

# Making the Right Connections: Promoting positive mental health among BC youth

## Focus on youth who had been physically abused

In 2008, over 29,000 BC youth in Grades 7 through 12 completed the fourth BC Adolescent Health Survey (AHS). The AHS is a paper and pencil questionnaire that provides a current and accurate picture of the health of BC youth. The 2008 AHS was completed in 1,760 classrooms in 50 of BC's 59 school districts. Following the release of the results (*A Picture of Health*), focus groups and workshops were conducted, giving youth the opportunity to respond to the results.

Using data from the AHS and the youth focus groups and workshops, McCreary created a report entitled *Making the right connections* (2011). This report offers a detailed look at the mental health of BC youth, and the role of various protective factors in promoting positive mental health. This fact sheet summarizes the findings contained in the report for youth who had been physically abused.



## Promoting positive mental health among youth who had been physically abused

### Support networks

Supportive and caring relationships are important in developing positive mental health. Among youth who had experienced physical abuse, having an adult in their family that they could talk to was associated with a greater likelihood of feeling good about themselves (83% vs. 58%) and their abilities (90% vs. 75%). Additionally, 77% of abused youth who had an adult outside of their family that they could talk to felt that their life was useful, compared to 63% of those who did not have a similar supportive adult.

Nineteen percent of females and 14% of males had been physically abused or mistreated. Two percent of these males and 8% of these females had also experienced some type of sexual abuse. Physical abuse was associated with a number of negative health indicators, such as lower self-esteem and higher rates of attempted suicide (15% vs. 3% with no physical abuse history). This sort of abuse was also associated with negative body image for males.

Among youth who had been physically abused, having a supportive adult inside or outside the family was linked to a lower chance of suicidal ideation. Having access to a supportive adult outside the family was also linked to higher self-esteem.

This summary profile of the mental health of youth who had been physically abused is one of 8 fact sheets that accompany the report, *Making the right connections* (2011), all of which can be downloaded at [www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca).

Physically abused youth were often more likely than youth overall to seek support from a variety of professionals, yet were less likely to feel that the support they received was helpful. For example, physically abused youth reported higher rates of asking a school counsellor for help than their peers in general (35% vs. 28%). However, they were less likely to find this experience helpful (60% vs. 67%).

### Skills and competencies

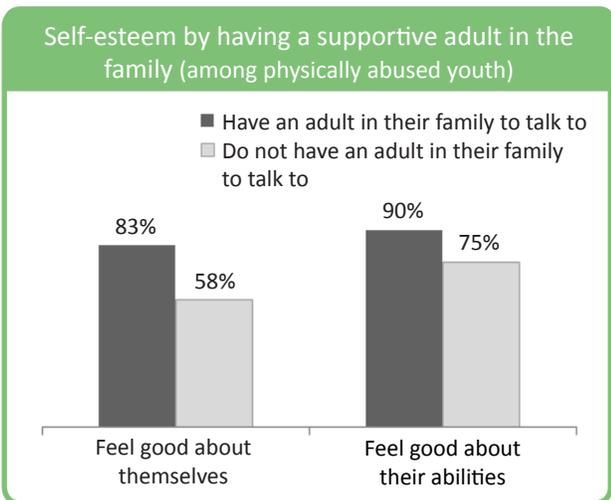
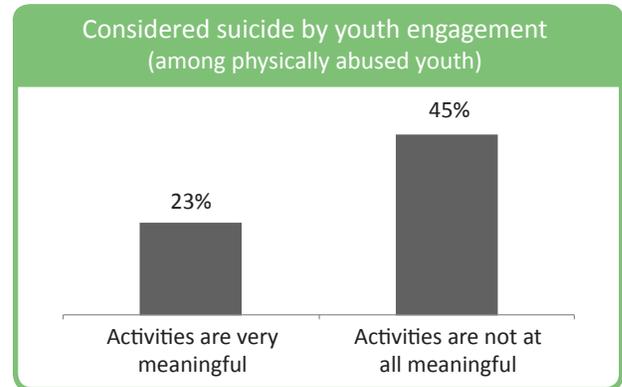
Physically abused youth who reported that they had sporting prowess or school based skills and competencies reported better outcomes on most indicators of mental health. For example, among abused males, 7% of those who thought they were good at sports had attempted suicide in the past year, compared to 17% of those who did not report such skills.

### Family and school connectedness

Family and school connectedness were among the two most consistent protective factors associated with positive mental health for youth who had been physically abused.

### Youth engagement

Youth who had been physically abused were less likely to feel their involvement in activities was meaningful, compared to youth in general. However, when they did feel involved and listened to, they reported lower rates of stress, despair and suicidal ideation.



**Youth's response to the data**

Youth suggested that schools needed to create a supportive, abuse-free atmosphere, where teachers know how to support and work with abused youth. Different services should be offered for males and females who have been abused. For example, females find discussion-based programs more valuable than males, and males prefer more physically active options.

Services should be offered in communities across BC and to a wide variety of youth, including those who are out of the school system. One-stop resources are preferred, where young people can access a variety of services without anyone knowing the reason.

Youth suggested targeting families for early interventions and teaching parents the skills to avoid resorting to physical abuse. Also, young people should be provided with information about how to report abuse and what will happen when they do, as well as voice in deciding how the issue is resolved.



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