

## How to use the Stigma Reflection Tool

Read through the vignettes and notice what words you choose to fill in the blanks.

Then, go to the non-stigmatizing replacement language page and write in the words. These words describe the situation in non-stigmatizing terms.

Reflection:

- Were these the words that came to your mind when you first read the vignettes?
- Where did you learn the other language from?
- Will you commit to changing your language and where appropriate questioning other people's language in regards to substance use and substance use disorder?

Person first language helps save lives.  
Thank you.

## Reflecting on Stigma

### Fill In the Blanks

There are more answers than questions so pick the most suitable based on what you have learned or confirmed today. (There are some hints on the next page.)

1. The reason Bill doesn't stop taking the drugs that hurt him is because he \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Did you see those \_\_\_\_\_ outside the beer store waiting for it to open? They're \_\_\_\_\_ . I wish someone would \_\_\_\_\_.
3. You call someone who drank too much alcohol \_\_\_\_\_.
4. I used to think that because I only drank alcohol, I had never touched \_\_\_\_\_. Now I know that alcohol is the \_\_\_\_\_ that has the greatest health impacts in Canada.
5. I used to try to make sense of the decisions people with an addiction made. Then someone pointed out that's why it's a \_\_\_\_\_. The term \_\_\_\_\_ really gives me a better sense of the problem people are dealing with.
6. People who use drugs are often \_\_\_\_\_. If they were only \_\_\_\_\_, they would be better off.
7. People using drugs need to wait at healthcare services at the \_\_\_\_\_. They mostly are only seeking \_\_\_\_\_. People with \_\_\_\_\_ health issues need to \_\_\_\_\_.



## Answers

1

- probably has a substance use disorder
- needs help to understand
- needs some support

2

- people
- possibly in trouble with their alcohol use
- create more education for people about substance use

3

- intoxicated because alcohol is a toxin

4

- drugs
- drug

5

- health issue
- substance use disorder

6

- suffering emotional difficulties or physical pain
- better equipped with other skills

7

- appropriate spot in line based on their health needs
- well-being
- life-threatening
- be taken care of first



### **What you hear ...**

When I see those addicts downtown, I can't imagine why they don't do something about their lives. You'd think they'd show a little self-respect; it's disgusting how they choose to live.

### **What you can say ...**

What someone suggested to me was to imagine a child in front of me who had done their very best. Then ask myself what problems they must have encountered as they grew up, and be dealing with today, to be suffering so much. Once I started doing that, it struck me that they must be leading a life they never imagined. I wonder if there is something we can do to help? At the very least, we can offer our respect for their humanity and use person-first language.

### **What you hear ...**

Well, I see Fred's finally back at work. It's been 28 days so it's a no brainer where he's been. I wouldn't have the nerve to show my face if they had to send me to detox. He must be really desperate for money to have come back. Keep an eye on your stuff.

### **What you can say ...**

I was worried about Fred's health as well. I read up on substance use disorders so I could have a better understanding of what he's going through. Did you know that stigma is one of the largest barriers to getting help? I think that's why the company has medical benefits that cover substance use disorders to support them in getting help, so we don't lose valuable employees to a health condition. I'm going to make a point of welcoming Fred back to work to help encourage him.

### **What you hear ...**

I don't know what Suzy was thinking last night. The last thing she said to me before the party was that she had to get home early to get her kids. Then there she was smashed, refusing to leave and it was embarrassing to be seen with her.

### **What you can say ...**

It sounds to me like Suzy was thinking about her family and responsibilities. I was concerned about her health. I read some material on substance use disorders and one of the indicators is losing the ability to act according to personal values. This inability may be a sign of a serious health issue. I'm going to share some information with her, as well as my concerns for her well-being.



### What you hear ...

One thing I know about addicts is they need to live with their own choices. If they suffer enough, some of them stop.

#### What you can say ...

One of the definitions of substance use disorder is when a person is unable to change their behaviour, in spite of negative consequences. They simply can't make the choice that will stop their suffering. It was really hard for me to understand because it doesn't seem to make any sense. As a friend was kind enough to point out, that's why it's called a "disorder."

### What you hear ...

I don't know why their parents didn't stop this from happening. My kids experimented like most kids, but I never let it get out of hand and neither did my kids.

#### What you can say ...

Substance use disorder isn't something people choose. It's something that happens to them. Most people take a substance and can moderate their choices around that substance based on their experience of beneficial or harmful consequences. You only get the diagnosis for a substance use disorder when the experience is harmful yet the use continues. That's why it's called a "disorder." Parents can't choose if their child will have a substance use disorder any more than other health conditions. We can take precautions and share information.



Canadian Centre  
on Substance Use  
and Addiction

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