What is Empathy Lens?

The Empathy Lens project is a collection of free images of people who use drugs and the services that support them. It promotes using positive and respectful images in drug-related education, media, and outreach.

Our goal is to:

- Change how people see drug use, supportive services, treatment, and recovery to reduce stigma

- Show what real harm reduction, treatment, and recovery spaces look like to normalize community and health-related care and reduce barriers to access

Find more info on stigma in images and check out our **free collection** of realistic, compassionate, and non-stigmatizing images!

EmpathyLens.org

Resources

Other free image collections:

The Gender Spectrum Collection
genderspectrum.vice.com

Sexual Health & Liberation Photo Collection
bhocpartners.org/health-photos

Disabled and Here Collection
affecttheverb.com/collection

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Public Domain Photo Database
jsad.com/photos

Find accurate info about substance use:

UW Addictions, Drug & Alcohol Institute
adai.uw.edu

LearnAboutTreatment.org
learnabouttreatment.org

LearnAboutCannabisWA.org
learnaboutcannabiswa.org

MedlinePlus
medlineplus.gov

ADAI
ADDICTIONS, DRUG & ALCOHOL INSTITUTE

INFORMATION SERVICES

W UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON
PSYCHIATRY & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES
School of Medicine

Stigma in images

How to avoid stereotypes and humanize people who use drugs

What is stigma and how does it affect people?

Stigma is negative opinions or judgments about others. In terms of drug use, stigma means looking down on someone who uses drugs or has an addiction (also called a "substance use disorder").

Stigma can happen anywhere, including healthcare. For people who use drugs, stigma can:

- Make them feel ashamed, left out, or treated unfairly
- Make others see them as less than human
- Lead to worse healthcare, not seeking or getting help, and poorer health

Our choices matter

The words and images we choose can increase stigma. For example, calling someone a "junkie" or an "addict" makes it seem like drug use is their whole identity.

Instead, using "person-first" language (like "a person with a substance use disorder") recognizes that they are more than their addiction. The same idea is true for images.

Pictures are powerful!
They shape how we think and feel, sometimes without us even realizing it.

How can I choose images that aren't stigmatizing?

Here are some tips on selecting images that don't spread stigmatizing ideas about people who use drugs or services that help provide support:

1. **Watch out for misinformation**
   Make sure images don't spread false information.

2. **Avoid triggering images**
   Stay away from images of drugs or drug supplies unless you need to explain something specific.

3. **Show different kinds of people**
   People who use drugs (and those who help them) come from all races, genders, and ages.

4. **Keep it positive and simple**
   Avoid dramatic, sad, or scary images. Show everyday people in normal, supportive situations.

5. **Make it humanizing**
   Avoid images that focus on the drugs instead of the person. Use images showing them as full people, not as just their drug use.
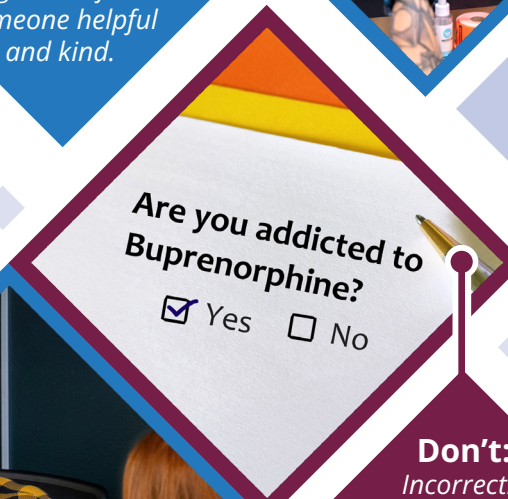
Examples: Do's & Don'ts

Don't: *Drug supplies are in focus while their face is blurry, like the only thing that matters about them is their drugs.*

Do: *Someone getting safer use supplies. They look happy to get care from someone helpful and kind.*

Are you addicted to Buprenorphine?
☑ Yes   ☐ No

Do: *A welcoming, friendly contingency management session, one of the few proven treatments for stimulant use disorder.*

Don't: *Incorrectly suggests it's common to become "addicted" to buprenorphine, an effective treatment for opioid use disorder.*