

Our Stories
Have Power



FACES & VOICES OF RECOVERY

Recovery Messaging for Young People in Recovery

Here's language that you can use to talk about recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs. This messaging is a result of in-depth public opinion research with members of the recovery community, including young people in recovery, and the general public. We encourage you to use this "messaging" or language whenever you're speaking – as a person in recovery, a family member or friend.

"This recovery messaging is excellent. Thanks to Faces & Voices of Recovery for its leadership in developing messages to all Americans that clearly and passionately convey the living reality of long-term recovery from addiction." – William White, Author and recovery advocate

WHY RECOVERY MESSAGING IS IMPORTANT

Faces & Voices of Recovery has found a way to describe and talk about recovery so that people who are **NOT** part of the recovery community understand what we mean when we use the word "recovery." One of the important findings from our research is that the general public believes that the word recovery means that someone is trying to stop using alcohol or other drugs. We have found a way to talk about recovery in a clear and credible way that will help move our advocacy agenda forward, making it possible for more people to get the help they need to recover.

1. Make it personal, so that we have credibility
2. Keep it simple and in the present tense, so that it's real and understandable
3. Help people understand that recovery means you or the person you care about is no longer using alcohol or other drugs. We do this by moving away from saying "in recovery" to saying "in long-term recovery," by using concrete examples from our lives to talk about stability and by mentioning the length of time that the person is in recovery.
4. For young people, mentioning the age at which you entered recovery is the best way to let others know that it's possible to find recovery at an early age.
5. Talk about your recovery ... not your addiction
6. Help people understand that there's more to recovery than not using alcohol or other drugs, and that part of recovery is creating a better life

MESSAGING OR LANGUAGE FOR A YOUNG PERSON IN LONG-TERM RECOVERY

I'm (*your first and last name*) and I am a young person in long-term recovery, which means that I have not used alcohol or drugs since I was [x] years old. Today I'm [y] years old and in long-term recovery for [z] years. Long-term recovery has given me new hope and stability. I've been able to create a better life for myself, my family and my community. I am now speaking out to offer hope and so that others have the opportunity to achieve long-term recovery, as I have.

MESSAGING OR LANGUAGE FOR A FAMILY MEMBER OF A YOUNG PERSON IN LONG-TERM RECOVERY

I'm [*your first and last name*]. My [son/daughter/sister/brother] is a young person in long-term recovery, which means that [he/she] hasn't used alcohol or other drugs since [he/she] was [x] years old. It has brought stability to [his/her] life. We've become healthier together, enjoying family life in our home (*insert concrete examples to personalize*). Long-term recovery has given me and my family new purpose and hope for the future. I am now speaking out because I want to help make it possible for other young people and their families to do the same.

HOW AND WHERE TO USE THESE MESSAGES

We hope that you will use these messages day in and day out. "Staying on message" means using the same language or message over and over again, until it becomes part of our common understanding. You may get sick of saying it, but a unified message, from the entire recovery community, is what we need to do now. This basic message will help us maintain our focus and continuity as it gets integrated into everything that we do. In the future, when there's greater public understanding of recovery, we will be able to change our basic message.

Remember to use this recovery messaging any time you write or speak about recovery, publicly or privately:

- When you're talking to your family, friends and neighbors
- When you're introducing yourself and speaking in public
- When you're being interviewed
- When you're meeting with elected officials, public policy makers and others in government
- When you're writing for your job or for newsletters, web blog posts, etc.
- ALWAYS!

WHAT'S NOT IN THESE MESSAGES AND WHY

We have side-stepped engaging in a discussion about whether or not addiction is a disease and gone straight to our message: Real teenagers and young people, from many different backgrounds and with different experiences, are in long-term recovery. Their lives, and the lives of their families, friends and communities are better because of it. That's why we need to make it possible for even more people to get the help they need, and once they are in recovery, remove barriers that keep them from sustaining their recovery.

"I'm a young recovering addict (alcoholic) or I'm a young addict (alcoholic)." When people hear the words addict or alcoholic, it reinforces the idea of a revolving door; that you or the person in your family is still struggling with active addiction. These words also reinforce negative stereotypes, define the person by the condition, and emphasize addiction over recovery.

"Addiction is a disease." "Addiction is a health problem." In our research, and as we're sure you know from your own experience, we found that many people believe that addiction is a moral issue, not a health problem. Even when someone says that they believe it's a health problem, when we scratched below the surface, we found that because of their personal experiences and/or prejudices, it's difficult for many Americans to truly believe that addiction is a disease or a health problem. We've sidestepped a discussion about whether or not addiction is a disease vs. moral problem and gone straight to our message. What we are doing is delivering a message of hope to other teens/youths about the possibility of long-term recovery and to policy makers that it makes sense to invest in recovery.

People in the recovery community are experts about recovery. Researchers and the heads of federal agencies, like the National Institute on Drug Abuse, are experts about addiction and can deliver this message with credibility.

Information about 12-step programs. The message does not mention a particular 12-step fellowship, whether AA, NA, Al-Anon or other programs to address concerns that people may have about their anonymity and the traditions of their fellowship.

A definition of recovery. The message we are delivering *describes rather than defines* recovery, so that the person you are speaking with or the audience you are addressing, can see what recovery means – that you or your family member is in long-term recovery and that other young people should have the opportunity to recover as well. You are not speaking out as a social worker or school counselor who is advising a teen/youth struggling with active addiction; as a physician who is diagnosing a person who needs treatment referral; an insurance company deciding whether or not someone's care should be covered; or an academic researching addiction and recovery.

A detailed explanation of your active addiction. You are conveying a message about recovery and hope based on your personal demonstration that young people struggling with addiction

can find long-term recovery. We have side-stepped focusing on what addiction involves and gone straight to our message: Real teenagers and young people, from all socioeconomic groups across the country, are in long-term recovery. Their lives and the lives of their families, friends and communities, are better because of it. No matter how many young people are struggling with addiction, what's important is to make it possible for them to get the help they need, and once they are in recovery, to remove the barriers that may keep them from long-term recovery.

LONG-TERM RECOVERY MESSAGING and PUBLIC POLICY

There's a reason that people all over our country are organizing to support recovery – to change local, state and national policies that restrict access to recovery and remove discriminatory barriers to sustained recovery. Faces & Voices of Recovery uses recovery messaging in all of our public policy work. We encourage you to do the same. Here are a few examples of how it can be used:

1) Funding for recovery community organizations

Issue: The federal government's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has a program called the Recovery Community Services Program (RCSP) that funds a small number of recovery community organizations to provide peer recovery support services. Faces & Voices has successfully advocated for the program, restoring funding after it was cut. To use recovery messaging to ask that more organizations receive RCSP support, a recovery advocate would say,

Recovery Messaging:

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Long-term recovery has given me new hope and stability. I've been able to create a better life for myself, my family and my community. (*use concrete examples*).

I am now speaking out because long-term recovery has helped me change my life for the better, and I want to make it possible for other young people to do the same.

I know that recovery support services help young people newly in recovery find jobs, housing and transportation, making it possible for them to achieve long-term recovery. Hundreds of recovery community organizations have applied for the federal government's Recovery Community Services Program, yet very few grants are awarded. We want to make it possible for even more people to achieve long-term recovery, and therefore we urge you to quadruple funding for the Recovery Community Services Program."

2) Restoring Voting Rights for People with Drug Convictions

Issue: Nationally, more than four million Americans are denied the right to vote as a result of laws that prohibit voting by felons or ex-felons. In 48 states (with the exception of Maine and

Vermont) and the District of Columbia prisoners cannot vote, in 36 states felons on probation or parole are disenfranchised, and in 11 states a felony conviction can result in a lifetime ban after the completion of a sentence.

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Long-term recovery has given me new hope and stability. I’ve been able to create a better life for myself, my family and my community. *(use concrete examples)*.

I am now speaking out because long-term recovery has helped me change my life for the better, and I want to make it possible for other young people to do the same.

I am one of the more than four million Americans who have been denied the right to vote because of a criminal conviction while I was using drugs. I’ve turned my life around and have a job and am paying taxes. I want to be more involved in my community. Young people in recovery like me should not be denied the right to vote.”

3) Rally for Recovery!

Issue: Each September people in recovery, their families, friends and allies organize and participate in Rally for Recovery! activities during National Recovery Month. At these events, recovery community organizations hold walks, picnics, concerts, register voters and speak out about advocacy campaigns that they are working on to support recovery.

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Long-term recovery has given me new hope and stability. I’ve been able to create a better life for myself, my family and my community. *(use concrete examples)*.

I am now speaking out because long-term recovery has helped me change my life for the better, and I want to make it possible for other young people to do the same.

Join us on Saturday at the State Capitol at 3:00 pm, where we will be speaking out about recovery in our community and Senator Jones will lead a march of 1000 people from all walks of life in our town in support of recovery. After the march, there’s a community fair with lots of food, music and activities for kids. We hope you can join us to support recovery!

4) Spending Priorities

Issue: There's a growing movement to reduce spending for prisons and jails and shift resources to support people in the community.

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Long-term recovery has given me new hope and stability. I've been able to create a better life for myself, my family and my community. (*use concrete examples*).

I am now speaking out because long-term recovery has helped me change my life for the better, and I want to make it possible for other young people to do the same.

The War on Drugs has crowded our prisons. We can't afford to waste limited resources on an expensive revolving door. We should invest in helping people of all ages get the help they need in the community and make it possible for them to regain their lives and their families."

If you'd like help developing messaging for a public policy advocacy campaign, please contact us at info@facesandvoicesofrecovery.org

RESOURCES:

Faces & Voices of Recovery's 2004 Hart/Teeter survey of the general public and 2001 survey of the recovery community can be found at:

http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/resources/public_opinion.php

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