



Recovery Friendly Workplaces

Person-Centered Language

Person-centered language puts people first. Using person-centered language is about respecting the dignity, worth, unique qualities and strengths of every individual.

This table includes some suggested person-centered language to use when working with people who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated. We understand that everyone has different language preferences and encourage employers to ask individuals about their language preferences.

Say This	Not This
substance use disorder	substance abuse
person with a substance use disorder	addict, junkie, or druggie
disease	drug habit
substance dependent	hooked
person in recovery	ex-addict
individual not yet in recovery	untreated addict
maintained recovery	stayed clean
recovery management	relapse prevention
had a setback, had a recurrence	relapsed or relapse
treatment is an opportunity for recovery	treatment is the goal
tested positive for drugs, person who uses drugs	dirty
tested negative for drugs, abstinent from drugs, in recovery, not drinking or taking drugs, not currently using drugs, not actively using drugs	clean
person arrested for a drug violation	drug offender or offender

Be specific when using person-centered language. For example, at the workforce investment board we say "jobseekers with records." The Marshal Project offers additional information about person-centered language in their article, [People-First Language Matters. So Does the Rest of the Story.](#)