

The Language of Recovery

For more than two centuries, addicted and recovering people in America have been the object of language created by others. People experiencing severe and persistent alcohol and other drug problems have inherited a language not of their own making that has been ill suited to accurately portray their experience to others or to serve as a catalyst for personal change.

("The Rhetoric of Recovery Advocacy: An Essay on the Power of Language", William L. White)*

The goal is to help individuals to get in and stay in recovery, however, the stigma and discrimination experienced by people who are addicted to alcohol and other drugs and/or who are recovering are profound. We are all exposed to the negative comments and beliefs expressed by people who don't understand. As recovery allies, it is important we use language that represents the hope and reality that people DO RECOVER from addiction. We must work together to establish a culture of recovery, to enable more people find their way to a recovery foothold and lifestyle. Language matters and sets the expectation for what can be accomplished.

Language we use now

Addiction is a chronic relapsing illness

Addiction is clearly a chronic illness. It does not go away once you have it. However, no comprehensive research has been conducted that demonstrates a high level of relapse. For *some* people, relapse is part of this illness. It is not helpful to establish the expectation that relapse will *always* occur during the recovery process. It is more helpful to teach that people can recover.

Substance Abuse

The term abuse is moralistic and refers to actions that are intentional and harmful to others. People with addiction are not abusers. They use substances because they have an illness.

Relapse Prevention

We set an expectation when we teach that recovery is about preventing relapse. Recovery is about becoming alive. How do we

Language that promotes recovery

Addiction is a chronic illness

Recovery is possible

Recovery from addiction is a reality

More than 23 million Americans are in recovery from addiction

Substance addiction

Alcohol & drug related problems

Substance use disorder

Recovery Enhancement

Developing Recovery Capital

convey this hope?

Recovering Addict or Alcoholic

The labels – ‘addict’ & ‘alcoholic’ - have a negative stereotype in our culture. They identify the person in recovery with their illness, deepening societal stigma.

Self-help

This says people with addiction problems are supposed to help themselves get better. This sets a false expectation: most people need the support of others to sustain the difficult work of recovery. Their strength is their ability to accept help.

Consumer

This defines a person in a power relationship that labels him/her as someone who receives treatment services, not as a human being who has chosen to enter a pathway of recovery.

**Medication Assisted Treatment Patient
Methadone Client**

Some people believe that use of Medication Assisted Treatment defines a person as ‘not being in recovery’. However, some people use medication to assist them in their recovery process. The use of Methadone, Suboxone, Vivitrol and other medications may lead to stigma and labeling from others creating greater barriers to recovery.

Person in recovery

Living proof

Survivor

Recovery support

Mutual Aid

Person in recovery

**Person in Medication Assisted Recovery
Person in Recovery**