

United Coalition for Down Syndrome Condemns The Rise in the Use of the R-word

Freedom of Speech & Protecting Vulnerable Communities Are Not Mutually Exclusive

CINCINNATI, DENVER, HOFFMAN ESTATES, ILL., WASHINGTON, D.C., WOBURN, Mass.

(May 13, 2025) – Today, the United Coalition for Down Syndrome is speaking out against the alarming resurgence of the “R-word” in public discourse. At the same time, we are calling on individuals and organizations to take a stand, by [pledging](#) not to use this harmful slur.

Numerous media outlets have reported a sharp increase in the word’s usage across television, radio, podcasts, social media, and the internet. A recent study examining social media in January 2025 revealed a staggering 207.5% rise in posts containing the R-word on X alone – totaling 312,642 instances.

Shockingly, there are some who believe its use is a “great cultural victory.”

We firmly reject that notion. The R-word is not a cultural triumph – it is a tool of marginalization. It dehumanizes people with Down syndrome and other disabilities and can contribute to mental distress and long-lasting harm. This type of language is rooted in the same prejudice that, for decades, led to people with Down syndrome and other intellectual and developmental disabilities being placed in cruel and inhumane institutions such as [Willowbrook, NY](#) – a practice that continued well into the early 1990s.

“Being compared to people like me should be considered a badge of honor. No one overcomes more than we do and still loves life so much. And yet here we are in 2025 with some of the most influential people in our country, like naughty little boys with their first curse word, reviving the use of the R-word just to gain attention and, meanwhile, opening the floodgates to its popular use. I appreciate the United Coalition for Down Syndrome standing up for what is right, and I hope this goes a long way in educating people that using the R-word is like a little dagger jabbing at our dignity as human beings,” says Frank Stephens, a Special Olympics Global Messenger associated with the “End the Word” campaign, and Global Down Syndrome Foundation board member.

The United Coalition for Down Syndrome embraces and is grateful for the freedom of speech that defines our nation. But using that freedom to perpetuate a derogatory term aimed at one of society’s most vulnerable populations is not bold – it’s cowardly. Not everyone with an intellectual and developmental disability can push back against such slurs or exact any meaningful social cost on those who use them.

We believe that the overwhelming majority of Americans want to do the right thing. The United Coalition for Down Syndrome urges everyone to make the conscious choice to leave this word behind. In exercising our freedom of speech, let’s also choose compassion,

dignity, and respect. These are lives worth celebrating – and our language should reflect that truth.

Related Resources:

GiGi's Playhouse Down Syndrome Achievement Centers: [Community Page](#); [GiGi's Message on the R Word](#)

Global Down Syndrome Foundation: [Words Can Hurt](#)

National Down Syndrome Congress: [NDSC condemns the use of the "R-word" and calls for respectful language](#)

National Down Syndrome Society: [Preferred Language Guide](#); [R-Word TikTok Video](#)

Special Olympics: [Why the R-word is the R-Slur](#); [Increase Usage of the R-word on Social Media](#)

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About the United Coalition for Down Syndrome

The United Coalition for Down Syndrome (UCDS) is a coalition of national Down syndrome organizations seeking to facilitate collective action and speak with a unified voice concerning critical issues that impact the Down syndrome community in the United States. UCDS is comprised of the following national organizations: GiGi's Playhouse Achievement Centers, Global Down Syndrome Foundation, LuMind IDSC, National Down Syndrome Congress, and National Down Syndrome Society. All of our organizations remain steadfastly non-partisan, focusing solely on the well-being of individuals with Down syndrome and their families.

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