

AFCCA: Youth Insights

What Siblings want other Siblings to Understand about Witnessing AFCCA

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.

Our sibling may have demonstrated AFCCA by

- Swearing a lot, saying mean things or yelling at family members;
- physically hurting family members or pets;
- threatening to hurt family members or pets;
- damaging objects or stealing money;
- self-harming or hurting themselves;
- threatening to cause sexual harm to family members.

A new study in Canada asked the questions:

What are the needs of young people impacted by AFCCA?

How does it feel to live in a home where your sibling displays aggressive behaviour?

Siblings of young people who demonstrated AFCCA helped to answer these questions, from a human rights perspective, through interviews and surveys. You can learn more about this study [here](#).¹

In the study, young people who had exhibited AFCCA indicated that their **aggressive behaviours were directed at their siblings 74% of the time**. Siblings discussed impacts related to feeling “on edge” or as if they were “walking on eggshells” around their brother or sister, particularly when their behaviour was reported as unpredictable.

How Siblings are feeling about their experiences within their families

“I think [my sister] feels emotions very, very strongly... so when it’s anger, she [doesn’t] know how to process that or... how to express it in a non-destructive way.”

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

“I’m putting boundaries in place, because nobody protected me as a child, and so I’m going to protect myself now.”

“I felt scared, protective, and guilty - like simultaneously all at once.”

“He does take like a lot of energy from people in the family, so as my mom explains it, like, she spends all her energy trying to make sure he’s okay... and like, there’s very little energy left for me...”

Siblings have rights too!

- Sometimes, it may feel like our interests come in second. We have the right to have our best interests balanced with the best interests of our sibling who is experiencing AFCCA.
- We have the right to be heard and to have our views taken seriously.
- We have the right to feel, and be, safe in our own home.

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

Some suggestions from siblings, that may help

- Our sibling with AFCCA is hurting and confused too, and we may have ideas on how to help them and our families get through the challenges. We have the right to share our opinions about solutions.
- It’s okay to set boundaries to protect ourselves and our feelings.
- We don’t have to be the parent.
- Our parents and caregivers may think we’re okay. We have the right to tell them if we’re not, how we feel, and to ask for help.
- It can get better. It’s ok to speak up and say our family needs more help, or to ask our parents/caregivers to seek out professional help.
- It may help to stick together! Connecting with other young people who live with AFCCA in their home may make us feel supported and validated.

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>

