

# SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT FOR BC YOUTH WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED ABUSE



## A 2018 BC ADOLESCENT HEALTH SURVEY FACT SHEET



Youth who have experienced physical or sexual abuse often experience challenges to their health and well-being, including poorer mental health and higher rates of substance use. Those who have experienced both physical and sexual abuse are particularly vulnerable (see [https://www.mcs.bc.ca/pdf/2018bcahs\\_factsheet\\_1.pdf](https://www.mcs.bc.ca/pdf/2018bcahs_factsheet_1.pdf)). However, the presence of a safe and caring school environment can support youth who have experienced one or both types of abuse to report more positive outcomes.

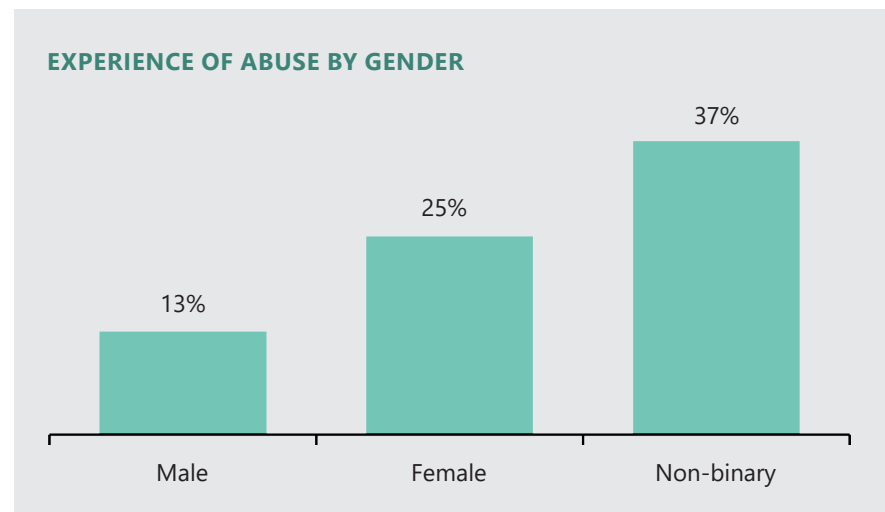
In 2018, one in five (20%) BC youth reported they had experienced physical abuse and/or sexual abuse. (Sexual abuse

refers to sexual abuse, forced sex, or being the younger of an illegal age pairing at first sex.) Non-binary students were the most likely to have been abused and males were the least likely.

Having staff and teachers who care, feeling safe at school, and feeling like a part of school were all associated with a lower likelihood of mental health challenges. For example, youth who felt school staff cared about them were less likely to report extreme despair in the past month, and this was the case for males (9% vs. 24% of those who did not feel school staff cared about them), females (17% vs. 38%), and non-binary youth (29% vs. 57%\*).

This fact sheet uses data from McCreary Centre Society's 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS). The 2018 BC AHS was completed by over 38,000 youth aged 12–19. For more information about the survey methodology please visit <http://mcs.bc.ca/>.

This fact sheet was prepared by Breanne Lande during a practicum placement completed as part of a Bachelor of Social Work at the University of Northern British Columbia.



A percentage that is marked with an asterisk (\*) should be interpreted with caution, as the standard error was higher than expected, but still within the releasable range.

## TEACHERS WHO CARE ABOUT THEM

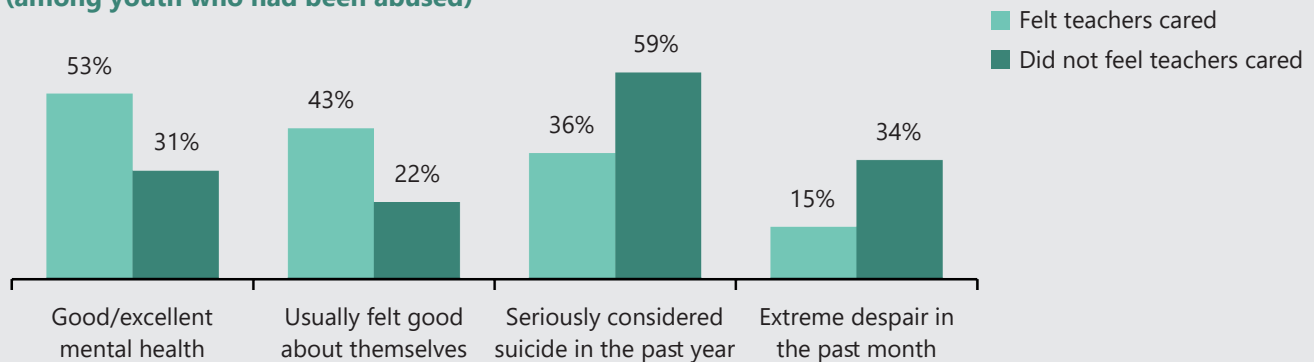
Youth who had experienced abuse reported better mental health when they believed their teachers cared about them. For example, youth who felt their teachers cared were more likely to rate their mental health positively, to feel happy most or all of the time in the past month (47% vs. 25% of those who did not feel their teachers cared about them), and to feel good about themselves. Rates of suicide ideation and extreme despair were also lower among youth who felt their teachers cared.

Among the 5% of youth who had experienced both physical and sexual abuse, those who had teachers who cared were twice as likely to report good/excellent mental health (36% vs. 18% who did not feel their teacher cared about them) and were less likely to report extreme despair in the past month (23% vs. 48%) or to have considered suicide in the past year (52% vs. 78%).

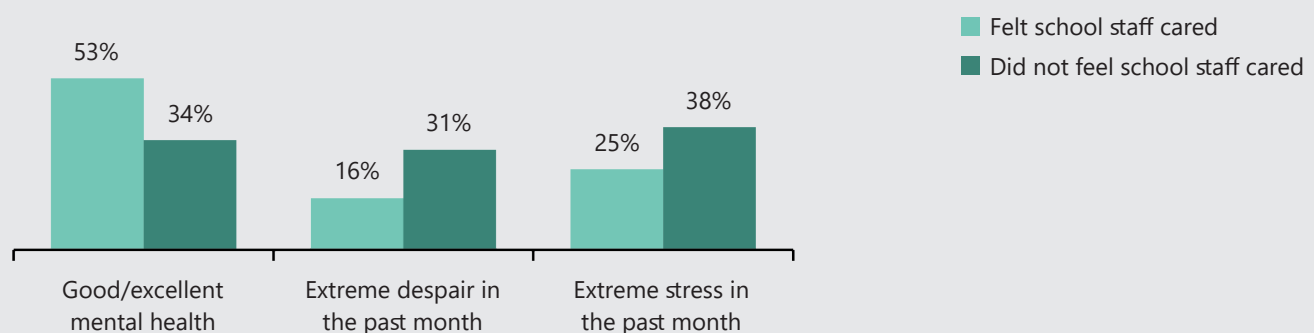
## OTHER SCHOOL STAFF WHO CARE

As was the case with teachers, when youth who had been abused felt that other school staff cared about them, they were less likely to experience mental health challenges. For example, 37% of those who felt school staff cared reported having seriously considered suicide, compared to 55% of those who did not feel school staff cared.

**MENTAL HEALTH IN RELATION TO HAVING TEACHERS WHO CARED ABOUT THEM (among youth who had been abused)**



**MENTAL HEALTH IN RELATION TO HAVING SCHOOL STAFF OTHER THAN TEACHERS WHO CARED ABOUT THEM (among youth who had been abused)**



## FEEL SAFE AT SCHOOL

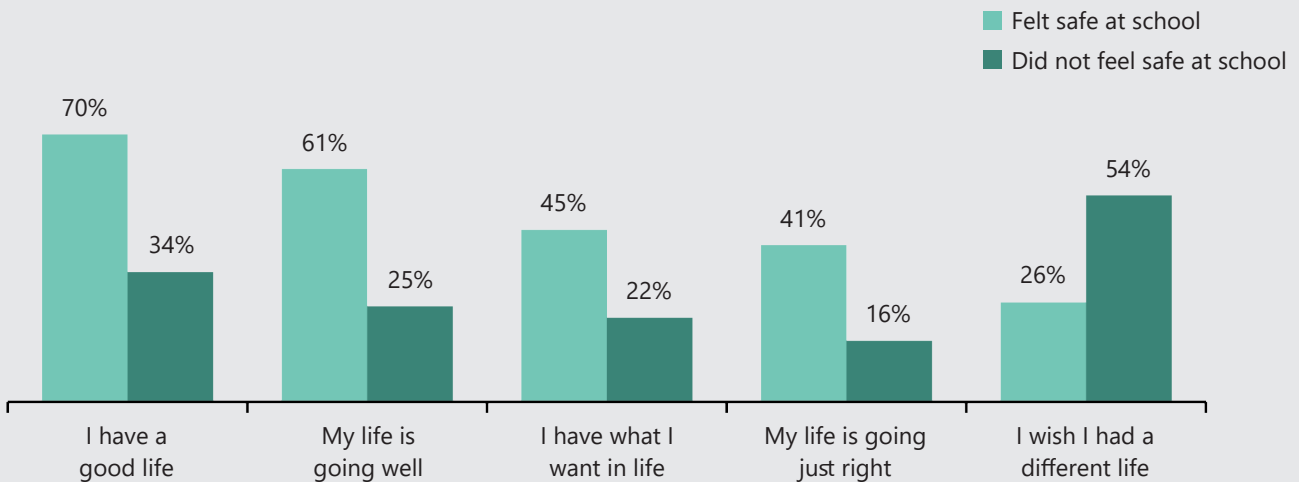
When youth who had been abused felt safe at school, they reported more positive well-being. For example, youth who felt safe at school were at least twice as likely to report that their life was going well and they had what they wanted in life.

## FEEL PART OF THEIR SCHOOL

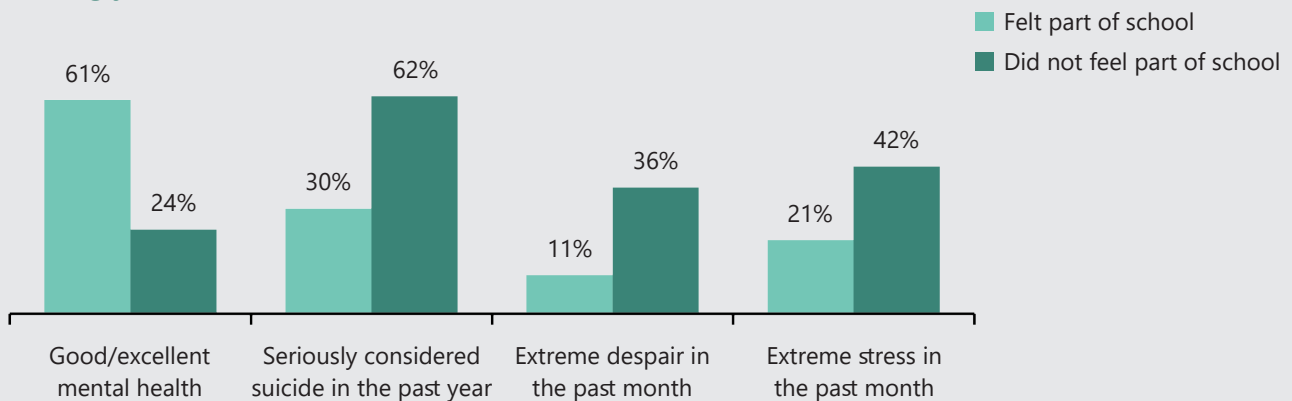
Youth who had been abused who felt like they were a part of their school were half as likely to have seriously considered suicide in the previous year, and were more than twice as likely to report good/excellent mental health.

They were also less likely to experience extreme despair and extreme stress in the past month.

### SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING IN RELATION TO SCHOOL SAFETY (among youth who had been abused)



### MENTAL HEALTH IN RELATION TO SCHOOL BELONGING (among youth who had been abused)



## SUMMARY

Schools play a significant role in the lives of youth who have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse. These results highlight some of the ways schools can support vulnerable students, and underscore the importance of promoting trauma-informed practices and policies to support better mental health outcomes.

## RESOURCES

If you suspect a child or youth 18 years old or younger is being abused or neglected, you have the legal duty to make a report. Call 1-800-663-9122 or 604-660-4927 (24 hours). If a young person is in immediate danger, call 911 or your local police department.

For more information on reporting child abuse in BC, please visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/protecting-children/reporting-child-abuse>

**If you are a child or youth and would like to talk to someone, call the Helpline for Children at 310-1234. You do not need an area code. You can call at any time of the day or night and you do not have to give your name.**

