

March: “Respect is the New R-Word”*

EDUCATION: Understanding the impact of the “R-word”

(Suggested audience: Elementary, middle, and high school students)

“That’s retarded”

Have you ever heard something silly, unfamiliar, awkward, or misunderstood described as “retarded”?

A lot of people use this word, but many don’t really understand what it means. Did you know that “retarded” is simply derived from an old-fashioned medical term for people with intellectual disabilities? Yeah, it was mental retardation. It was just a word used to describe a medical condition like “asthma” or “pneumonia.”

But now, the word has morphed into something negative and offensive. It’s used to insult someone or something considered to be lesser in some way. And while the people who use it might not even know about its history, it’s still linked to people with disabilities. That means that when someone uses the word “retarded” as an insult, it is degrading to people with disabilities.

The way we speak helps us and the people around us shape their opinions. If you use “retarded” to refer to things you dislike or make fun of, you’re creating an environment that perpetuates negative stigmas about people with disabilities. You’d probably never directly call a person with a disability those things, but every time you use “retarded” as a synonym for something negative, you’re putting them down.

Now that you know more about the history of the word “retarded,” how will you react the next time someone uses it around you?

It’s not easy to be the person who says something isn’t right. It takes courage to say something to your friends that may not be what they want to hear. But it’s important that people understand the power of words and their impact. You and your friends can lead this change.

Stop using the “R-word” today.

INTERACTION: Spread the word to end the word*

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Pledge to stop saying the R-word and hold an event at your school encouraging others to pledge as well. Your pledge shows that you are committed to use language that respects the dignity of people with intellectual disabilities, and creating more accepting attitudes and communities for all people.

The campaign is generally held in March each year.

Visit the campaign [website](#).

Access the online [resources](#).

* The “R-word” campaign is supported by Special Olympics and Best Buddies, and more than 200 other organizations from around the world.