**Spread the Word to End the Word**

**Action Kit**

**KEY MESSAGES AND TALKING POINTS**

It is time we **Spread the Word to End the Word™** and build awareness for society to stop and think about its’ use of the R-word. Use of that R-word, “retard” or “retarded,” is hurtful and painful and whether intended or not, is a form of bullying. Most people don’t think of this word as hate speech, but that’s exactly what it feels like to millions of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their families and friends. The R-word is just as cruel and offensive as any other slur. Visit [www.r-word.org](http://www.r-word.org) to make your pledge today. Eliminating the use of this word is a step toward respect.

* Young people around the world are taking a stand and raising awareness of the dehumanizing and hurtful effects of the R-word and are helping encourage others to think before they speak.
* Youth leadership and athlete advocacy is extremely important to our history and our future for the Spread the Word to End the Word campaign. People should have a voice and for so long they didn’t feel empowered to speak up about this R-word issue, and through our actions for Spread the Word, Special Olympics is empowering people to speak up about the issue. Over 650,000 people have taken the pledge. Use this tweet-ready text to get the word out: I pledge #Respect thru my words & actions. Will you? Pledge now to create communities of inclusion for people with ID <http://r-word.org>
* Did you know the pejorative and ever increasing use of the R-word in today’s society further perpetuates the stigma and negative stereotypes that face people with intellectual disabilities?
* Special Olympics is leading a global youth movement via a new marketing campaign aimed at shifting the public’s misperceptions about the organization and people with ID. Through marketing activations and events, we will be challenging the youth of the world to become the first unified generation – one that champions inclusion and unity through activities where individuals with and without intellectual disabilities participate together. We are empowering youth to make change in their communities. Visit [www.r-word.org](http://www.r-word.org) to see how you can make change.
* Up to three percent of the world’s population have intellectual disabilities - that’s almost 200 million people around the world. It’s one of the largest disability populations in the world, perhaps you know someone?
* We ask that you help us change the conversation and help eliminate the demeaning use of the R-word from today’s popular youth vernacular and replace it with “respect.” We are asking for your help in creating a more accepting world for people with intellectual disabilities and all those people that may appear different, but have unique gifts and talents to share with the world.
* Special Olympics’ Multi-National Public Opinion Study of Attitudes toward People with Intellectual Disabilities, conducted by Gallup, reveals that throughout the world, **over 60 percent of people *still* believe that people with intellectual disabilities should be segregated in schools and in the workplace.** This is intolerable. We need massive attitude change now to attack and reverse the stigma that is destructive to the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and a barrier to growth.
* In Maria Shriver’s recent national report, titled The Shriver Report Snapshot: Insight into Intellectual Disabilities in the 21st Century, findings reveal that although young Americans have more progressive attitudes toward and expectations for people with intellectual disabilities, **young Americans, especially men, find using the word ‘retard’ acceptable for many when used to tease friends or oneself, not in reference to people with a clear intellectual disability**.

Some of the key findings of the snapshot reveal include:

* 89% of Americans think it is offensive to call someone with a clear intellectual disability “Retarded”
* 56% of Americans feel it is not offensive to refer to oneself as “Retarded” when they make a mistake
* 38% of Americans feel it is not offensive to call a friend “Retarded” when they do something foolish
* Special Olympics Unified Schools provides opportunities for young people of all abilities to be leaders in their schools and communities by promoting equality and acceptance. These leadership activities help students with and without intellectual disabilities find their voices by teaching them to become change agents striving for respect and inclusion. We have nearly 4,500 schools in 45 states across the country and many of those schools support Spread the Word to End the Word efforts through running pledge stations or holding student rallies to promote inclusion.
* Language affects attitudes. Attitudes impact actions. Make your pledge to choose respectful people first language at [www.R-word.org](http://www.R-word.org).