

# AFCCA: Youth Insights

## What Youth Experiencing AFCCA Want Professionals to Understand

**What is AFCCA?** Aggression toward Family/Caregivers in Childhood and Adolescence (AFCCA) is a pattern of behaviour that causes significant physical and/or psychological harm to the child/teen showing the aggression, to the person(s) who the aggression is directed at, and to other family members who may witness it.

A recent study sought to identify the **social, emotional, and mental health needs of young people impacted by AFCCA**. Youth who had exhibited AFCCA and siblings impacted by AFCCA from across Canada participated in the study via surveys and interviews. You can learn more about this study [here](#).<sup>1</sup>

“Children understand a lot more than we give them credit for. And they need to be heard.”

### Young People’s Insights on What Contributed to their demonstration of AFCCA

“The main reason for my aggression was a sexual assault I had experienced by a family member, and I was having a lot of trouble dealing with it, especially with **feelings of anger**.”

“I would **turn a lot of that aggression inwards**... I cut myself for a very long time, I did drugs when I was younger, all as part of like, dealing with that anger.”

“I was in a lot of **emotional pain** and like, you know, very confused... There’s a lot of things going on, thinking back on it... **trauma of my adoption**; not knowing about my birth culture and things like that.”

#### Key Insights From Youth

We need to feel heard and have our views taken seriously.

We need specialized care for childhood trauma, including adoption trauma and relevant diagnoses.

We need the tools to learn to express ourselves differently and safely.

We need you to know and respect our human rights.

We need a confidential space with youth-friendly professionals where we can speak freely without fear that the information will be used in court or to separate our families.

We need mental health support for the entire family unit. This needs to include conflict de-escalation strategies for us and our caregivers.

#### Youth-Led Suggestions on Ways that Could Improve Your Practice

- Learn about specialized supports from professionals who understand AFCCA and its risk factors.
- Ensure all professionals are trauma-informed to support young people’s overall growth and skill development in communication and coping.
- Facilitate ongoing access to support services from childhood into adulthood.
- Increase children’s rights awareness among professionals on your team.
- Ensure that all practices are child rights-informed.
- Employ approaches that center the voices and rights of children and teens – we have the powerful potential to impact outcomes for those affected by AFCCA.

<sup>1</sup> DeCarlo-Slobodnik, D., & Gervais, C. (2022). *Young persons’ reflections on their rights as children in the context of aggression toward family and caregivers in childhood and adolescence*. University of Ottawa. <https://www.adopt4life.com/resource-library/young-persons-reflections-on-their-rights-as-children-in-the-context-of-afcca>

