

# Avoiding stigmatising language.

The language you use is important. By choosing words that are welcoming and inclusive, you can help reduce stigma.

Stigma in the form of language and actions can make people feel unwelcome and unsafe. This can stop them from getting help or feeling comfortable talking to you about their alcohol and other drug use.

Stigma is a mark of disgrace and difference. Generally, stigma occurs when people in society disapprove of or hold negative attitudes toward something.

**There are some steps you can take avoid using stigmatising language:**

- 1** Use language that puts the person first. People shouldn't be defined by their alcohol and other drug use.  
*For example: "A person who chooses to use drugs."*
- 2** Language is bigger than just the words used. Your body language and tone are important.  
*This might include open body language, appropriate eye contact, being mindful of how you hold or use your arms, and using a kind tone of voice.*
- 3** Alcohol and other drug use is a health and social issue. It's best to not talk about alcohol and other drug use as a moral problem (that someone is a bad person). It's also important to get the right facts and information based on evidence.  
*The Alcohol and Drug Foundation's Drug Facts section of the website provides evidence-based information in an easy-to-understand format - [adf.org.au/drug-facts](http://adf.org.au/drug-facts)*
- 4** When talking about drug-related crime or a person who uses drugs, use facts, evidence-based information and correct terms to avoid 'sensationalising'.
- 5** Consider who you're talking to. Words can mean different things to different people, depending on language and cultural contexts.  
*Be respectful in your language and use empathy to try and understand the other person's experience.*
- 6** Language changes over time. Check reliable websites to make sure you're up to date with the most recent appropriate terms and words to use, for example the Alcohol and Drug Foundation's *Power of Words* resource listed below.
- 7** People who use, or have used drugs in the past, will refer to themselves and their life experiences in different ways. This may sometimes include terms that may be considered stigmatising. That's their choice.  
*Try to use non-stigmatising and non-judgemental language, and don't make assumptions about the person.*
- 8** Use the Alcohol and Drug Foundation's Power of Words resource listed below as a guide for the most appropriate language and terminology to use. However, it's also important to ask the person what terms they prefer you use.  
*Remember, they are a person, just like you. Be respectful and considerate.*

## The Power of Words

The Alcohol and Drug Foundation's 'Power of Words' resource gives practical advice on language to use and avoid.

[adf.org.au/resources/power-words](http://adf.org.au/resources/power-words)

When you're working with someone who uses alcohol or other drugs, it can be a good idea to share information on where they can go to get support.

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



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