

2023 Tribal Healing to Wellness Court Enhancement Training

Strength-Based Language

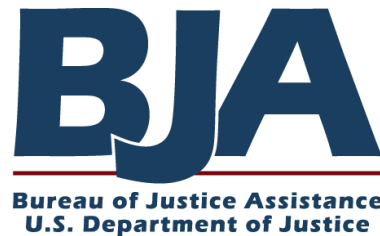
Understanding the Impact of Word Choice on Treatment Court Outcomes

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First things first...

The opinions, findings, and recommendations expressed in this presentation are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the Bureau of Justice Assistance or the Center for Justice Innovation State-Based Adult Drug Court Training and Technical Assistance Program.



Center for Justice Innovation (formerly the Center for Court Innovation)

Original Research

Conducts independent evaluations, documenting how government systems work, how neighborhoods function, and how reform efforts change things.

Operating Programs

Making an impact on the ground in dozens of communities and testing new ideas for improving the justice system. Projects include community-based violence prevention projects, alternatives to incarceration, and reentry initiatives.

Technical Assistance (TA)

Provides hands-on, expert assistance to reformers around the world, including judges, attorneys, justice officials, and community organizations. TA experts are available to help plan, implement, and evaluate new policies, practices, and technologies.

Center for Justice Innovation

Technical Assistance Team Values

Through **equitable collaboration**, promoting **person-centered practices**, exercising **transformative** approaches, prioritizing **anti-racism**, and **anti-oppression** our goal is to ensure that people of all backgrounds have access to and are supported in treatment courts and the court system.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

<https://native-land.ca/>

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Territories Languages Treaties

Search your address, or toggle switches above to add shapes. Click around! [Think critically about this map.](#)

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Territories Languages Treaties

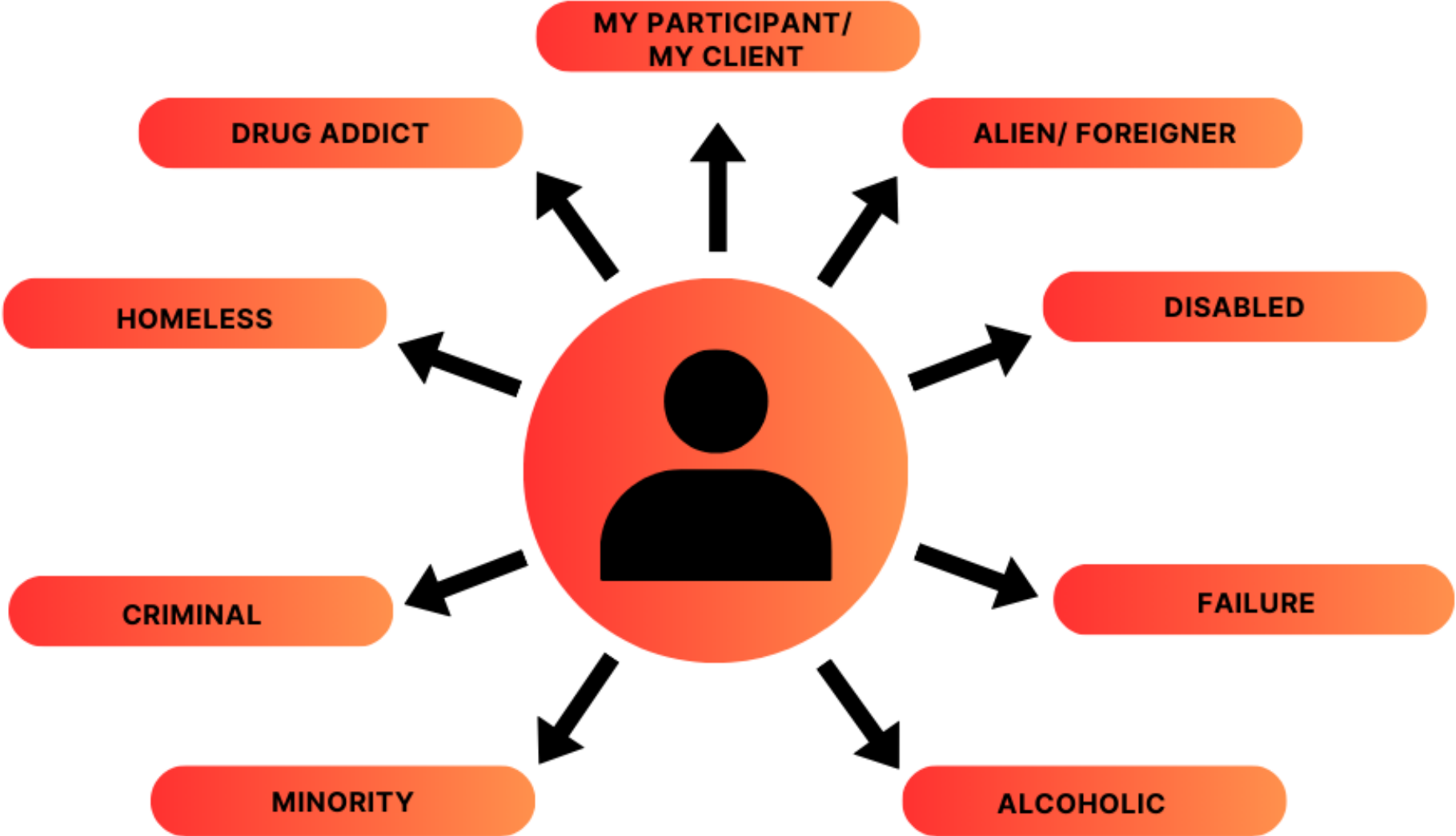
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Learning Objectives

- Understand the impact of language use on individuals.
- Review current research landscape, including discussions of stigma effects and explicit/implicit bias.
- Discuss how language choice can impact participant experience in treatment courts.
- Provide takeaway strategies to apply inclusive language within treatment court environments.

Terms We Hear



Language is Critical

- Language is an important tool in the system of how we communicate. Like most tools, it can be affective when used properly. When misused, it can have consequences beyond its initial use.
- The way we communicate and the words we chose can encourage and empower individuals or perpetuate stigma, discrimination, and impact self-worth.



Metacommunication

The communication behind the verbal use of words or language. The unspoken cues we communicate.

Metacommunication involves:

- Body Language
- Eye Contact
- Facial Expression
- Personal Space
- Tonality
- Appearance
- Vocalizations (sighing, laughing)
- Touch
- Objects
- Media elements (profile picture, posts, or chosen quotes)



What does research tell us about language choice and use?

The language you chose
can imply **moral values**
and **create barriers** to
treatment for people
who use substances.

(HARTWELL ET AL, P.3)

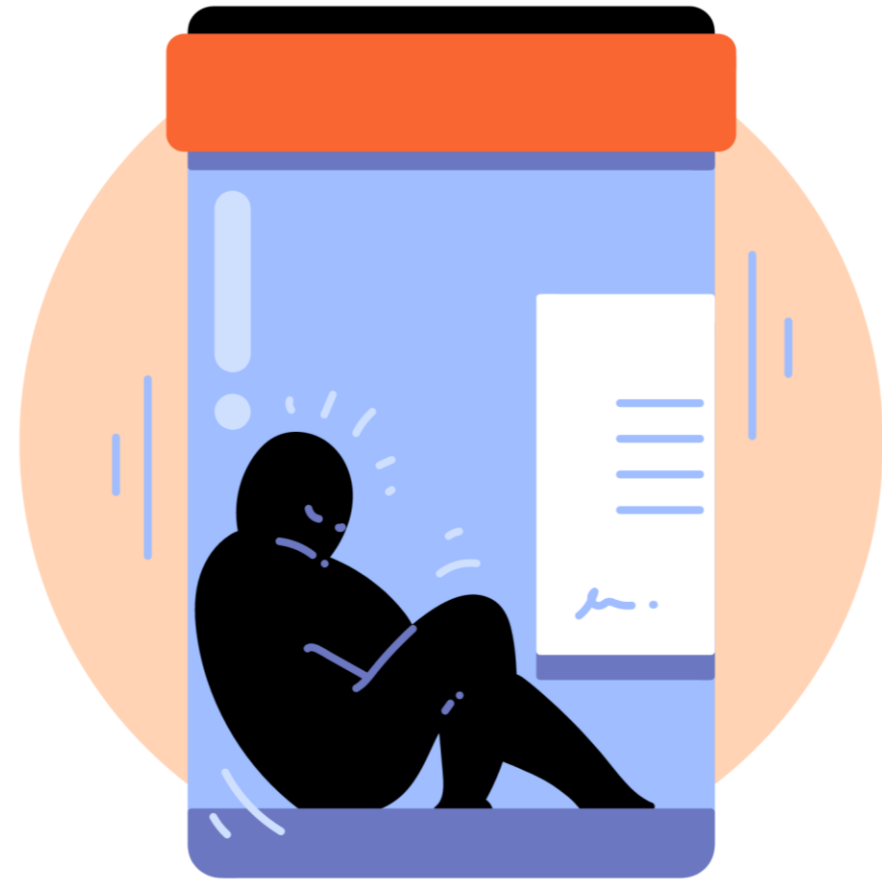
Stigma



- Societal bias often frames people with a substance use disorder as lacking accountability, to be categorized by their illness or choices, and giving them a singular identity.
- This can stop individuals from entering treatment.

Internalized Stigma

- Substance users may have heightened sensitivity to stigmatizing language due to internalized shame and past experiences.
- People who use substances may come to expect discrimination or believe they should be treated poorly by others based on negative engagements with “helping individuals.”



Stigmatizing language
can reinforce **negative**
public perceptions of
substance users.

(MCGINTY, P. 111)

Encountering **stigmatizing language** from staff in treatment settings can **discourage clients** from continuing treatment, while treatment providers who use **nonjudgmental language** can **positively benefit** individuals in **treatment.**

(HAMMARLUND ET AL., P. 133)



Individuals who identify with holistic views of individuals who use substances can still have implicit biases, particularly relating to minoritized populations.

Use of person-centered and inclusive language may **build trust and strengthen communication** between clients and treatment providers.



Changing embedded
language patterns require
both *education* and
increased general
awareness.

Language and Team Engagement

Person-First or Person-Centered Language

- This language prioritizes the individual over their health condition, disability, or disease.



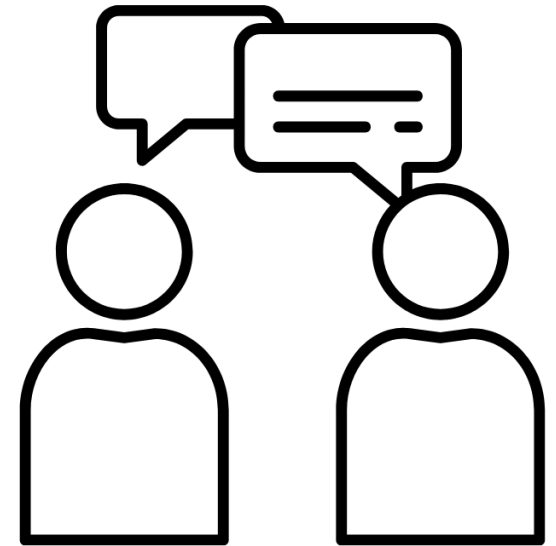


Strengths-Based Approach

- Using a strengths-based approach can also serve to reduce stigma and facilitate engagement with participants.

Where Do We Start?

- Review mission statements
- Review policies and procedures/operations manual
- Ongoing Training
- Make the conversation part of regular practice



Reviewing mission statements and policies and procedures/operations manual

- Why does your team do the work that you do?
- How does language help you achieve those goals?
- Are your policies and procedures/operation manuals reflective of your mission and does your language uplift your work?



- Language is always evolving.
- Training on inclusive language should not happen once, it needs to continuously be part of the conversation.

Training



Listening to Other Voices

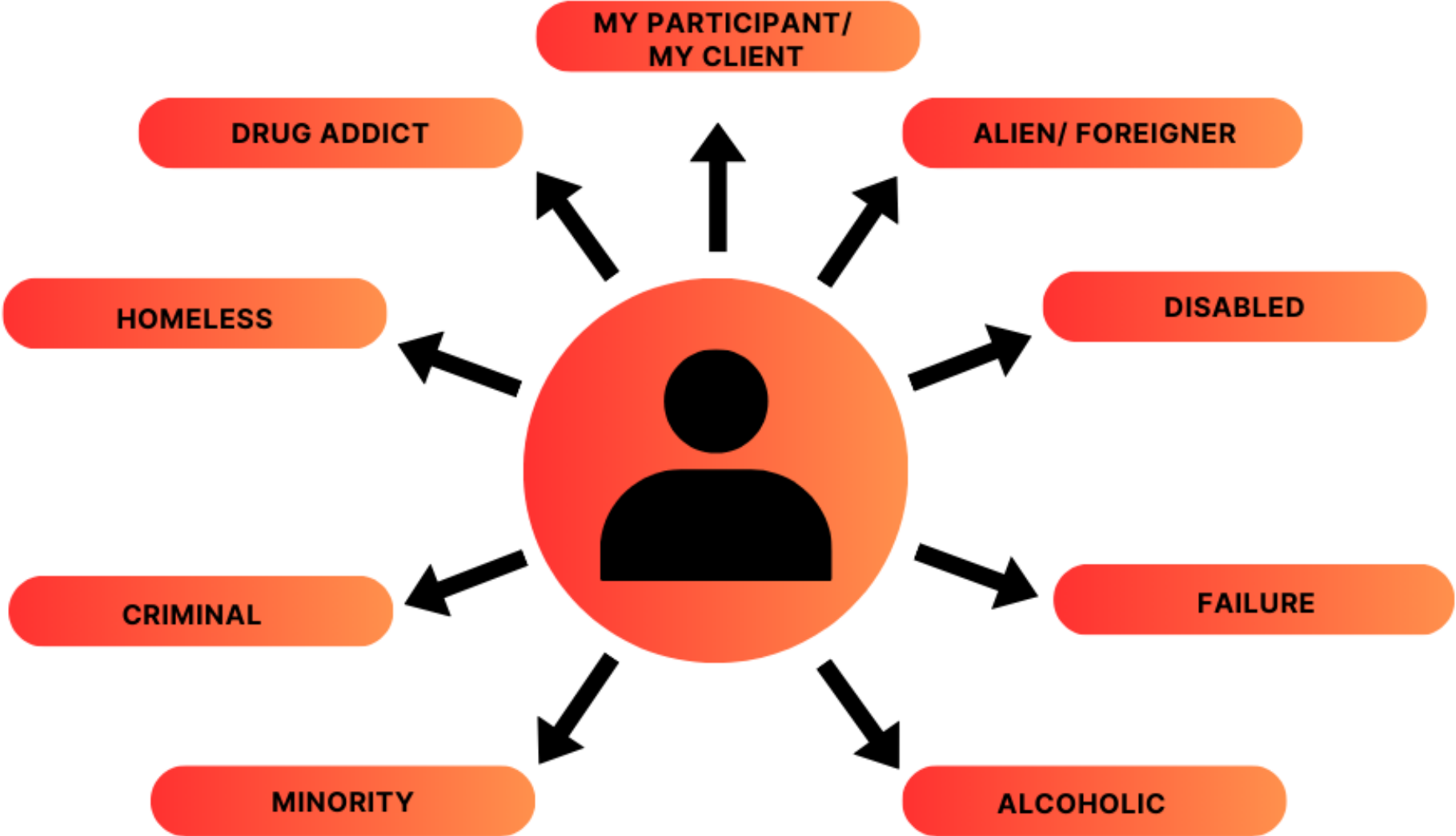
- Who has input in your court's practices?
- Are you surveying your participants/graduates?
- What community connections do you have?

Language and Participant Engagement

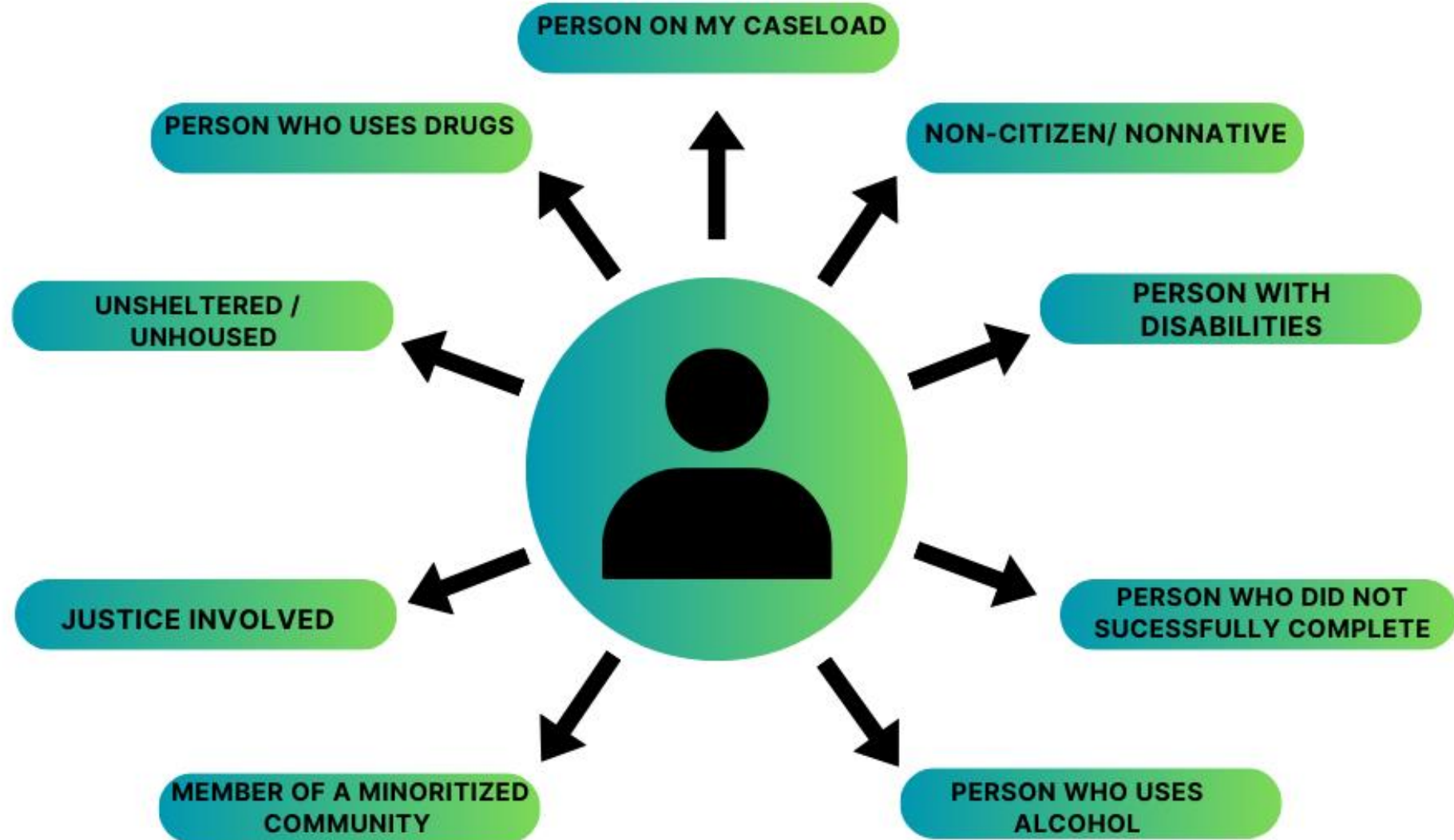
Engaging with Your Participants

- Person-first language requires that you listen to the terms your participants want used.
- Providing/introducing inclusive language into your interactions

Terms We Hear



Terms We Can Use



Road mapping

Starting Location

Question: What are you?
Question: Where are you from?
Question: What's your ethnicity?

Closed Questions, Poor Tone, Word Choice

Ethnicity

Open Questions, Body Language, Affirming Words

Destination

Question: Tell me about your background?
Question: How would you describe yourself?
Question: How do you identify?

Starting Location

Question: Do you have a problem with drugs?
Question: What drugs do you use?

Closed Questions, Poor Tone, Word Choice

Substance Use

Open Questions, Body Language, Affirming Words

Question: Can you tell me about your relationship with substances?
Question: What type of supports are you interested in?

Destination

Starting Location

Question: Don't you want help?
Question: Do you want to stop using drugs?
Question: Have you ever been to rehab?

Closed Questions, Poor Tone, Word Choice

Treatment Engagement

Open Questions, Body Language, Affirming Words

Question: Have you ever engaged in treatment before?
Question: What are some goals we can establish for you?
Question: Can you tell me about your previous treatment experience, if any?

Destination

Revisit: Learning Objectives

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Questions?

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