigma alert) Medication-assisted treatment (MAT), including opioid treatment programs (OTPs), combines behavioral therapy and medications to treat substance use disorders (see agonist; antagonist).

This term has been issued a Stigma Alert, as the term may not fully appreciate research that has shown that with or without psychosocial support, medications are effective treatments for addiction – hence, the term "assisted" may undervalue the role of the medication. In addition, this term may create a double standard for substance use disorder treatment, as no other medications used to treat other health conditions are referred to as 'assisted' treatment. Many advocate instead to simply state "medications for addiction treatment."

OPIOID REPLACEMENT THERAPY (ORT)

(stigma alert) An outdated term for use of medications to treat opioid use disorder symptoms and craving, also referred to as “opioid substitution therapy”, “opioid maintenance therapy”, or “mediation assisted therapy”.

When used, this term could imply that one is simply swapping one addiction for another, replacing an illegal opioid, such as heroin, with a longer acting but less euphoric opioid. Research has shown that with or without psychosocial support, opioid agonist and antagonist medications are effective treatments for opioid use disorder. In addition, this term may create a double standard for substance use disorder treatment, as no other medications used to treat other health conditions are referred to as “replacements.” Many advocate instead to use the term “medications for addiction treatment.”

PHYSICAL DEPENDENCE

(stigma alert) This term may be stigmatizing when used to describe tolerance and withdrawal, as the term implies true dependence. However, this term does not meet the World Health Organization (WHO) [International Classification of Diseases \(ICD-10\)](#) diagnostic criteria for dependence, which would include at least one psychological component.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG MISUSE

(stigma alert) The use of a medication without a prescription or usage of a drug in a way other than as prescribed; or for the experience or euphoric feeling elicited. This term is used interchangeably with “non-medically used psychoactive substance” or “prescription drug abuse”. This term has a stigma alert as the word “misuse” is thought by some people as an expression of negative judgement. Instead, use [clear, unambiguous, non-stigmatizing terminology](#) such as “non-medical use of a psychoactive substance.”

RELAPSE

(stigma alert) Relapse often indicates a recurrence of substance use. More technically, it would indicate the recurrence and reinstatement of a substance use disorder and would require an individual to be in remission prior to the occurrence of a relapse.

The highest risk for recurrence of substance use disorder symptoms occurs during the first 90 days following the initial intervention. The risk for recurrence of symptoms decreases after 90 days. This indicates that individuals attempting to recover from substance use disorder need the most intensive support during this first 3-month period, as individuals are experiencing substantial physiological, psychological, and social changes during this early recovery phase. There is typically a greater sensitivity to stress and lowered sensitivity to reward that makes continued recovery challenging.

This term has a stigma alert, as it can imply a moral failing for some people. Instead it may be preferable to use morally neutral terms such as “resumed,” or experienced a “recurrence” of symptoms.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

(stigma alert) A term sometimes used to describe an array of problems resulting from intensive use of psychoactive substances. It has also been used as a diagnostic label. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV), “substance abuse” is defined as a maladaptive pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress as manifested by one (or more) of the following, occurring within a 12-month period:

1. Recurrent substance use resulting in a failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school, or home (such as repeated absences or poor work performance related to substance use; substance-related absences, suspensions, or expulsions from school; or neglect of children or household).
2. Recurrent substance use in situations in which it is physically hazardous (such as driving an automobile or operating a machine when impaired by substance use)
3. Recurrent substance-related legal problems (such as arrests for substance related disorderly conduct)
4. Continued substance use despite having persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems caused or exacerbated by the effects of the substance (for example, arguments with spouse about consequences of intoxication and physical fights).

SUBSTANCE MISUSE

(stigma alert) The use of a substance for unintended or intended purposes in improper amounts or doses. Term has a stigma alert, as some people believe it implies negative judgement and blame. Instead, many recommend using the terms “substance use” or “non-medical use.”