

Defining Substance Use

DEFINITIONS

Substances describe any kind of drug that has a biological effect on our bodies and/or brains. Drugs, alcohol, opioids/prescription painkillers, tobacco etc. are all substances.

Substance use is a continuum, not limited to those who don't vs. those who are "addicted." It can describe casual, infrequent, social, frequent, daily, problematic, and/or dependent use. It can also describe addiction.

Addiction is a chronic (ongoing) illness caused by a number of genetic, psychosocial and environmental factors. It is characterised by behaviours that include one or more of the following:

- 1 Loss of control over drug use (e.g. amount or frequency)
- 2 Continued use despite harm or consequences
- 3 Compulsion to use
- 4 Craving

THERE IS NO MAGIC FORMULA TO DETERMINE IF SOMEONE'S USE IS PROBLEMATIC BECAUSE EVERYONE IS DIFFERENT. SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER MIGHT BE:

- How is the substance being used?
- How often is use happening?
- What consequences are happening as a result?
- How does the person feel during and after the use?
- Why is the person wanting to use the substance?

INSTEAD OF USING THE WORD...

ADDICT → A person with addiction/substance use issues

CLEAN → Not using substances

SOBER → In recovery from substance use disorder

