

# The use of disablist language

## Poll results



ABA has conducted qualitative research over recent years with young disabled people about their experiences of bullying at school. Time and time again the issue of the use of disablist language was talked about. Young people told us:

- disablist language is used in schools by other pupils regularly (and worryingly sometimes by teaching staff); and,
- that it was very rarely challenged by teaching staff.

ABA wanted to conduct some quantitative research for Anti-Bullying Week 2014. We completed an independent poll of 1,000 adults and found that:

- 1 in 10 adults have used abusive language towards a disabled person
- 44% of adults use the words 'spaz', 'spastic', 'retard', or 'mong' in casual conversation
- Half of those justify the use of this discriminatory language as part of 'banter'
- 65% hear others using these words in conversation
- Most adults are ignorant of the meaning of disablist words

We wanted to see what teachers thought about the prevalence of disablist language amongst pupils. We polled 500 teachers and found that:

- Almost 70% of teachers have heard children using the words 'spaz', 'spastic', 'retard' or 'mong' at school.
- Over half of these teachers heard children using it in 'casual' conversation; however the same number heard them using the words as an insult to their peers.
- 55% of teachers have heard children using the words at a disabled child /child with special educational needs - with just under half of these using the words to insult them

Our findings have painted a very worrying picture about the use of this discriminatory language. We surely cannot expect children and young people not to use disablist language if adults are using this language as regularly as our poll indicates. Schools have a legal duty to challenge the use of all discriminatory language - including disablist language wherever and whenever it is seen or heard. This includes reports of disablist language online.

ABA has lots of resources and free training on our website to support teaching staff to challenge the use of disablist language including free online training. Please take a look at our website (see link below) and support us to bring an end to the use of disablist language!

**'Sticks and stones may break my bones and words leave emotional scars that never heal'** - quote from a young disabled person



**"It makes you feel angry, sad, not confident."** Quote from a young disabled person talking about disablist language

**"This is completely unacceptable. No child should ever say or hear these words whether used in conversation or as an insult. Schools have a responsibility to ensure that children can learn in an environment free from prejudice."**

Minister for Children and Families, Edward Timpson MP, during Anti-Bullying Week 2014