

**Health  
Behaviour in  
School-aged  
Children:  
Healthy Settings  
for Young People  
in Canada  
(2006)**

Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) is a World Health Organization survey examining the health behaviours of youth recently conducted in 41 countries. This fact sheet highlights information about the health of 9,672 Canadian youth in grades 6 through 10 in the HBSC study funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada.

For more information about the HBSC study and for Canada-specific data, please visit [www.publichealth.gc.ca](http://www.publichealth.gc.ca). For international data visit the HBSC global site at [www.hbsc.org](http://www.hbsc.org).

# Emotional Health Among Canadian Youth

Emotional health is a critical part of young people's well-being. Research has shown that many youth who experience mental health problems continue to have these problems in adulthood and may suffer personal costs, including limited employment opportunities, reduced access to housing and strained family relationships.

If poor emotional health develops into mental illness, personal costs can include poverty, homelessness and social exclusion, which may ultimately be life-threatening. Therefore, it is essential to recognize and respond to early indications of emotional health difficulties.

## Girls report more emotional health issues

Overall, the proportion of students who say they feel depressed at least once a week has remained relatively constant since 1994. The numbers range from 21 to 26 percent for boys, and 24 to 38 percent among girls.

Beginning in grade 7, girls were also more likely to report feeling helpless, feeling bad tempered or irritable more than once a week, and experiencing physical symptoms such as backache.

## Students' self-confidence tends to decline with age

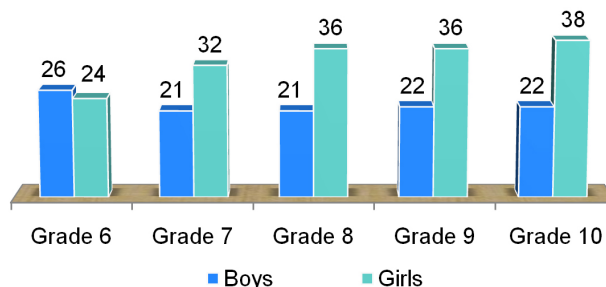
Levels of self-confidence in both genders show a steady decrease between grades 6 and 10. The proportion of boys who strongly agree they have confidence in themselves falls from 47 to 24 percent; for girls, it falls from 36 to 14 percent. Students' positive ratings of their general health also tend to decline with age, although the differences are much less dramatic – from 90 to 86 percent for boys, and from 90 to 76 percent for girls.

## Family relationships make a difference

Students who report having trusting relationships and good communication with their parents tend to report better emotional health. Among those with high scores on the parent trust and communication scale, only 18 percent report having low emotional well-being. Among those with low parent trust and communication scores, 52 percent had low emotional well-being.

Living with both parents and having an affluent family also provide protection in relation to emotional health. However, these are much less dramatic than the impact of the parent-child relationship.

Feeling depressed or low at least once a week, by grade and gender (%)



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# Health Behaviour in School-aged Children: Healthy Settings for Young People in Canada (2006)

This fact sheet was developed in collaboration with the Joint Consortium for School Health with funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

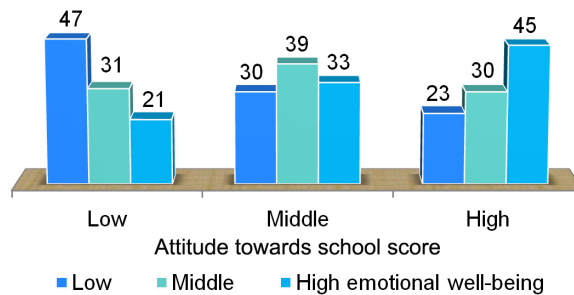
Data for this fact sheet was taken from: Freeman, John. "Emotional Health and Well-being." *In Healthy Settings for Young People in Canada*. W. Boyce, M. King, & J. Roche (Editors). Ottawa, Ontario: The Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008.

## The school environment and peers are critical

There is a strong link between students' attitudes toward school and their emotional health. Those with the most positive attitudes also have the highest levels of emotional well-being – almost double the proportion of those with the least positive attitudes (45 percent versus 23 percent).

Students with higher levels of academic achievement are also more likely to report high levels of emotional well-being. Among students with the lowest academic scores, 59 percent have low emotional well-being, compared to just 24 percent among high academic achievers.

Emotional well-being and attitude towards school (%)

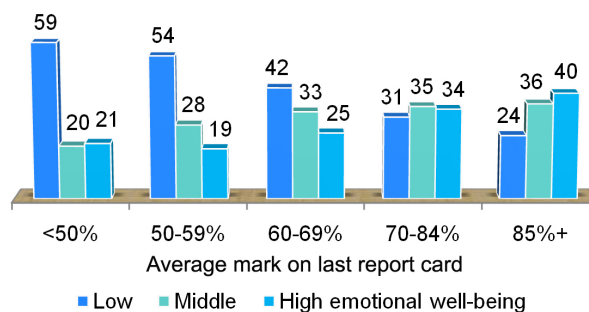


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Emotional well-being is also higher among students whose friends have positive social attitudes. This was found to have more of an influence in rating emotional well-being than communication with friends.

Overall, the findings underline the importance of healthy school environments and peer relationships in supporting young people's health and well-being.

Emotional well-being and academic achievement (%)



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## What can schools, families and communities do?

Everyone can help make a difference by contributing to healthy, supportive learning environments. Research consistently demonstrates that health and education are inextricably linked – and the most effective way to address issues such as emotional health is through a comprehensive school health approach.

This means not looking at any one issue in isolation, but recognizing that many factors are interconnected with healthy living – and that families, teachers, administrators, school staff, professionals and other community members all have a role to play in supporting young people's healthy development.

When it comes to students' emotional health, much can be gained by working to ensure a positive school environment and building strong relationships among students, teachers, staff and community members<sup>1</sup>. This comprehensive approach can help to improve students' attitudes toward school and thus their emotional health.

For more information on comprehensive school health, visit the Joint Consortium for School Health website at [www.jcsh-cces.ca](http://www.jcsh-cces.ca). For more information on asset-based social development resources and programs in Canadian schools, see "Mental Resilience Quick Scan of Activities and Resources in Resilience/Positive Asset-Based Social Development in Canadian Schools", available on the Joint Consortium for School Health website.

For more about what's happening in your community, contact your local school or district directly.

<sup>1</sup> Joint Consortium for School Health (2007), *Mental Resilience Quick Scan of Activities and Resources in Resilience/Positive Asset-Based Social Development in Canadian Schools*, p. 1, 18