

Suicide Prevention for Youth with Disabilities



Youth with disabilities experience significantly higher rates of suicidal thoughts and behaviors than their peers.



Some studies report suicide attempt rates **2–3 times higher** than their peers.



Risk increases substantially among certain disability groups.



School Staff play a crucial role in recognizing suicide risks early.



STARS can train school staff in ND to prevent suicide among youth with disabilities.

Intro to Suicide Prevention for Youth with Disabilities

- Disabilities can **mask distress**.
- Suicide risk for youth with disabilities is **often overlooked**.
- Youth with disabilities understand the concept of death and hopelessness, **even if they express it differently**.
- Educators play a vital role in **recognizing risk early and helping build connections**.

Myths and Facts about Youth with Disabilities

Myth: Students with disabilities are not at risk for suicide.

Fact: Students with disabilities are **2-3x more likely to attempt suicide**.

Emotional and behavioral disorders have an up to 3x higher suicide risk. Youth with autism spectrum disorder or intellectual disabilities have increased thoughts or ideas centered around death or suicide.

Myth: Individuals with disabilities don't understand what suicide means.

Fact: Many youth with disabilities understand death, hopelessness, and suicide. They may **express these experiences differently**.

Myth: Talking about suicide puts the idea into people's heads.

Fact: Discussing suicide with a student **reduces stigma**. It also can help students **feel safer asking for help**.

Suicide Prevention Training and Readiness for Schools (STARS) Youth With Disabilities Prevention

What STARS Trains School Staff to KNOW:

- **Youth with Disabilities Protective Factors:** Creativity, persistence, empathy, humor
- **Youth with Disabilities Risk Factors:** Social isolation, bullying, loss of independence, difficulty expressing feelings or asking for help
- **Youth with Disabilities Warning Signs:**
 - **Behavioral and Emotional Cues:** Withdrawal, aggression, voicing hopelessness
 - **Changes in Communication or Routine:** Shift in tone, regression in skills



What STARS Trains School Staff to MONITOR:

STARS recommends School Staff monitor for **Warning Signs**.

Warning signs can often be identified using the **FACTS framework**:

Feelings of hopelessness,
Actions like risky behavior or withdrawal,
Changes in social patterns/sleep/mood,
Threats that are verbal or written,
Situations of trouble, loss, or major life change



Note: Pay attention to changes from the youth's baseline.

How STARS Trains School Staff to RESPOND:

- Approach with **warmth, curiosity**, and **no judgment**.
- Offer a **calming presence** to the youth.
- **Ask directly and simply** if you are concerned about suicide.
- **Refer** to mental health services within your building as appropriate. You can always call or text the **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** or chat at 988lifeline.org/



Interested in bringing STARS to your School?

Contact Sarah.Kemp.Tabbut@und.edu

NDHOPES



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Rural & Tribal Youth Suicide Prevention

988
SUICIDE
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