

AFCCA: Youth Insights

Siblings' Experiences with AFCCA, and What They Want Caregivers 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](#).¹

“As an older sibling, I felt like a lot of the parenting responsibility fell onto me.”

What We Need Our Parents and Caregivers to Know

We need to be okay too

“I was always quieter... and I think that contributed to them thinking ‘oh she’s fine because... she’s not freaking out or destroying the house... she’s okay’; even though I wasn’t okay.”

We need to express ourselves

“...oftentimes the psychologist met with my mom, my sister and my dad... but I was never included in any of that, and I feel like that opportunity may have helped...”

We are under a lot of pressure

“...I was kind of expected... to avoid setting her off rather than her being expected to not explode... So, a lot of the responsibility... kind of fell on me.”

We need to be supported

“...nobody protected me as a child...”

We need to feel heard

“I wish that my mom had been more open to listening to me and hearing about my experience.”

Our needs sometimes feel secondary to our sibling’s

“...she spends all her energy trying to make sure he’s okay... and like, there’s very little energy for me...”

Supporting us means learning about our human rights!

We have the right to:

- feel, and be, safe in our own home.
- be heard just as much as our siblings who exhibit AFCCA.
- have our needs and best interests balanced with those of our siblings who are experiencing AFCCA.

Please learn more about our rights based on the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).

Some things that might help our family:

- Understanding that while we may not be showing aggressive behaviour, we may not be okay either. Please ask us about how we are feeling, and really listen to what we have to say.
- Upholding our best interests too, by balancing our needs with those of our siblings experiencing AFCCA.
- Seeking trauma-informed (and adoption-informed, if appropriate) support for our entire family.
- Finding caregiver peer supports to help you reduce your own feelings of isolation and learn best practices from other caregivers.
- Finding respite (time for rest or away from each other) – for my sibling, for you, and even for me. We could all use it!
- Learning about children’s rights to help me feel heard, validated and protected.

In the study, young people with AFCCA indicated that their aggressive behaviours were directed at siblings 74% of the time.

¹ 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>

