



The COVID-19 pandemic brought many challenges to families already strained by the complexity of caring for adopted children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).



Children with FASD are more vulnerable to stress and to mental health issues than the general population.

The disruption in social support, routine and structures led to an increase in mental health issues in children and youth with FASD.

For their children and youth, caregivers in our survey reported increases in:



Parents noted regression in their children, saying they felt their pre-teens were reverting to toddler-like behaviours. They also noted trauma related behaviours resurfacing.

[In]Kaitlyn's case it was anxiety, anxiety behaviours went really kind of super through the roof, and trauma behaviours that we have seen from her over the years, but that she had really done a lot of work in the last few years to work through those and move past some of that, immediately we were back there again.

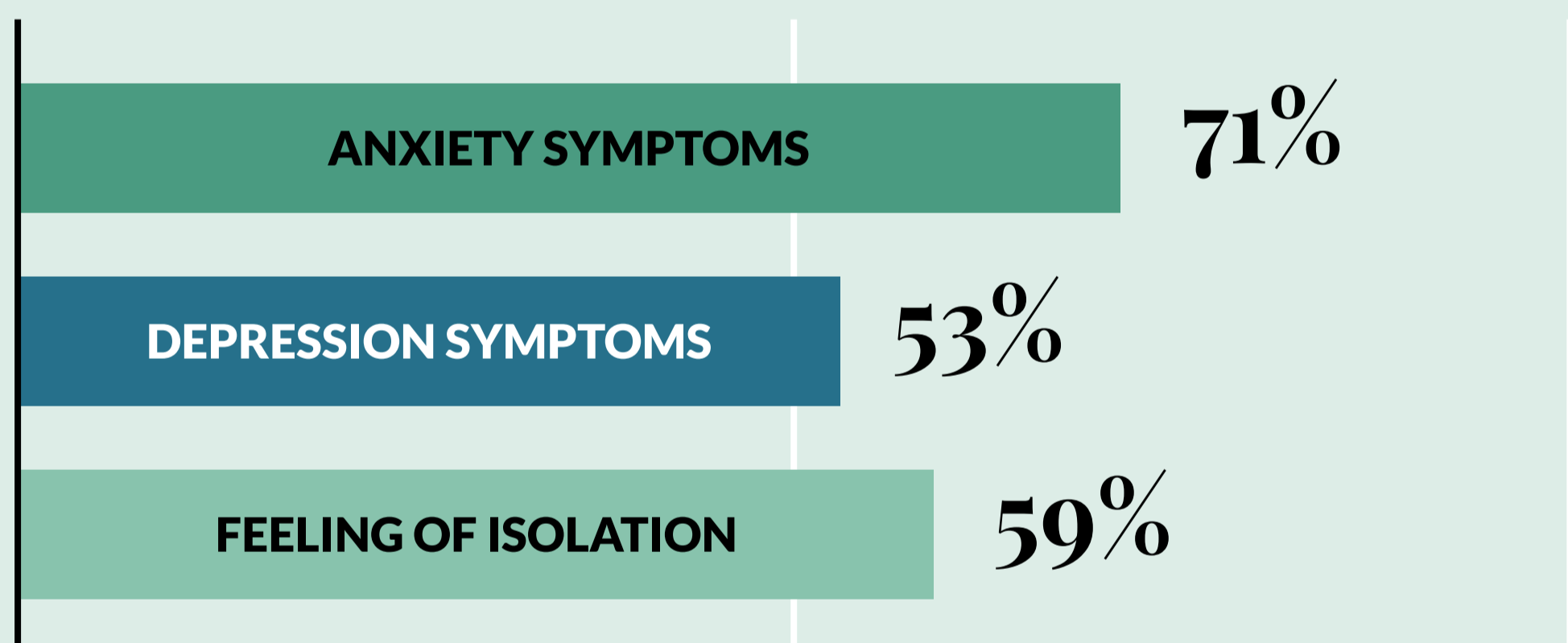
When children and youth with FASD have increased mental health concerns, it may lead to an increase in challenging and dangerous behaviours in the home.



Dangerous behaviours were displayed in the form of self-harm and at times aggression towards other family members.

Caregivers reported being exhausted by having to provide constant supervision and expressed a need for respite and mental health support.

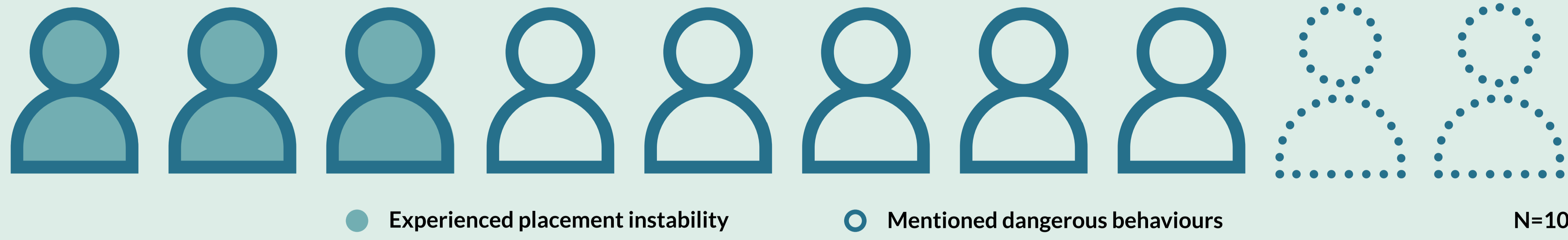
Many caregivers reported increased symptoms of anxiety, depression and isolation during this time.



Caregivers also noted that the tumultuous environment also had an impact on other siblings in the home. In multiple cases, these siblings also have FASD, trauma and attachment injuries as part of their history.

The combination of all of these factors has led to placement instability in multiple cases.

It was noted that those caregivers with the highest reported frequency of dangerous behaviours in the home were also the ones who experienced placement instability for their child.



Recommendations



Mobile crisis unit is an essential service for several families of children and youth with FASD.



Build awareness among first responders on de-escalation techniques and special concerns when dealing with youth with FASD during a crisis situation.



Enhanced support to address mental health needs of caregivers as well as of the children and youth.



Develop interventions to respond to the dangerous behaviours and aggression some children and youth may display during times of crisis to keep themselves and their loved ones safe.



Provide resources for FASD-informed respite options that are accessible and safe during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as post-pandemic.