

# Communicating Effectively with People Who Have Substance Use Disorder or Alcohol Use Disorder

## SUD/AUD

# 1

Understand that SUD and AUD are both disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Ask about accommodations/modifications a person may need and consider learning styles. Examples: flexible schedule, wellness supports (including a support person), reminders, preferences, written materials instead of verbal instructions.

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### Consider personal bias & stigma



What is your bias? Societal narratives about SUD/SUD often tell us people are making a conscious choice to continue using or drinking and therefore they are lazy, lacking willpower, irresponsible, etc. Think about the ways you have absorbed these narratives and pause and consider your language and behavior toward people with SUD/AUD. Spend time learning about SUD/AUD as a medical disorder to help cultivate empathy and understanding.

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# 2

### Be kind, present and polite

# 3

Be compassionate and be prepared to listen. Use compassionate and empathetic listening skills. Make the environment open to allow the person to share information. Be transparent while communicating about the case or child welfare information. Slow down with communication and check in with them to reassess information is received. Move towards long term connection by building rapport.

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### In a group setting

Ensure we ask if they have a support person(s) to bring to meetings, court, etc. A support person(s) may be able to help someone understand child welfare questions & requirements. Allow flexibility (AM meetings or PM meetings) or breaks during meetings and include rescheduling options without punitive results. Consider having a facilitator, smaller groups, one on one meetings, or what works best for the person or family.



# 4

## Celebrate recovery successes

# 5

Take the time to honor and celebrate self determination. Intentionally learn about the person's time in recovery, including their goals and accomplishments. Highlight individual strengths and focus on trauma-informed approaches. Use opportunities to share both small and bigger successes with the person and the family. For example, a week or 30 days of recovery should be acknowledged.



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### Language

Focus on using strength based language to help empower the person. Use person first language and compassionate communication. Terms that should be used are Substance Use Disorder and Alcohol Use Disorder. Avoid using slang terms such as addict, addiction, drug user, junkie, etc. Avoid using jargon or ODHS specific language. Avoid using coercive pressure to encourage a person in their recovery including statements like "We will only increase parenting time if you have all negative UAs". Instead focus on asking the person how you can support them toward their recovery goals.



# 6

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### SUD/AUD & Recovery

Recovery is an ongoing commitment and every person's journey with SUD/AUD can look different. Avoid applying assumptions and judgments to a person's recovery process. Understand that recurrence of substance/alcohol use can be a very normal part of the long-term recovery process and avoid viewing this as a failure. It can be a learning opportunity for the person. Educate yourself on the various emotional, physical and behavioral impacts that recovery can have on a person's life. For example, withdrawal effects which may include moodiness or falling asleep, guilt or shame, hunger or thirst, etc.

# 7

### Resources

- [https://www.spectrum.niaaa.nih.gov/Content/archives/Winter\\_2022.pdf](https://www.spectrum.niaaa.nih.gov/Content/archives/Winter_2022.pdf)
- <https://www.recoveryanswers.org/addiction-ary/>

