CELBRATING 15 YEARS

SPREAD
THE WORD

Special Olympics

BEST BUDDIES

STUDENT TOOLKIT

Individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID), a group made up of over 200 million people, representing every country, belief system, sexual orientation, gender expression, race, and ethnicity, continue to be excluded and isolated from their peers in schools, workplaces, and communities around the world. By taking the Pledge to Include and by acting for meaningful inclusion, you can combat the hurtful and dehumanizing effects of exclusion.

This toolkit is for students who would like to activate on inclusion in their schools. Below you will find event ideas, social media guidance, and more so that you and your friends can engage every day of the year on inclusion. To learn more about how to write and talk about Spread the Word >>, view our Core Messaging Toolkit or explore our website at www.spreadtheword.global.

As we celebrate 15 years of Spread the Word, we're reflecting on the incredible journey and the impact this campaign has had in fostering inclusion and breaking down stereotypes. Now, we're energized to renew our commitment by returning to the roots of the campaign, reigniting the spark and momentum that defined its early days in 2009. With the same passion and dedication, we aim to journey back to the heart of our mission. We're eager to inspire change, one word at a time.

Spread the Word was created to End the Word and we believe we should stick to the core reason why this campaign was created, to commit to acknowledging the hurt caused by disparaging words towards people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The R-word is not as prevalent, but it is still used, along with other derogatory language words. Words matter because they hold the power to shape perceptions, influence emotions, and drive actions. The language we use can either foster understanding, empathy, and unity, or perpetuate stereotypes, division, and discrimination. Choosing our words carefully is essential for effective communication and building a more inclusive and compassionate society.

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SPREAD THE WORD

GATHERING A TEAM

Who can help make your community more inclusive?

- If your school doesn't have one yet, start a **Special Olympics** or **Best Buddies club**.

- Reach out to your Special Olympics or Best Buddies advisor, a teacher, or school administrator and ask them to support you in promoting inclusion.

- Gather a group of students from sports teams, student government, service organizations, or other clubs focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- Build a team of people dedicated to planning and carrying out ideas for inclusion at your school. Plan events and work to change social norms that exclude.

- Discuss what inclusion means and looks like with **Inclusion Tiles** from **Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools**®. As you create your inclusion journey, think about the ways your journey may be different from a friend's or a classmate's.

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SPREAD THE WORD

HOST AN EVENT

Bring your school community together to promote inclusion!

- Work with your team and clubs at your school to host an assembly or pep rally for inclusion, or plan an inclusion week. You can host an event on Zoom, create a video, or use social media when in-person gatherings aren't possible. View **this guide from Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools** for more ideas for virtual events.

- **Unified Sports** and **Best Buddies Clubs** are a great place to start but consider bringing other clubs in that focus on inclusive practices such as racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights, culture, mental health, and more.

- Promote your event using posters, flyers, and social media posts. Ask school administrators to help get the word out. **Find Templates Here**.

- Share why it is important to Pledge to Include. Have students and community members sign the banner or take the pledge online at **www.spreadtheword.global/pledge**.

SPREAD THE WORD »»

TAKE AN ACTION EVERYDAY.

Look out for those who may be excluded or left out.

- Invite them to join you for lunch.

- Try to get to know them.

- Welcome them. **Be a friend. Be a teammate**.

- Be a leader. Teach others why inclusion matters.

STUDENT TOOLKIT

SPREAD THE **WORD** »

Social Media is a powerful way to raise awareness for Spread the Word. It allows people to engage in conversations that help change attitudes and drive people to pledge to take their own action for inclusion at **www.spreadtheword.global**. Here are some ideas for using social media channels.

FACEBOOK

- Like and follow the **Spread the Word >> Page**
- Re-share articles, videos, and events and your own narrative on inclusion. Contribute to positive discussions in the comments.
- Post on your own page inviting friends to take the **#pledgetoinclude.**
- Share your own story of inclusion with photos from Special Olympics of Best Buddies events.

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- Follow **@PledgeToInclude @SpecialOlympics** and **@BestBuddies**
- Retweet posts to your own page. Include your own words.
- Use **#PledgeToInclude** when talking about the Spread the Word Campaign or how you are working to make you community more inclusive.
- Tag friends and community leaders and challenge them to take the Pledge.

INSTAGRAM

- Follow **@PledgeToInclude.**
- Join discussions in the comments or share posts to your own page or story.
- Post photos or videos from school, Best Buddies, or Special Olympics events and talk about why inclusion is important to you.
- Be sure to tag our account and use #PledgeToInclude.

BLOGS, TIKTOK, AND MORE

- These channels can be powerful storytelling tools. There are conversations taking place every day about inclusion, people with intellectual disabilities, sports, or friendship.
- Find a topic you care about and share your perspective. Engage online communities and spread the word about inclusion.
- Keep interactions respectful and moving forward by always encouraging people to join in taking the pledge to include.

STUDENT TOOLKIT

SPREAD THE WORD »»

USE OUR **SOCIAL MEDIA TEMPLATES** TO HELP SHARE YOUR STORY.

SPREAD THE WORD »»

SPREAD THE WORD »»

SPREAD THE WORD »»

WORDS AFFECT ATTITUDES,

ATTITUDES IMPACT ACTIONS.

SAMPLE TEXT FOR ANY PLATFORM

Everyone needs to be heard. Everyone needs to feel included. Everyone needs to be included. Join me in building truly inclusive schools, workplaces, and communities, where we can learn and grow together. Visit https://www.spreadthew ord.global/.

We are celebrating 15 years of Spread the Word, but the work continues. We're eager to inspire change, one word at a time. Join me in taking the pledge and commit to acknowledging the hurt caused by disparaging words towards people with intellectual disabilities. #PledgetoInclude

When was the last time you totally committed to something? Bring that level of courage and commitment to our movement for a more inclusive world! Learn more at https://www.spreadthewo rd.global/

STUDENT TOOLKIT

SPREAD THE WORD

ONLINE SAFETY AND WELL-BEING

TIPS FOR RESPONDING TO HURTFUL COMMENTS ONLINE:

- It is important to keep yourself safe. If you feel like you need to, hide negative accounts from your feed.

- If you see bullying or negative comments online, respond with positivity and information. Lead with compassion and kindness. Arm yourself with your honest feelings. Try to foster understanding.

- Use those comments as an opportunity to engage the person in conversation. Prepare a few lines of text expressing why inclusive words and actions matter to you. Have it ready to engage in positive conversation. We cannot effect change without confronting the attitudes we hope to change.

- Most people will respond to this positively. Those who don't, brush it off! It's likely they've heard your message and it sticks with them – maybe they will pledge to include next year! You know why you care about inclusion, so keep going.

STAYING SAFE AND INCLUSIVE ONLINE
INTERNET SAFETY AND WELL-BEING
IN A TIME OF VIRTUAL CONNECTION

- Keep your accounts private.
- Mute, unfollow, or block accounts that make you feel uncomfortable.
- When responding to hurtful behavior, lead with **compassion** & thoughtful counterpoints.
- Invite others to take the **#pledgetoinclude**
- Follow accounts that **inspire** you or bring positivity to your feed.
- For more resources, go to spreadtheword.global

RESOURCES FOR ONLINE SAFETY AND WELL-BEING

- The Trevor Project's guide for protecting your own space and well-being on IG.

- https://www.stopbullying.gov/

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools: Build Back Inclusive Guide](#)

- [Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools: Back to School Resources](#)

- [Best Buddies Chapters: Inclusion Resources](#)

- [Best Buddies: Virtual Program Resources](#)

- [Spread the Word >> Fact Sheet](#)

- [Advocacy and Inclusion Opportunities from Best Buddies International](#)

- Intellectual Disabilities and Language and Terminology Fact Sheet: [A one-page reference about intellectual disabilities](#) and the language to use when talking about people with intellectual disabilities

STUDENT TOOLKIT VIDEO GUIDE

Will and Alex, the organizers of an event at Yorktown High School, shared their tips and tricks for getting the most out of the resources in this toolkit!