Mentoring

Avoiding stigmatising language.

1 People should not be defined by their alcohol and other drug use. Use person-first and person-centred language.

For example: "a person who chooses to use drugs".

2 Language is broader than just the words used. Adapt your body language and tone to convey respectful engagement.

This might include open body language, appropriate eye contact, and being mindful of how you hold or use your arms.

3 Alcohol and other drug use is a health and social issue. Avoid framing alcohol and other drug use as a moral failing, exaggerating facts or relying on information that is not supported by evidence, or is based on selective statistics.

The Alcohol and Drug Foundation's Drug Facts section of the website provides evidence-based information in an easy to understand format - https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/

4 Look for the most recent consensus on appropriate language as terms can become outdated as language evolves.

The Alcohol and Drug Foundation's "Power of Words" resource gives practical advice on stigmatising and appropriate language - https://adf.org.au/resources/power-words/

5 Choose terms that are strengths based and empowering and convey messages of protective and preventative measures for reducing harm related to alcohol and other drug use.

The Alcohol and Drug Foundation's "AOD Lifecycle Planner" demonstrates protective factors across the life span - https://community.adf.org.au/get-started/aod-lifecycle/

6 When discussing a person who uses drugs or drug-related crime, convey factual and accurate information and terminology to avoid sensationalist comments.

The Alcohol and Drug Foundation's Drug Facts section of the website provides evidence-based information in an easy to understand format - https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/

7 Include help seeking information when working with people who use/have used drugs to encourage connections with health or harm reduction services.

A list of where to find help or services can be found on the Alcohol and Drug Foundation's website - https://adf.org.au/help-support/

8 Keep your audience in mind as words can mean different things to different audiences, depending on language and cultural contexts.

Be respectful in your language, and use empathy to try and understand the other person's experience.

9 People who use/have used drugs will refer to themselves and their life experiences in different ways, which may sometimes include terms that may be considered stigmatising. That is their choice.

Try to use non-stigmatising and non-judgemental language, and don't make assumptions about the person.

10 Use the ADF's Power of Words resource - https://adf.org.au/talking-about-drugs/power-words/ as a guide for best practice. However, it is also important to ask the individual what terminology they prefer.

Remember, they are a person, just like you. Be respectful and considerate.

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