Experiences of BC youth with FASD

McCreary Centre Society

2023 BC AHS

In 2023, a total of 38,488 students, aged 12–19, completed the BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) in public schools in 59 of the province's 60 school districts. Results are considered representative of 97.6% of students aged 12–19 in mainstream public schools in BC (more information available here: ***mcs.bc.ca/pdf/2023_bcahs_factsheet_methodology.pdf***).

Just under 1% of youth who completed the survey reported having FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder). Among these youth, over half identified as male (54%), 27% as female, and 19% as non-binary.[1]

A peer-reviewed paper based on these BC AHS findings is available here: ***sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S019074092500619X?dgcid***.

[1] Additional statistical testing was carried out to ensure gender was not driving the reported comparisons between youth with FASD and those without the condition.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) results from exposure to alcohol before birth, and is linked to a range of challenges in young people's lives. FASD is a lifelong condition, and youth with FASD may need specialized care and support into adulthood (Pei & Flannigan, 2016; Wilson et al., 2024). However, certain supports and experiences can help youth with the condition to experience positive health and well-being.

This fact sheet uses data from the 2023 BC AHS to describe challenges that youth with FASD are more likely to experience compared to youth without the condition. It also identifies supports and protective factors among youth with FASD that can contribute to enhanced health and well-being.

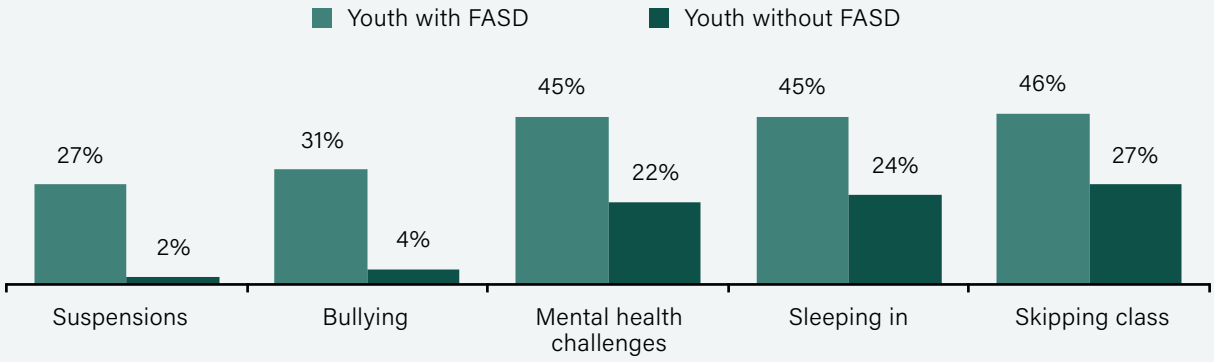
Challenges in the lives of youth with FASD

School

Students with FASD were less likely than those without the condition to have positive feelings about school, including feeling like a part of their school (28% vs. 55%), happy to be there (28% vs. 52%), and safe at school (35% vs. 64%), as well as that school staff treated them fairly (43% vs. 68%). They were also more likely than youth without FASD to have missed school in the past month for various reasons.

Students with FASD were over 20 times more likely than those without the condition to report they were not planning to finish high school (21% vs. 1%).

Youth with FASD were more likely to miss school than those without the condition



Reasons for missing school in the past month

Victimization

Youth with FASD were more likely than those without the condition to have ever been sexually abused (48% vs. 13%) and physically abused (43% vs. 15%), and to have experienced discrimination in the past year (67% vs. 42%).

They were also more likely to have been the victim of extreme teasing, social exclusion, and physical assaults at school or on the way to or from school in the past year. In addition, they were more than three times as likely as youth without FASD to have perpetrated such bullying during that time.

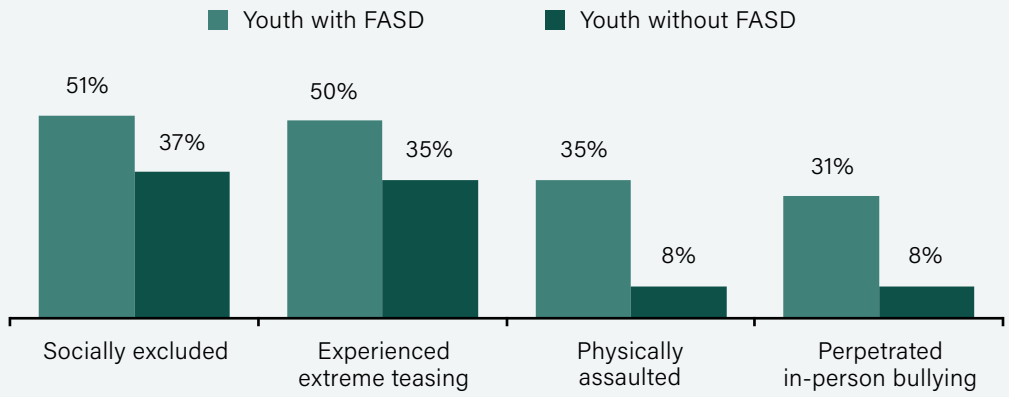
In the past year, cyberbullying victimization was also more common among youth with FASD (41% vs. 15% of those without FASD), as was cyberbullying perpetration (28% vs. 8%).

Justice involvement and other government care experiences

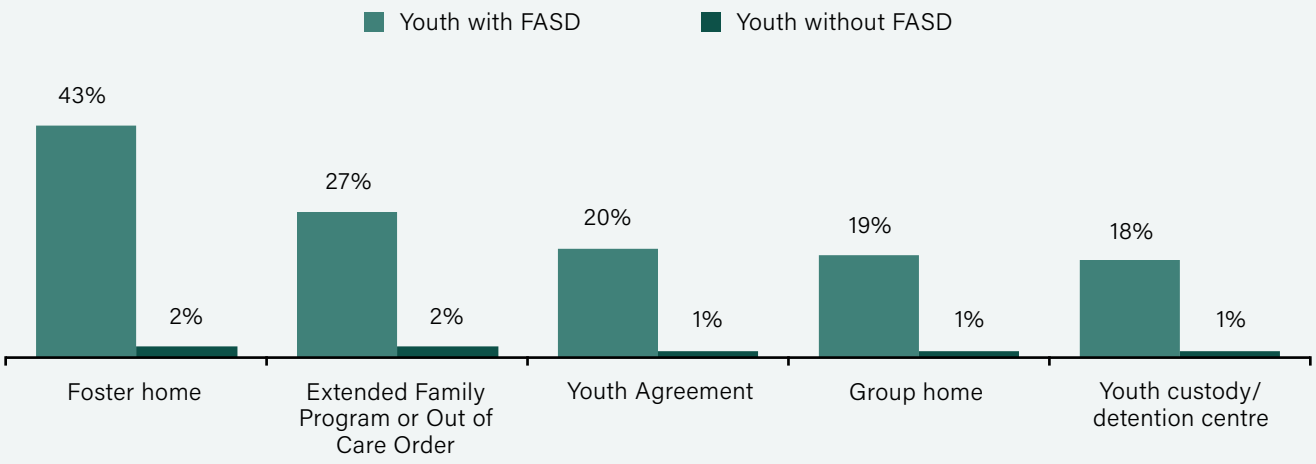
Just under 1 in 5 youth with FASD had ever stayed in a youth custody or detention centre, compared to a small minority of youth without the condition. Youth with FASD were also more likely than those without the condition to have ever been in other types of government care and alternatives to care, including a foster home, group home, Youth Agreement, and Extended Family Program or Out of Care Order.

When all types of government care and alternatives to care were considered together, over half of youth with FASD reported at least one of these experiences, compared to a minority of youth without the condition (54% vs. 5%).

Youth with FASD were more likely to have been involved in bullying at school or on the way to/from school in the past year



Government care and alternatives to care



Health and well-being

Youth with FASD reported poorer health than youth without the condition. For example, they were less likely to rate their overall health as good or excellent (51% vs. 73%), and were more likely to have experienced a serious accidental injury (51% vs. 33%) and concussion (39% vs. 15%) in the past year. They were also more likely to have missed out on accessing needed medical help in the past year (49% vs. 18%; among youth who felt they needed medical help).

Experiencing a mental health condition, as well as various mental-health related challenges, was more common for youth with FASD than for those without the condition. For example, youth with FASD were more likely to experience extreme stress and despair in the past month, and to often or always feel lonely. They were also half as likely as youth without FASD to feel quite or very hopeful for their future.

Youth with FASD were almost 10 times as likely as their peers to have an addiction to alcohol or other substances.

Mental health and well-being

	Youth with FASD	Youth without FASD
Had a mental health condition	63%	22%
Had an addiction to alcohol or another substance	48%	5%
Experienced extreme stress in the past month	34%	13%
Experienced extreme despair in the past month	28%	8%
Self-harmed in the past year	48%	24%
Seriously considered suicide in the past year	44%	18%
Attempted suicide in the past year	33%	5%
Felt lonely often or always	45%	24%
Felt they had a good life	42%	76%
Felt their life was going well	38%	66%
Felt good about themselves	32%	52%
Felt hopeful for their future	30%	60%

Protective factors among youth with FASD

All findings in this section are among youth with FASD.

As shown in the previous section, youth with FASD were more likely than youth without the condition to experience challenges in their lives. However, supports and other protective factors were identified that were associated with better health and well-being among youth with FASD.

Helpful adults

Among youth with FASD, those who **had an adult to help them with various tasks** were more likely than those without such an adult to report better health and well-being. For example, among those who needed help:

- Youth who had an adult to **help with their homework** were less likely to experience extreme stress in the past month (23% vs. 48% of youth without such adult support) and were more likely to expect to graduate from high school (78% vs. 42%).
- Youth who had an adult to **help with making or getting to appointments** were less likely to have missed out on accessing the medical care they needed in the past year (41% vs. 72%).
- Youth who had an adult to **help with learning life skills** (e.g., cooking, budgeting) were more likely than those without such an adult to feel good about themselves (39% vs. 15%) and hopeful for their future (40% vs. 13%).

Positive school experiences

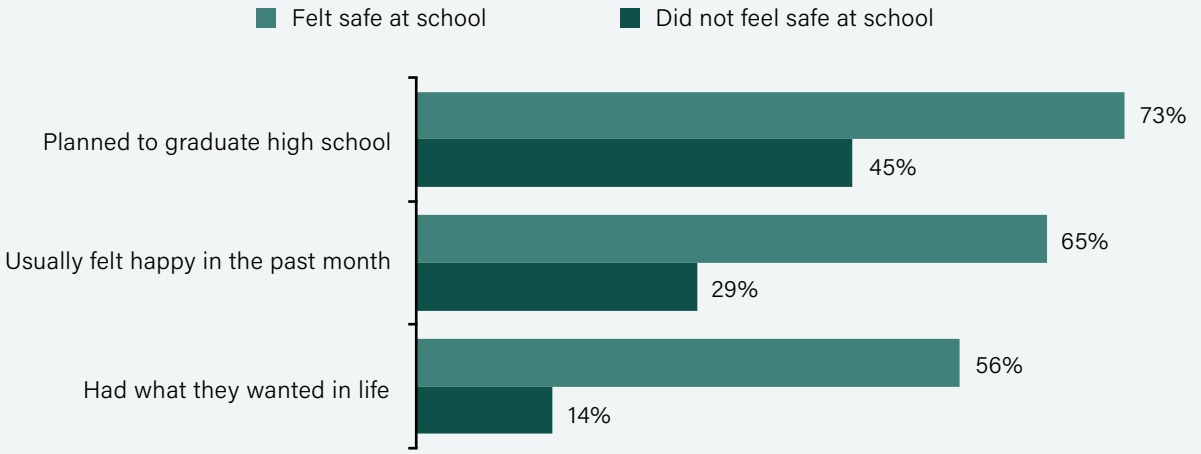
Youth with FASD who felt **connected to school** were less likely than those who did not feel this way to have missed class in the past month, including because of their mental health and bullying. These youth were also more likely than their peers who did not feel like a part of their school to anticipate graduating from high school and to feel satisfied with their life (e.g., 64% felt their life was going well vs. 22%).

Youth who felt connected to school were less likely to miss class in the past month and were more likely to expect to graduate from high school *(among those with FASD)*

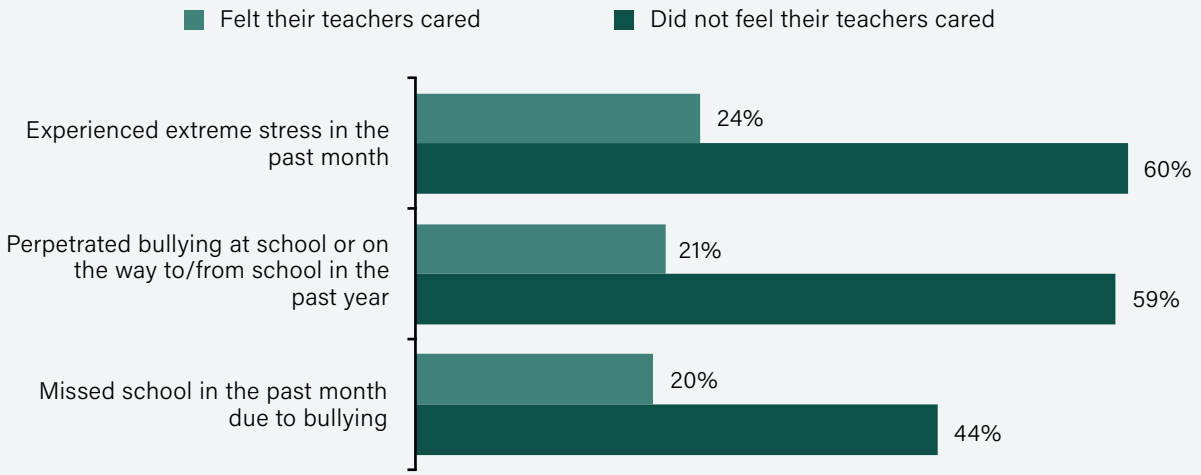
	Felt like a part of their school	Did not feel like a part of their school
Missed class due to their mental health	28%	58%
Missed class due to bullying	24%	43%
Planned to graduate high school	77%	45%

Findings were similar for youth who felt **safe at school** and for those who felt their **teachers cared about them**. For example, youth with FASD who felt safe at school were more likely to feel satisfied with their life. Also, those who felt their teachers cared about them were less likely to experience extreme stress in the past month and to have perpetrated bullying at school or on the way to or from school in the past year.

Youth who felt safe at school were more likely to plan to graduate high school and report positive well-being *(among those with FASD)*



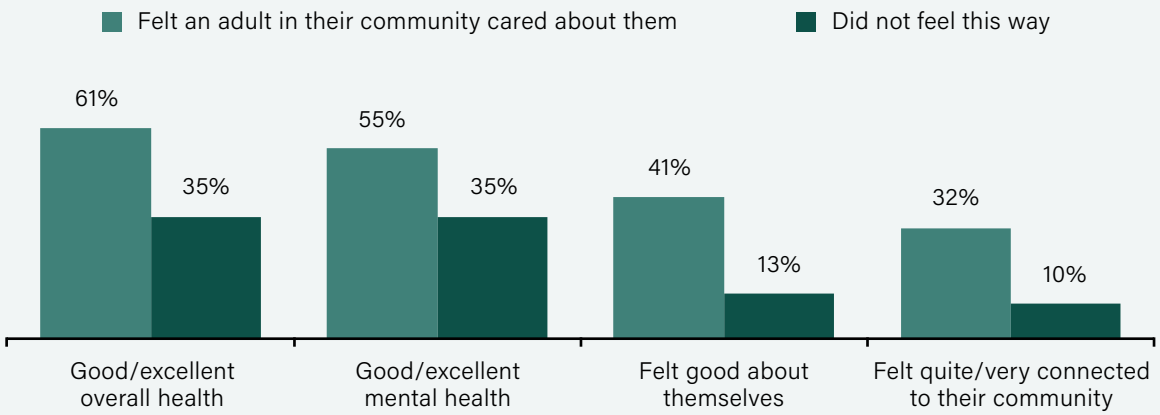
Youth who felt their teachers cared about them were less likely to experience extreme stress and bullying involvement *(among those with FASD)*



Community supports

Youth with FASD who felt that at least one adult in their community, outside of their family and school, cared about them were more likely to feel connected to their community and to report positive health and well-being.

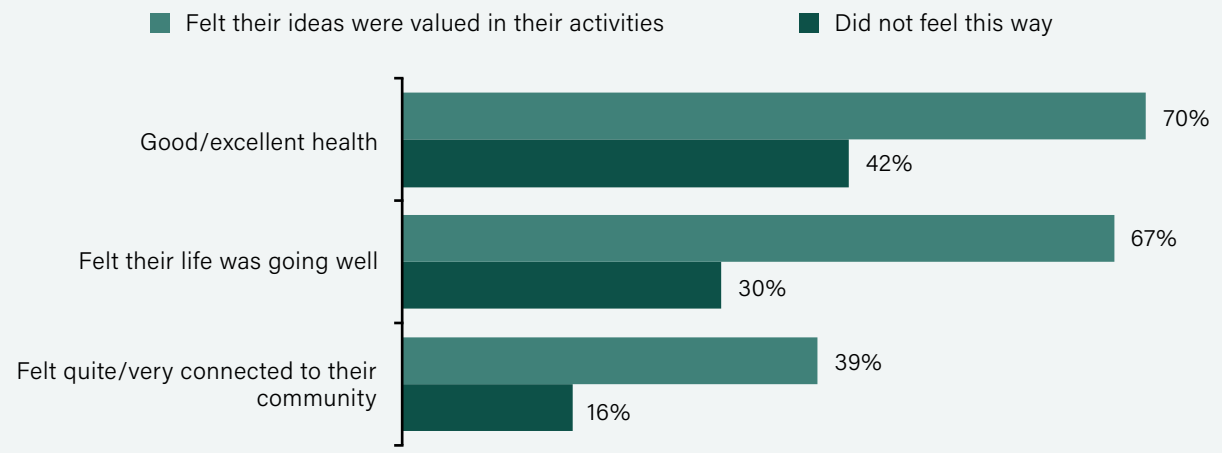
Youth who felt an adult in their community cared about them were more likely to report better health and well-being *(among those with FASD)*



Meaningful involvement in activities

Youth who felt their ideas were listened to and acted upon in their activities were more likely than those who did not feel meaningfully involved to feel connected to their community, satisfied with their life, and to report better overall health.

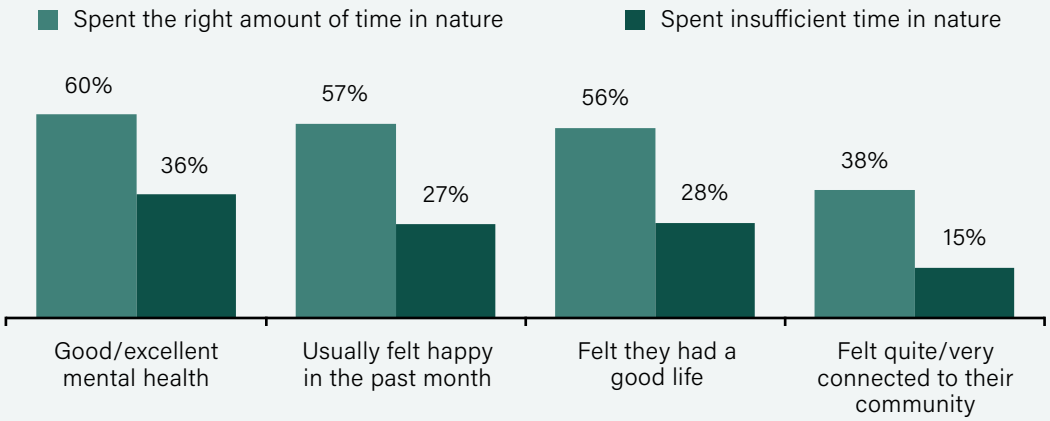
Youth who felt meaningfully engaged in their activities were more likely to feel connected to their community and to report better health and well-being *(among those with FASD)*



Spending time in nature

Spending time in nature was protective for youth with FASD. Those who felt they spent the right amount of time in nature were more likely than those who did not spend enough time there to feel like a part of their community, to report good or excellent mental health, usually feel happy in the past month, and to feel they had a good life.

Spending time in nature was associated with positive health and well-being
(among youth with FASD)



Summary

Results showed that youth with FASD were more likely than those without the condition to experience a range of challenges and to miss out on accessing needed services. However, protective factors were identified that can support young people with FASD. These include:

- ***Supportive and consistent adults at home, at school, and/or in the community.*** These include adults who help youth with tasks such as learning life skills and making or getting to appointments.
- ***Positive school experiences, including feeing safe, cared about, and connected at school.*** Positive experiences at school can reduce the likelihood of youth with FASD missing class, and can increase their chances of expecting to graduate from high school and feeling satisfied with their life.
- ***Involvement in community activities that are meaningful to youth with FASD and in which they feel valued and heard.*** Feeling they have a voice in decisions that affect them can help youth to feel connected and can enhance their well-being.
- ***Spending time in nature and connecting with their natural surroundings*** can be beneficial to youth with FASD.

References

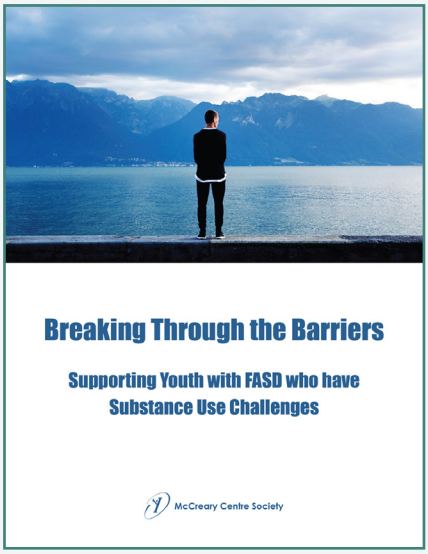
Pei, J., & Flannigan, K. (2016). Interventions for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder: Meeting needs across the lifespan. *International Journal of Neurorehabilitation, 3*(1), 1–9. DOI: 10.4172/2376-0281.1000192

Wilson, H., McCormack, J. C., Singh, N., & Chu, J. T. W. (2024). Lived experience of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder: A qualitative scoping review. *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology, 66*(6), 702–712. ***https://doi.org/10.1111/dmcn.15761***

Additional resources

Breaking through the barriers (2014)

McCreary Centre Society completed a mixed methods study using 2013 BC AHS data. The report also included qualitative input from youth with FASD who had substance use challenges, as well as caregivers and service providers supporting youth with FASD. The report considered service barriers as well as effective approaches and supports: ***mcs.bc.ca/pdf/breaking_through_the_barriers.pdf***.



The Asante Centre

Resources and information for individuals, parents/caregivers, and professionals: ***asantecentre.org/education-and-resources/***.

BC Centre for Ability

FASD and Key Worker Support Services provides free support to families of children and youth with complex developmental behavioural conditions, including FASD: ***bc-cfa.org/programs/children-and-youth/key-worker-program***.

Caregiver resource guide

A guide developed as a way for caregivers to access information and resources relating to providing care for children and adults with FASD: ***canfasd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Caregiver-Resource-Guide-FASD-March-2018.pdf***.

Mental health resource guide

A guide for professionals working with individuals with FASD: ***canfasd.ca/mental-health-toolkit/mental-health-toolkit-introduction/***.

POPFASD

Offers resources and other supports for educators who support learners with FASD:

- Homepage: ***fasdoutreach.ca***.
- Grants: ***fasdoutreach.ca/cars***.
- Resources: ***fasdoutreach.ca/resources/***.

Towards Healthy Outcomes: A Framework for Integrated Community Intervention

Designed to support individuals with FASD at individual, family, community, and systems levels: ***canfasd.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/Towards-Healthy-Outcomes-2.0.pdf***.