

Social Connectedness for Disabled Youth

What are the barriers in creating social connectedness for youth with disabilities?

Communication: social cues, misunderstandings, assumptions about disabilities

Physical: fine motor skills affect giving and receiving affection, tiredness, overstimulation

Awareness: Lack of education and understanding of disabilities, unrealistic expectations, seeing accommodations as privileges instead of needs

Cost: High cost of therapy and other services, insurance barriers



What are some ideas to get past those barriers?

Respect: normalize accommodations and that we all have different needs (disabled or not), give people time to process and explain themselves, be understanding and ask questions, accommodate physical and emotional needs

Education: Teach disability history, provide education about disabilities, provide education about body language and social cues and how they differ in the disability community

How can the health dept. or anyone inform and influence others on this topic?

Maximize health benefits, provide education curated and presented by disabled people, provide comprehensive education on physical, sexual, and emotional health, center and amplify the voices of disabled youth



Social Connectedness for Disabled Youth



Why are relationships (romantic & platonic) important for social connectedness?

Broaden your world view, learn about yourself, make you happier, build trust and have someone to connect with deeply, allow for co-regulation, feeling included

What are the barriers to forming and keeping solid relationships for youth with disabilities?

Understanding/Respect: Disabled youth are often written off for their accessibility and other needs

Social: Communication differences, not knowing what a healthy relationship should look like

Physical: Distance, being emotionally or physically tired, places people hang out are often not fully accessible, lack of accessible travel options



How does lack of social connectedness impact physical & emotional/mental health risks?

Increases risk of mental health issues, less happiness, fear of showing your authentic self, difficulty regulating without physical touch or trusted emotional outlets, exhaustion from people not understanding disability or making an effort, constantly having to explain and defend ourselves

Actionable Steps You Can Take to Support Social Connectedness for Disabled Youth



Education

Host panels or webinars featuring people with disabilities. Provide disabled youth with information on physical, emotional, and sexual health for disabled youth. Provide information on how to have healthy relationships and how to be safe in relationships. Provide education on how to access medical care for physical, mental, and sexual health, and how to navigate insurance. Keep information direct and simple, but realistic and age-appropriate.

Direct Work

If you work with disabled youth (such as therapists, doctors, mentors, etc.) ensure long-term relationships as much as possible. When possible, utilize sliding-scale payment options.

"Nothing About Us Without Us"

Include and center disabled youth in everything you do relating to them – work, school, policy, healthcare, community events, etc. Empower them to take control over decisions affecting their lives, as they are the experts in their own lives. Examples could include youth advisory committees to provide input on your work (especially in industries such as nonprofits, education, healthcare, public policy, and city planning), student-led IEP meetings, or youth-led transition planning.