

# Harm Reduction Conversation Guide for Providers



Instead of Saying	Say
Clean	Person who is substance use-free (in recovery)
IV drug user	Person who injects drugs
Addicted baby (meth/cocaine baby)	Baby born to person who used a substance while pregnant/Baby who has been exposed to substances while in the womb
Ex-addict	Person in recovery or long-term recovery
Sober	Person who is not using substances, in recovery
Relapse prevention	Recovery management
Detox	Withdrawal management
Non-compliant	Non-adherent
Relapse	Return to use
Cold turkey	Abruptly stopping the intake of a substance
Medication-assisted treatment (MAT)	Medication for substance-use disorder
Opioid substitution replacement therapy	Opioid agonist therapy

## References

- American Hospital Association. (2022). People Matter, Words Matter. Advancing Health America. Retrieved from: <https://www.aha.org/people-matter-words-matter>
- CA Bridge. (2021). Tool: A Caring Culture in Healthcare. CA Bridge Public Health. Retrieved from: <https://bridgetotreatment.org/resource/a-caring-culture-in-healthcare/>
- Mental Health Coordinating Council. (2013). Guidelines for Recovery Oriented Language. Retrieved from: <https://www.healthsciences.unimelb.edu.au>
- National Institute of Drug Abuse (2021). Words Matter: Terms to Use and Avoid When Talking About Addiction. NIH Advancing Addiction Services. Retrieved from: <http://www.nida.nih.gov>
- National Movement to End Addiction Stigma. (MHC). Addiction Language Guide. Retrieved from: <https://www.shatterproof.org>

**Harm Reduction is a public health approach that engages with people who use substances (lawful and unlawful) and equips them with life-saving tools and information to lower the transmission of infectious diseases and prevent overdoses through provision of care that is stigma-free and centered on the needs of people who use substances.**

## Brief, Structured Opener

- Give your name, title, pronouns and explanation of why you are talking to the individual.
  - “My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I use (she/her; he/him; they/them) and I’m a \_\_\_\_\_ (doctor/social worker/CHW). If you’re comfortable, can we talk about your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_(opiates, alcohol, meth, etc.)?”
  - “Can we take a few minutes to discuss why you are here today?”

## Reflective Listening and Providing Education

- Listen without interrupting and reflect your understanding of the individual’s concerns and/or needs.

- “It sounds like you were under a lot of stress when you were using.”
- “You mentioned that you often use.”
- Briefly clarify any misconceptions the individual has regarding substance use.
  - “Narcan/Naloxone is only effective on opiates/opioids.”
  - “Using alone increases the risk of overdose death.”

### Listening for Change Talk and Affirmation(s)

- Although harm reduction counseling does not require an individual’s commitment to change, we still want to help the individual identify and prioritize specific goals regarding substance use. Harm-reduction counseling does not require an individual’s commitment to change.
  - “You mentioned you’d like to use fewer pills or drink less. What is interfering more with your quality of life at this moment?”
  - “You said, ‘Being safer when using.’ What does that mean to you?”
- Reflect on what the individual has said. Give positive reinforcement for the individual’s strengths and identified goals.
  - “It’s good you feel \_\_\_\_\_ (your spouse, friend, boss, etc.) will support you.”
  - “I appreciate your willingness to discuss this with me.”

### Addressing Barrier(s)

- Help the individual identify attainable and realistic goal(s).
  - “How will you get to the harm-reduction program?”
  - “How do you think \_\_\_\_\_ (your spouse, friend, etc.) will feel about you practicing harm reduction by \_\_\_\_\_ (not sharing syringes, drinking less, using fewer pills, etc.)?”

### Closing

- Use a summary/reflection to ensure you understood what the individual discussed.
  - “We’ve been talking about your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_ (opiates, alcohol, meth, etc.) and you wanting to focus on \_\_\_\_\_ (using sterile syringes, drinking less, etc.)”
  - “Today we have discussed \_\_\_\_\_ (using sterile syringes, drinking less, etc.). Does that sound correct to you?”

### Referrals

- Confirm the individual’s willingness to receive referral(s) and provide person-centered resource(s).
  - “You are entitled to expand your options of support. Which of these referrals would you like me to call to set you up with an appointment?”
  - “Would you like my phone number so you can call me if you have any questions?”

### Patient-Centered Language

Instead of Saying	Say
Alcoholic	Person with alcohol use disorder
Drunk	Person who misuses alcohol
Binge drinker/Bender	Person who consumes lots of alcohol in a short time
Druggie/Junkie/Tweaker/Pothead	Person who uses substances (not all substance use is problematic or a disorder)
Addiction Addicted to Drug problem	Person who has a substance-use disorder
Dirty	Person who tests positive for substance use