

Connections to School

AMONG BC YOUTH

Connectedness is used to describe how youth feel about their social environment, including their family and school. If a young person feels connected to school, this can provide a sense of attachment that can impact their health, as well as school performance. Youth who are connected to school feel a sense of belonging to their school, feel treated fairly by teachers, and feel close to people at school. When students feel connected to their schools, academic and social learning can take place, and youth are more likely to feel better and choose healthy behaviours.

The Adolescent Health Survey asked youth a series of questions about their relationships with teachers and peers, and students' sense of belonging at school. Together these items form a measure of school connectedness. Youth who are highly connected to school report better health and engage in fewer risky activities compared to those who have medium or low school connectedness.

Academic performance and aspirations

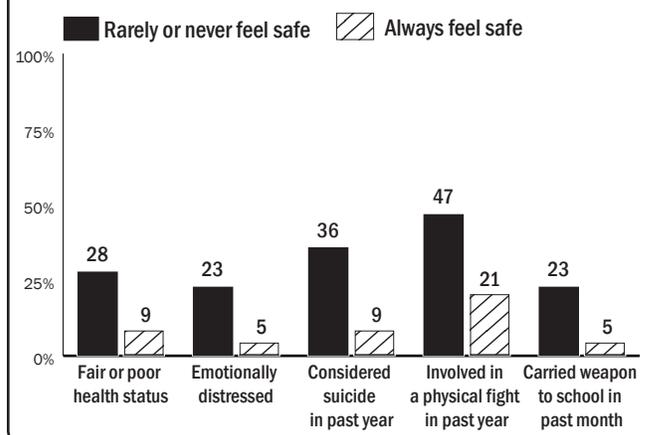
Academic performance is associated with health. Students who take fewer risks have better health and get better grades. Twenty-eight percent of youth reported mostly A's, 43% mostly B's, 27% mostly C's and 3% mostly D's and F's. Females (33%) are more likely than males (22%) to get mostly A's. Students with A's experience less emotional distress and are much less likely to smoke tobacco or marijuana, drink alcohol, have sex, or be involved in fights than those who receives C's or below.

Youth who have post-secondary educational aspirations are less likely to take risks. In BC, 72% of students expect to graduate from a post-secondary institution such as a community college, technical institute, or university, while 7% expect to finish their education either before or when they graduate from high school. Sixteen percent do not know when they will finish their education.

This fact sheet is one of a series on various health issues among BC youth, and may be copied for use as a handout. Data for the fact sheets were collected in the BC Adolescent Health Survey (2003), a 140-question survey completed by over 30,500 students in grades seven to twelve, in schools throughout BC. In all, 45 of BC's 59 school districts agreed to take part in the survey. The first Adolescent Health Survey was conducted in 1992, and the second in 1998. In total, more than 72,400 BC students have completed the survey over a ten-year period.

The Adolescent Health Surveys were conducted by the McCreary Centre Society, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the health of BC youth through research, information sharing, and community-based projects that address the unmet health needs of young people.

Feeling Safe at School



| Strong connections to school reduce the odds of engaging in risky behaviour. | | |
|---|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| | Males | Females |
| Cigarette smoking | ★ ★ ★ ★ | ★ ★ ★ ★ Cigarette smoking |
| Marijuana use | ★ ★ ★ ★ | ★ ★ ★ ★ Marijuana use |
| Involved in a physical fight | ★ ★ ★ ★ | ★ ★ ★ ★ Involved in a physical fight |
| Caused a pregnancy | ★ ★ ★ | ★ ★ ★ ★ Had been pregnant |
| Made a suicide attempt | ★ ★ ★ ★ | ★ ★ ★ ★ ½ Made a suicide attempt |

The greater the number of stars the greater the impact school connectedness has.

Safety matters

Feeling safe at school is strongly linked to better physical and emotional health, and reduced risk taking, especially among younger students.

Health impact

Youth who had high levels of school connectedness were two-thirds less likely to report having made a suicide attempt than those with lower connectedness. Highly connected males were 64% less likely, and females 72% less likely, to have made a suicide attempt in the past 12 months.

School connectedness was also linked to healthier eating behaviours. Females with high school connectedness were a third less likely to report binge eating or gorging and were half as likely to report vomiting after eating.

Risk taking behaviours

Males were 40% less likely to report that they had got somebody pregnant, and female youth were half as likely to have been pregnant if they reported high levels of school connectedness compared to those with lower levels of connectedness.

School connectedness is linked to lower risk for violence. Youth were two-thirds less likely to carry a weapon if they had high levels of school connectedness. Male youth were half as likely to get into a physical fight and female youth 65% less likely if they were highly connected to school. This was a slightly stronger correlation than in 1998.

School connectedness also reduced the odds that a youth reported illegal drug use. Youth who showed strong connections to school were two-thirds less likely to use drugs than their less connected peers.

| Strong connections to school reduce the odds that youth will... | |
|--|-----------|
| Carry a weapon to school | ★ ★ ★ ★ ½ |
| Use illegal drugs | ★ ★ ★ ★ ½ |
| Engage in binge drinking | ★ ★ ★ ★ |
| Make a suicide attempt | ★ ★ ★ ★ |
| Drink and drive | ★ ★ ★ ★ |

The greater the number of stars the greater the impact school connectedness has.

Safe and inclusive schools foster healthy youth

Binge drinking is also influenced by school connectedness, with highly connected youth being almost half as likely as their less connected peers to indulge in binge drinking – although the influence of school has declined slightly since 1998.

Similarly, the odds of tobacco smoking and regular marijuana use are also reduced with strong school connectedness. Males are about half as likely to participate in either if they have strong connections to school, and females two-thirds less likely.

The link between school connectedness and lower drinking and driving has gotten stronger over the past years. Youth who are highly connected to school are now about half as likely to report they drink and drive as those who are less connected.