

Harm Reduction Principles 101

Minimize Harm

- Make every appropriate effort to keep patients on Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) to minimize the risk of overdose.
- Discuss safer use strategies, refer to local Syringe Service Programs (SSPs).

Redefine Success

- Remember that abstinence is not the goal for everyone.
- Elicit patient's goals beyond their substance use (if they want to stop using heroin, why? The underlying goal may be to reconnect with family, to regain their self worth, etc). Share these goals with the team and revisit them often.

Approach Non-Judgmentally

- Remember that most people with Substance Use Disorder (SUD) have histories of experiencing stigma in the healthcare system.
- Use motivational interviewing techniques to approach each patient with compassion and curiosity.

Dignify and Respect

- Use person-first language (see [MOC Destigmatizing Language Guide](#)).
- Create a welcoming, comfortable space. Consider engaging patients or peers in the design of the physical space.

Empower with Knowledge

- Remember that each patient is their own best decision maker when empowered with knowledge.
- Provide factual, unfiltered information - about the risks of substance use, about the pharmacology of MOUD (e.g., counsel a patient how to safely restart their buprenorphine if they briefly discontinue their treatment).