

**Talking about drugs
and those of us
who take them**

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First edition

Published by Exchange Supplies. Product code P122

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Foreword

This guide may prompt some to ask “*Why does it matter what we call those...*” And that’s exactly why we need this guide because many people believe we do not warrant such niceties.

People who use drugs are living in the middle of a 50-year experiment that’s gone terribly terribly wrong. The social, economic and political rationale for introducing prohibition has been effectively dismissed and roundly excoriated.

Prohibition was used as a Trojan horse for other even darker modes of social engineering, derailing any group or agency that worked to change the racial inequities and brutalities.

The cost of this divisive and scientifically unsupportable debacle is so vast and insidious it has infiltrated and polluted every aspect of our society and family life from the halls of power to the judiciary and police bribery and corruption is rampant and unstoppable.

Families who have a relative caught up in this ludicrous attempt to ban an instinctively human behaviour are so haunted by guilt and fear that they sometimes express relief when overdose brings the nightmare to an end.

People who use drugs wish you didn’t need this guide as its underlying meaning is so clear it’s almost terrifying: we are not considered to be part of the human family as our status as ‘people’ has to preface any mention of us.

History will speak of this interlude with a sense of wonder at the brutality and horror of the disaster that is prohibition.

Jude Byrne

Fighting the war on my community

Introduction

The language we use to describe people and the things they do provides a window to the thinking, prejudice, and value we place on them and their actions.

When talking about marginalised groups stigmatising language can be so culturally normal that we don't question it.

This is particularly true in the field of illicit drugs: for instance **the term 'drug misuse'** implies that there is a universal correct and sanctioned use for drugs and a universally understood line which, when crossed, signifies that it is 'misuse' when in fact the substances and doses which are considered 'use' are firmly culturally and historically rooted, and ever changing.

The term 'drug abuse' goes further to emphasise stigma

- the word abuse is normally only attached to the most disapproved of violations of our social norms with 'physical abuse', 'sexual abuse' being the two that spring to mind. In western culture it is impossible to describe an activity as being 'abuse' and have people think that you value the behaviour, or indeed the person.

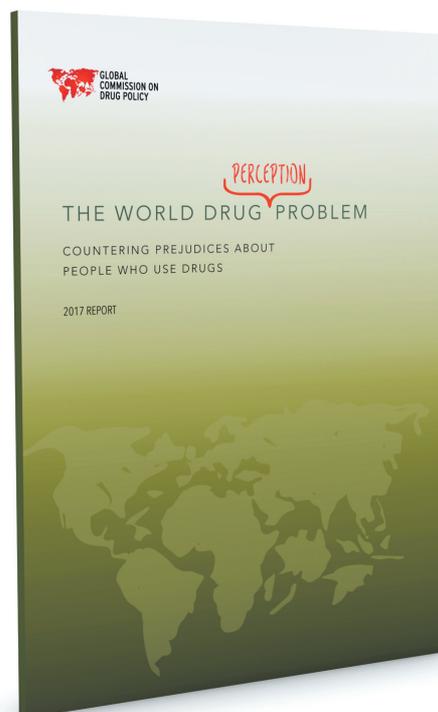
This guide goes beyond these two more obvious examples of language that has no real place in a rational discourse about drugs and explores the nuances that exist in attempting to achieve a language of drugs, and drug taking that values people who use drugs, and accepts the utility and pleasure of taking drugs in ways that are outside the norms of western society.

Background

The writing of this guide was prompted by the publication of 'The World Drug Perception Problem' by the Global Commission on Drug Policy.

The Global Commission guide was a great start in humanising the discourse about drugs and the people who take them. However, we feel that the language they suggested in the guide was over influenced by a medical view of drug taking which sees it as inherently abnormal and pathological.

This guide proposes an even more person centred approach, and one which accepts the choices of people who use drugs and doesn't regard drug use as an illness or abnormal behaviour.



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Global Commission says don't use	Global Commission suggests	Suggestions for less medical, more neutral terms
Drug user	Person who uses drugs	<p>Person centred language is more important where the view of the reader or listener isn't known, it emphasises the humanness of the person, and sets it in relation to the behaviour being described making the point that the behaviour is not the person.</p> <p>However, we look forward to the day when the humanity of people who used drugs does not need to be stressed, and the term 'drug user' is non-pejorative descriptive term like car user, or iPhone user.</p> <p>In personal communication, between people who share values including a non-judgemental acceptance of drug use, the term drug user is normal, and is probably the most commonly used term by people who take drugs when talking about themselves, or their peers.</p>
Recreational, casual, or experimental users	Person with non-problematic drug use	<p>Person who uses drugs; Recreational drug user: The Global Commission proposed alternative implies that use that can't be described as 'recreational, casual, or experimental' is necessarily problematic, this is certainly not always the case.</p> <p>Conversely it also implies that 'recreational, casual, or experimental/infrequent' drug use is <i>always</i> non-problematic, again this may not be the case as drug use that falls within these descriptions can cause problems including overdose, social exclusion, and (until we bring prohibition to an end) in many places, prosecution.</p> <p>Casual is a word that implies an emotional state, and/or attitude so isn't suitable for use in the media, and would seldom be an accurate/appropriate descriptor.</p> <p>Recreational i.e. describing drug use as a leisure activity, is appropriate use of language.</p>
Drug/substance abuser	-	<p>Person who uses drugs: The term abuse is a negative value judgement about the correct or authorised use of a drug. It is commonly used, and therefore needs to be addressed in a guide of this kind.</p>
Addict; junkie; dope head, pothead, smack head, crackhead etc.; druggie; stoner	<p>Person with drug dependence;</p> <p>Person with problematic drug use;</p> <p>Person with substance use disorder;</p> <p>Person who uses drugs (when use is not problematic);</p>	<p>Person with drug dependence;</p> <p>Person who uses drugs daily;</p> <p>Uses [x drug] regularly/daily;</p> <p>Person with [x problem(s)] as a result of drug use:</p> <p>To see drug use as a disorder is to pathologise it, and treat it as abnormal.</p> <p>Dependence is a more neutral term that describes the state of feeling like you need something, which is more appropriate.</p> <p>Terms relating to daily cannabis use (pothead, stoner, dope head) shouldn't be lumped together with the others because the stigma of opiate/cocaine use is greater than that of cannabis use.</p> <p>The term person who uses drugs does not need to be confined to those for whom drug use is non-problematic.</p>
Chaotic drug user	-	<p>Dedicated drug user; Person whose main focus is taking drugs and/or maximum intoxication: The term chaotic was not included by Global Commission, but is regularly used in media, clinical, and social media discourse in the UK so is added here.</p> <p>Chaotic is a patronising term that fails to see order or purpose where it often exists.</p>

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Drug habit	Substance use disorder; Problematic drug use	Person who is drug dependent; Daily drug user: To see drug use as a disorder is to pathologise and treat as abnormal. Dependence is a more neutral term that describes the state of feeling like you need something, which is more appropriate. Taking drugs frequently /daily is not necessarily problematic.
Addicted to [X drug]	Has [X drug] use disorder	Person who is dependent on [drug]; Uses [drug] daily: As above.
Clean	Abstinent; Person who has stopped using drugs	Not a drug user any more; Hasn't used [x drug] for [x period]: Abstinent has a moral overtone of not doing something you want to do. 'Stopped using drugs' is a loaded term that usually only refers to some drugs, and excludes others.
Dirty (as in 'dirty screen')	Actively uses drugs; Positive for substance use	Urine screen positive for [x drug]; Drug test positive for [x drug]: Urine tests can be positive for a metabolite of a drug days or weeks after it was used. The description should just state the facts, without extrapolating additional meaning or motivation.
Fight, counter, combat drugs and other combatant language	Respond, program, address, manage	Respond; Response: Program, address, manage, are all terms that imply the state and/or a professional field has a legitimate right to intervene and are part of the discourse of prohibition and over regulation.
Fix rooms, shooting gallery	Safe consumption facility	Drug consumption room; Safe consumption facility; Safe injection facility.
Former addicts; Reformed addict	Person in recovery; Person in long-term recovery	Person who used to use drugs; Person who is not using drugs any more; Person who hasn't used [x drug] for [x period]; Recovery is a term with NA /AA overtones, and assumptions, especially it is used to equate abstinence. Recovery should be used as a journey and/or any positive change.
Injecting drug user	Person who injects drugs	We look forward to the day when the humanity of people who used drugs does not need to be stressed, and the term 'injecting drug user' is no more a pejorative term than car user, Windows / Mac user, or iPhone user.
Opioid replacement therapy	Opioid substitution therapy	OST (Opioid substitution therapy): OST is easier to say.

EXCHANGE SUPPLIES

A social enterprise v. **1.** A business driven by a social mission, and using commerce to achieve health and/or social objectives. **2.** A company whose profits are invested in promoting activism or innovation for social good. **3.** An organisation that offers training and employment opportunities to those discriminated against in the workplace.

MAKING INJECTING SAFER
