



# History of the R-Word



## CHANGING THE WORDS

The R-word, "retard," is slang for the term mental retardation. Mental retardation was what doctors, psychologists, and other professionals used to describe people with significant intellectual impairments. Today the r-word has become a common word used by society as an insult for someone or something stupid. For example, you might hear someone say, "That is so retarded" or "Don't be such a retard."

When used in this way, the r-word can apply to anyone or anything, and is not specific to someone with a disability. But even when the r-word is not said to harm someone with a disability, it is hurtful.

*"Children with disabilities are 2-3 times more likely to be bullied than their peers without disabilities"*

Because of this, Special Olympics and the greater disability community prefer to focus on people and their gifts and accomplishments, and to dispel negative attitudes and stereotypes. As language has evolved, Special Olympics and other organizations have updated their official terminology to use standard, people-first language that is more acceptable.

*"I believe that we should CELEBRATE our differences and what makes us unique and interesting. RESPECT is a basic human need and right. The way you treat others reflects who you are." – C. Gibson*

## ROSA'S LAW

Rosa's Law removes the terms "mental retardation" and "mentally retarded" from federal health, education and labor policy and replaces them with people first language: "individual with an intellectual disability" and "intellectual disability."

Special Olympics, the world's largest movement dedicated to promoting respect and human dignity for those with intellectual disabilities, has long championed the use of people first language.

*"What you call people is how you treat them, what you call my sister is how you will treat her. If you believe she's 'retarded,' it invites taunting, stigma. It invites bullying and it also invites the slammed doors of being treated with respect and dignity."  
- Rosa's Brother Nick*

The law was passed on October 8, 2010 and is named after Rosa Marcellino, a 9 year old girl with Down syndrome who worked vigorously with her parents and siblings to remove these words from the health and education code in her home state of Maryland after being bullied at school. The signing of Rosa's Law is a significant milestone in establishing dignity, inclusion and respect for all people with intellectual disabilities.

*"Everyone has a gift and the world would be better off if we recognized it." – Dr. Timothy P. Shriver, Chairman and CEO of Special Olympics*

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