

AFCCA: Youth Insights

What Siblings want Professionals to Understand about their Experiences

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

“...I wonder if there would have been a difference in having the opportunity for me to share what was going on, because... the psychologist met with my mom, my sister and my dad... but I was never included in any of that...”

Siblings' Perspectives on Professional Services & Supports for Families Experiencing AFCCA

“...having you know, a third party involved [like] a counselor... would have been very helpful... for all of us.”

“I definitely think that when [my sibling] aged out of the services, there needs to be **better transition to continued services.**”

“Definitely going to a therapist and the therapist that I’m going to is... adoption-informed... and I think that makes a very big difference, too, because I do think that **the adoption piece contributes to a lot of what happened.**”

“...children’s services... their first instinct is to take the kid away... even the police, justice system. It’s almost the same thing... And then they’re **not really speaking to one another** and trying to create beneficial solutions for children and their families...”

How can you help a sibling experiencing AFCCA in their family

We need to feel heard and have our best interests equally considered.

We need you to know and respect our human rights.

We need the tools to understand what our siblings with AFCCA are trying to express with their behaviours.

We need support from adoption- and trauma-informed professionals with an understanding of AFCCA.

You can help my caregivers to understand that we often feel unsafe and “on edge.” In addition to physical aggression, verbal and emotional forms of aggression significantly impact our self-esteem, sense of personal boundaries, and abilities to express ourselves.

We need mental health support for our whole family. This support should also provide conflict de-escalation strategies for us, our siblings, and our caregivers.

Supporting us means learning about our rights!

- We have the right to feel and be safe in our own home.
- We have the right to be heard just as much as our siblings who exhibit AFCCA.

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

Some Things that Could Improve your Practice:

- Provide specialized support from professionals who understand AFCCA and its impacts.
- Ensure all professionals are trauma-informed to support the entire family affected by AFCCA.
- Provide ongoing access to support services from childhood into adulthood.
- Increase children’s rights awareness among professionals.
- Ensure that all practices are rights-informed.
- Employ approaches that center the voices and rights of children and teens, which have the powerful potential to impact outcomes for those affected by AFCCA.

In the study, young people with AFCCA indicated that their aggressive behaviours were directed at siblings 74% of the time. Our family is not alone in experiencing this.

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>

