

Reducing the Stigma

Addiction can happen to anyone. Research indicates that in the United States, as many as one in seven people are expected to develop an addiction to alcohol or drugs, also known as a substance use disorder. This means it is highly likely that people who suffer from it live, work and raise families in your neighborhood or community.

Addiction is a chronic disease because it causes long-lasting changes to the brain. These changes lead a person to seek out and use alcohol or other drugs over and over. Even so, addiction can be treated and managed. Unfortunately, substance abuse disorders come with a stigma—even people who seek treatment are often negatively stereotyped. We need to work to reduce this stigma, which can be a barrier to acknowledging the problem, seeking and accessing treatment and, ultimately, to recovery.

Addiction and Teens

Teens who struggle with drugs or alcohol face stigmas associated with addiction every day, causing them to feel at odds with themselves and the world around them. Additionally, the threat of societal judgment prevents many parents from getting their teens the help they need to recover. Americans' opinions about teens with addiction tend to be shaped by the negative perception associated with it. Thus, parents whose school age children are resorting to drug use are often hesitant to get them professional help; they worry what their friends, coworkers, extended family and even doctors will think of them. The end result is an unaddressed teen addiction that inevitably worsens without treatment. Stigmatization may be strong, but your love for your child is stronger. The hardest step is often the first one: seeking help. Don't wait to take action — your child's life could depend on it.

How to Reduce the Stigma of Addiction

If the stigmas of addiction and rehabilitation are reduced, people suffering from the disease may feel more confident to step forward and receive help. One way to reduce the stigma of addiction is to communicate using "person-first" language. This involves referring to individuals first as a person, after which you can reference their medical condition.

SAY THIS:	NOT THIS:
Person with opioid use disorder	Addict, user, druggie, junkie, abuser
Disease	Drug habit
Person living in recovery	Ex-addict
Person arrested for a drug violation	Drug offender
Substance dependent	Hooked
Had a setback	Relapsed
Maintained recovery; substance-free	Stayed clean
Negative drug screen	Clean drug screen
Positive drug screen	Dirty drug screen

Language is powerful – especially when talking about addiction. Understanding that a substance use disorder is a disease can lead to empathy for the affected person and help reduce the stigma surrounding it.

For more information, please visit our website at www.drugfreeadamscounty.org.