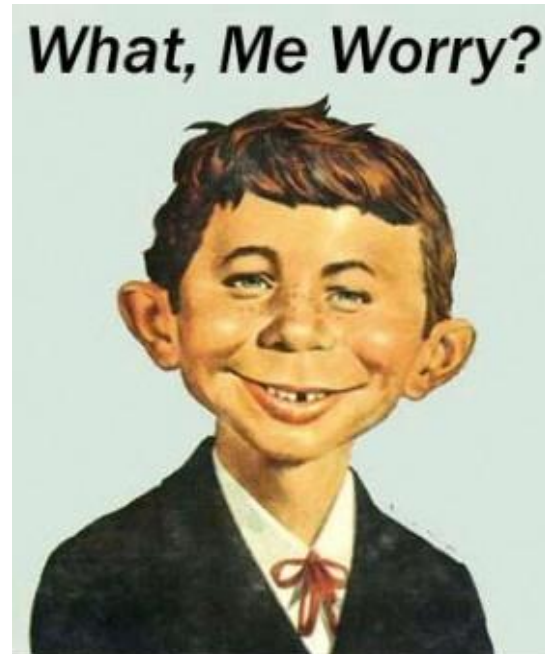


Do fear and exaggeration increase risk?



Larry Magid

(not pictured above)

Co-director, ConnectSafely.org

Founder, SafeKids.com

larry@ConnectSafely.org


ConnectSafely
Smart Socializing Starts Here™

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was right



“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

After 9/11, flying was “dangerous”

So people drove more and deaths per passenger mile went up



Some parents fear inoculations

Which means fewer kids are protected against preventable diseases



And sometimes fear can lead to questionable invasive procedures

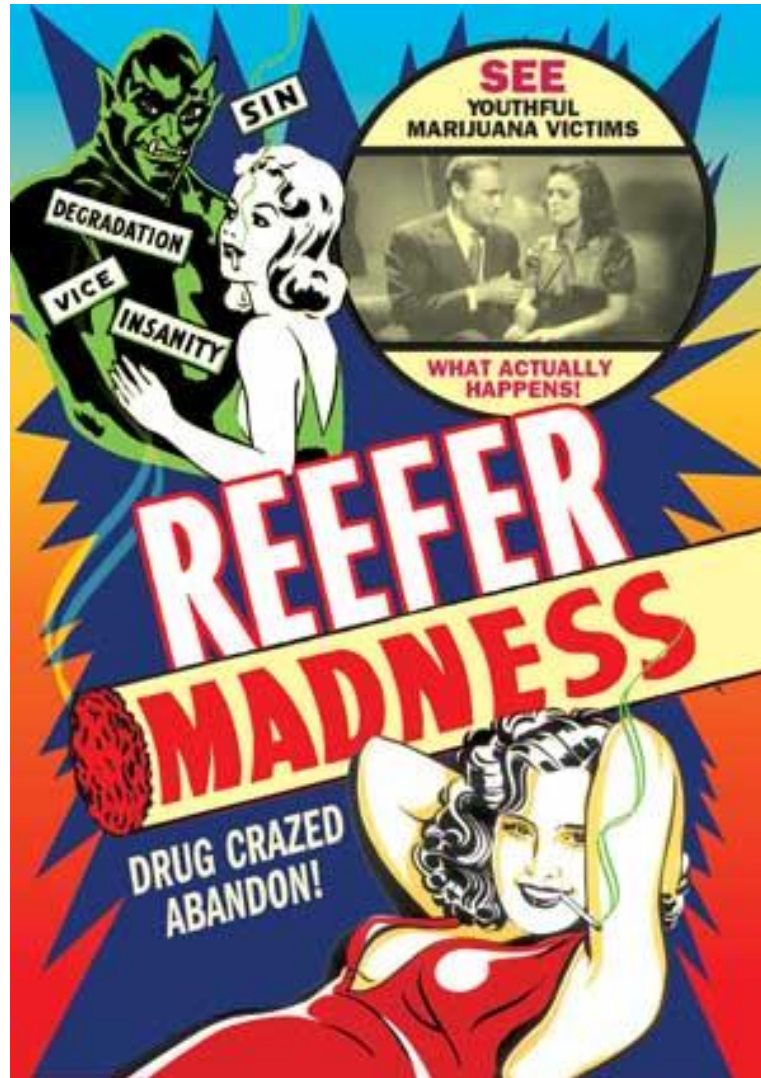


Some panicked over:

- Y2K
- Killer bees
- Swine flu
- Stranger danger
- Stock market “crash”
- Al Qaeda and nuclear weapons in Iraq
- Unemployment
- Not enough people to fill available jobs
- Inflation
- Deflation
- Obama getting elected
- McCain getting elected



And, of course



But fear can also be protective



“You should not try to scare people into healthy practices”

“In 50 years of research, many different theories have been developed to explain the *inconsistent results* with respect to the effects (or lack of effects) of fear appeals, but in general health communicators have assumed for a long time that “*you should not try to scare people* into healthy practices, including smoking prevention and cessation.”

(Hill, Chapman, Donovan, 1998).

<http://www.thcu.ca/infoandresources/publications/fear%20appeals%20-%20web%20version.pdf>

If it's not credible & actionable, people don't respond

“According to EPPM*, how people respond to fear appeals depends on their assessment of the threat and their perceived efficacy. When assessing threat, the audience considers severity, or the seriousness of it, as well as their susceptibility, or the likelihood that it will happen to them.”

*Extended Parallel Process Model

Based on research from Kim White @ Michigan State

<http://www.thcu.ca/infoandresources/publications/fear%20appeals%200-%20web%20version.pdf>

Boomerang effect



If the perception of threat exceeds perception of efficacy...

- They will **avoid** the message
- **Deny** they are at risk
- **Mock** the message or become angry at the source or issue (and ignore it).
- *They may even **increase their unhealthy behaviors** (boomerang effect).*

Danger control

- When perceived threat is low, the audience does not worry about efficacy and so they do not respond
- When perceived threat is high and perceived efficacy is low(er), the result is avoidance, denial or anger towards the source or issue (fear control)
- When perceived threat is high and perceived efficacy is higher, the recommended behavior is adopted (danger control)

Based on research from Kim White @ Michigan State

<http://www.thcu.ca/infoandresources/publications/fear%20appeals%20-%20web%20version.pdf>

The DARE experience

- DARE classes were *no less likely* to have smoked marijuana or cigarettes, drunk alcohol, used "illicit" drugs like cocaine or heroin, or caved in to peer pressure than kids who'd never been exposed to DARE.
- Its *panic-level assertions* that "drug abuse is everywhere." Kids don't respond well to hyperbole, and both the "Just Say No" message and the hysteria implied in the anti-drug rhetoric were pushing students away.
- It's also possible, some researchers speculate, that by making drugs seem more prevalent, or "*normal*" than they actually are, the DARE program *might actually push kids who are anxious to fit in towards drugs.*

Time Magazine:

<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,99564,00.html#ixzz1W0XkvmW1DD>

DARE to keep kids away from candy

- My 6-year old daughter was afraid of Walgreens because it sold “drugs”
- Besides, kids her age weren’t at risk of drugs – the biggest risk in their lives was candy and junk food

Source: My wife Patti Regehr



Fear can paralyze



And lead to irrational decisions



Predator Panic of 2004-2006



All Sections

ABC News Home > Good Morning America

All Children Vulnerable to Online Predators

Authorities Say 1 in 5 Children Has Been **Approached By Online Predators**

RELATED STORIES

- Homeland Security Press Aide Held, Charged
- Teen Tells How He Was Lured Into Child Porn

GOOD MORNING AMERICA HEADLINES

- U.S. Military Effort in Afghanistan: Is It Working?
- **VIDEO** ▶ Soldiers Send Their Greetings
- **VIDEO** ▶ Is Your Commute Killing You? | **STORY**

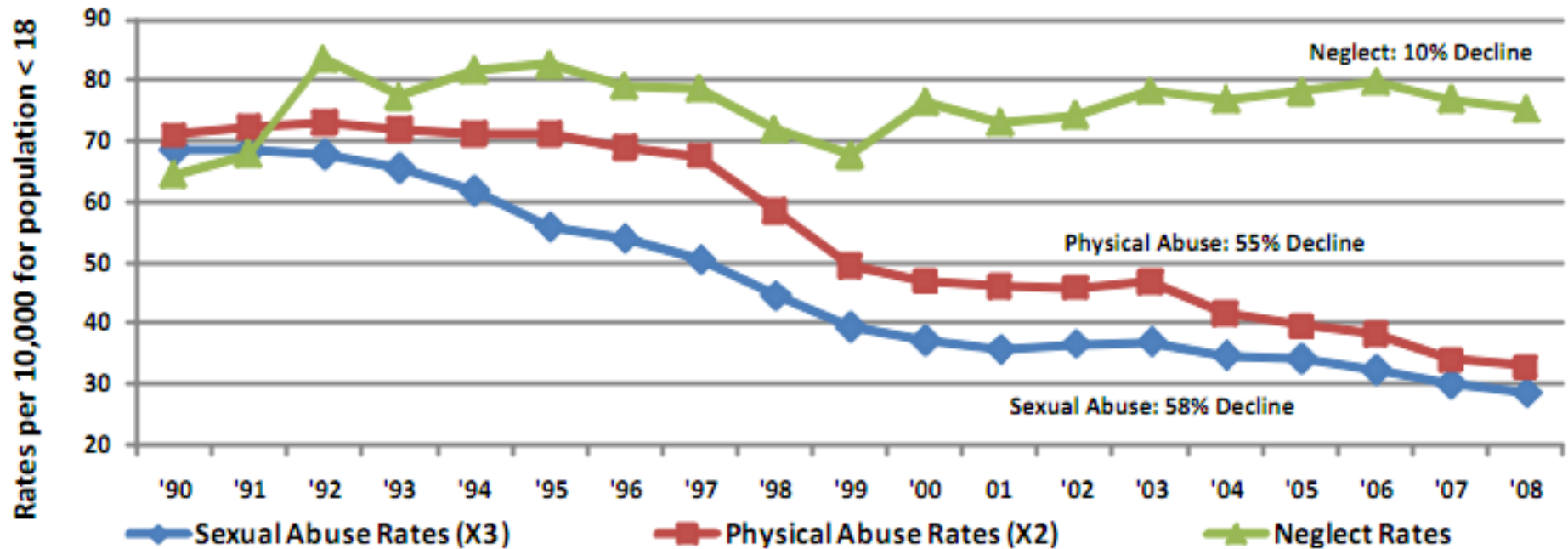


April 6, 2006 — Between the arrest of Brian Doyle, deputy press secretary for the Department of Homeland Security, and the testimony of a child pornography victim on Capitol Hill, the dangers of online predators have been major news this week.

Authorities say that's a good thing, and that parents can learn an important lesson from the headlines — any child, even overachievers from healthy homes, can be lured into the underworld of child pornography from online predators.

The rise of the web has not resulted in increased victimization of children

Figure 1: US Maltreatment Trends: 1990-2008



Note: Trend estimates represent total change from 1992 to 2008. Annual rates for physical abuse and sexual abuse have been multiplied by 2 and 3 respectively in Figure 1 so that trend comparisons can be highlighted.

Blue line represents 58% decline in child sex abuse from 1992 to 2008

Moving right along

The Internet Safety Technical Task Force found that:

“Bullying and harassment, most often by peers, are the most salient threats that minors face, both online and offline.”

Which naturally leads to

Cyberbullying Panic!



Cyberbullying: The Nation's New Epidemic

By Nicolette Gomez

ON DECEMBER 8, 2010 [POLICY](#)



Cyberbullying has become a national epidemic. More and more teens and young adults are taking their own lives because of constant online harassment, and it is an issue that has no easy fix.

According to the Cyberbullying Research Center, cyberbullying is defined as "willful and repeated harm

inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic

PRI



Yo

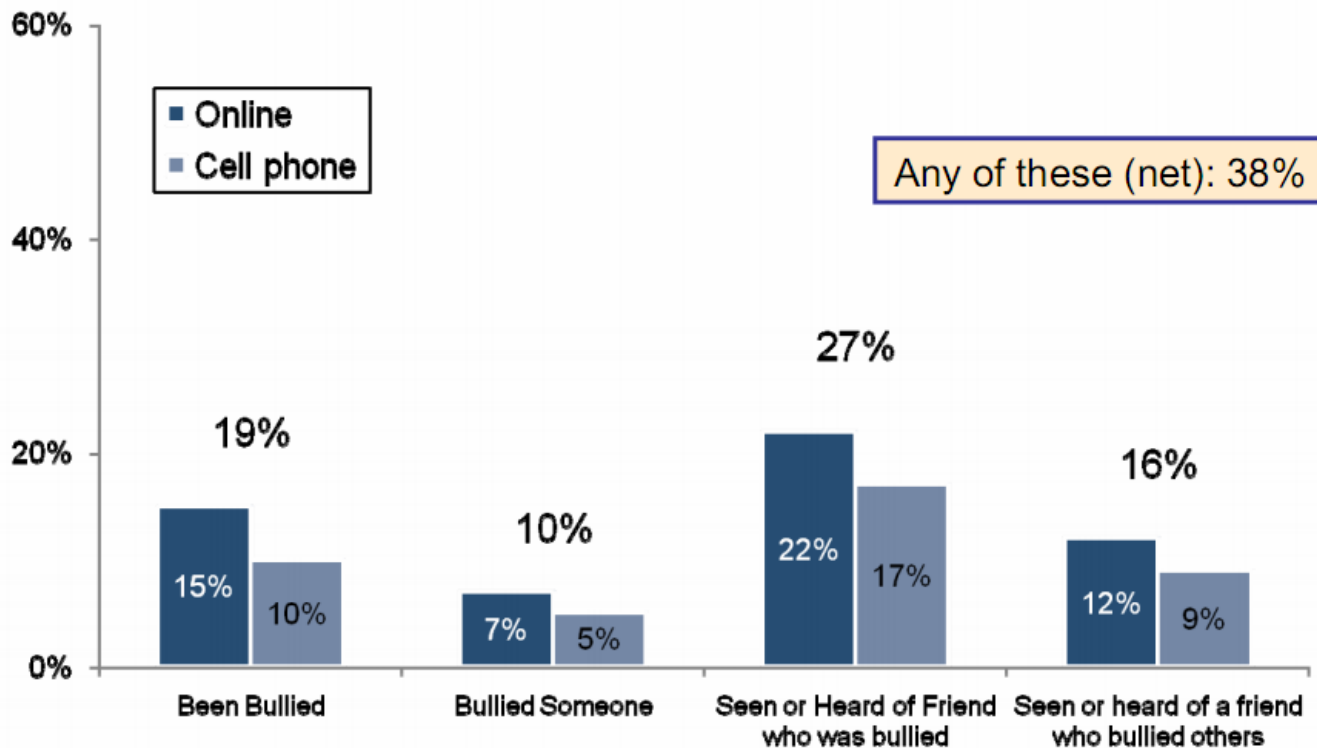
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It's a problem, not an epidemic

Data is not consistent but the consensus is that about 20% of kids experienced cyberbullying



Q905: Thinking about bullying online, have you ever...? Please select all that apply
Q907: Thinking about bullying by cell phone, have you ever...? Please select all that apply
Base: All respondents (n=655)

Most children are neither victims nor monsters



- Not every interaction that makes kids uncomfortable is bullying
- While some are very vulnerable, most children are reasonably resilient.
- Across Europe, 6% of 9 to 16-year-old internet users have been bullied online. 3% confess to having bullied others. *
- Far more have been bullied offline, with 19 per cent saying they have been bullied at all – and 12 per cent have bullied someone else*

And bullying is going down, not up

“The percentage of youth (2-17) reporting physical bullying in the past year went down from 22 percent to 15 percent between 2003 and 2008.”

Source: Trends in Childhood Violence and Abuse Exposure ..
Finkelhor, et al)

Sexting Panic

A 2008 survey found that 20% of teens sent a 'sext'



Which led to stories like this:

Jan. 15, 2009

"Sexting" Shockingly Common Among Teens

Latest Case Involves Three Teen Girls In Pa. Who Sent Nude Pics To Three Boys



Font size



Print



E-mail



Share



373 Comments

But a 2009 Pew Study found

- 4% sent a “sext”
- 15% received a “sext”

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project: Dec. 2009

Danger of exaggeration

- Can destroy credibility
- Can cause “boomerang effect”
- Can cause people to believe that behaviors are “normal”

Social norms approach

- People emulate how they *think* their peers behave
- If people *think* their friends don't smoke, they're less likely to smoke.
- Same is true with over-eating, excessive alcohol use and other negative behaviors, including *bullying**



*Assessing Bullying in New Jersey Secondary Schools: Applying the Social Norms Model to Adolescent Violence: Craig, Perkins 2008

Alternative to fear messaging

“Social-norms marketing campaigns have emerged as an alternative to more traditional approaches (e.g., information campaigns, moral exhortation, fear inducing messages) designed to reduce undesirable conduct.”

Donaldson, Graham, Piccinin, & Hansen, 1995
<http://www.csom.umn.edu/assets/118375.pdf>

Standardized regression coefficients predicting bullying behavior in the last 30 days (N=7,247^a)

Independent Variables	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)
Perception of bullying (index)	.42 *
Actual bullying norm at school (index median)	.08 *
Gender (male vs. female)	.10 *
Age	.09 *
Race (white vs minority)	-.05 *
School population size	.00 ns
Race (% white at school)	.02 ns
Students with free lunch (%)	.01 ns
Student/teacher ratio at school	-.02 ns

Perception of bullying is strongest predictor of whether an individual will bully!

^aIncludes only schools where at least 50% of students responded overall from the grades surveyed.

*Coefficient is significant at $p < .001$.

^{ns} Coefficient is not significant, $p > .05$.

Bully Behavior at School in Last 30 Days: Actual Prevalence and Perceived Norms

Norm is not to bully but only a minority know it!

(N=10,668)

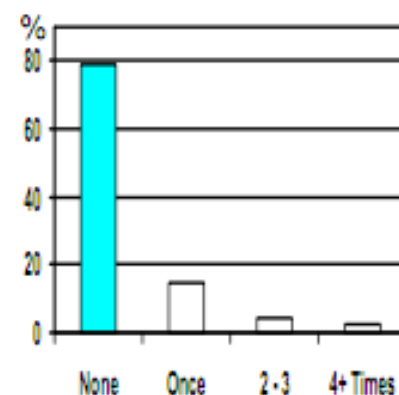
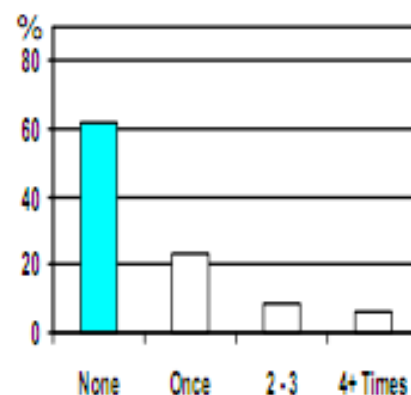
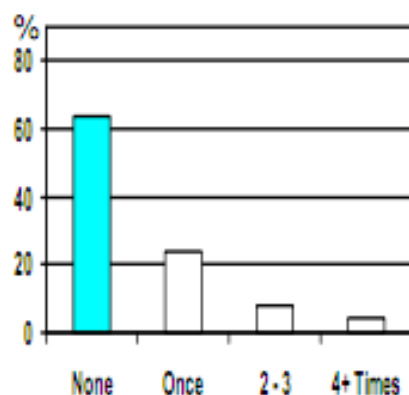
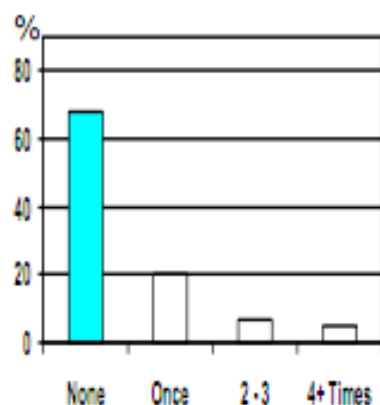
Pushing, shoving, hitting, kicking, hair pulling, or tripping...

Teasing in an unfriendly way...

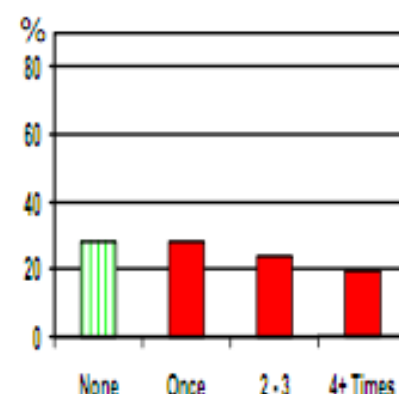
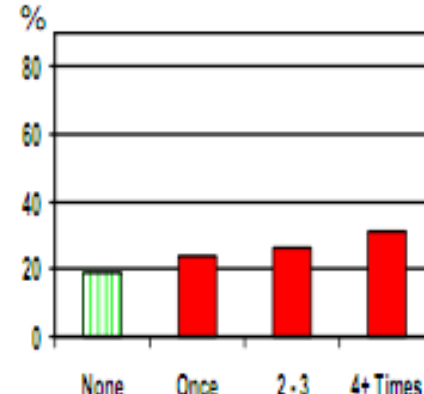
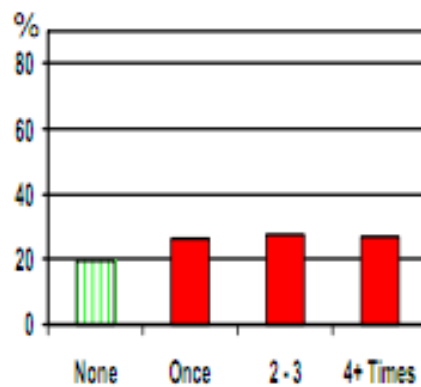
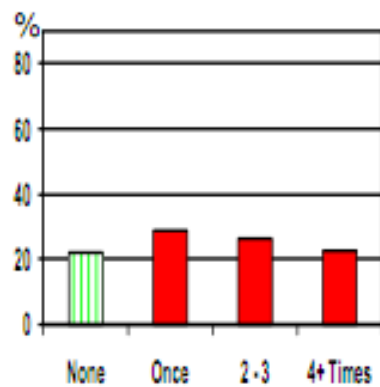
Calling hurtful names...

Excluding someone from a group to make them feel bad...

Actual Behaviors



Perceptions of Norm



Legend:

█ actual norm

█ misperceived norm

▤ accurately perceived norm

Bullying Behavior at School in Last 30 Days: Actual Prevalence and Perceived Norms

(N=10,668)

Norm is not to bully but only a minority know it!

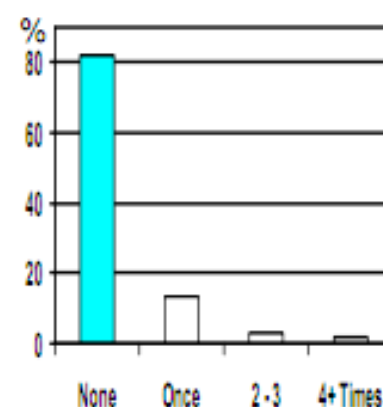
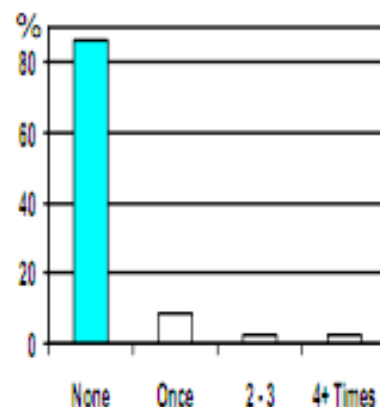
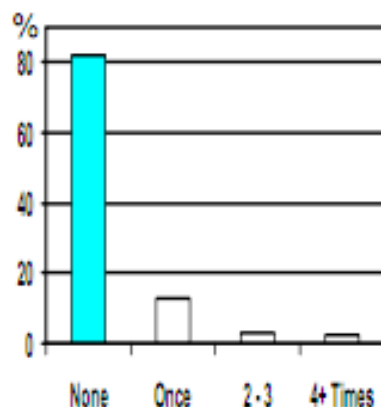
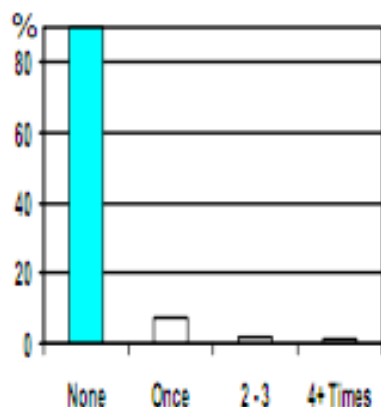
Taking or damaging someone else's belongings

Spreading unkind stories or rumors about someone else

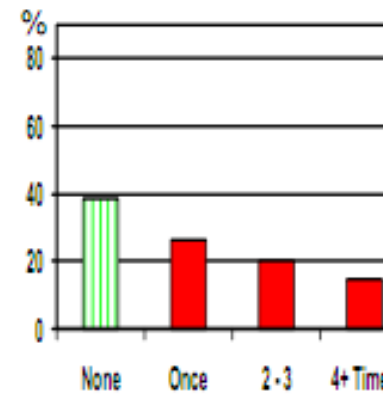
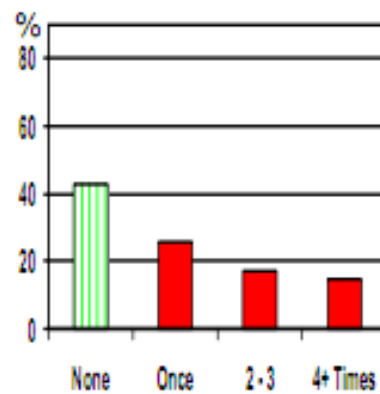
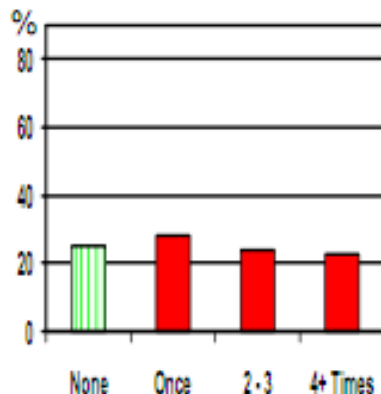
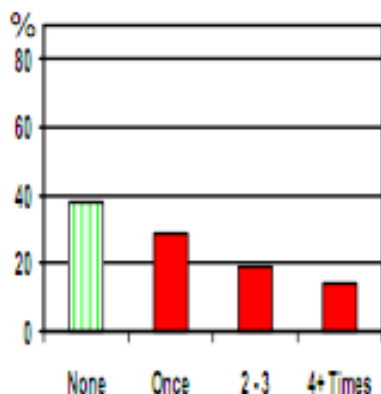
Threatening to hurt someone

Making someone do something they did not want to do

Actual Behaviors



Perceptions of Norm



Legend: █ actual norm

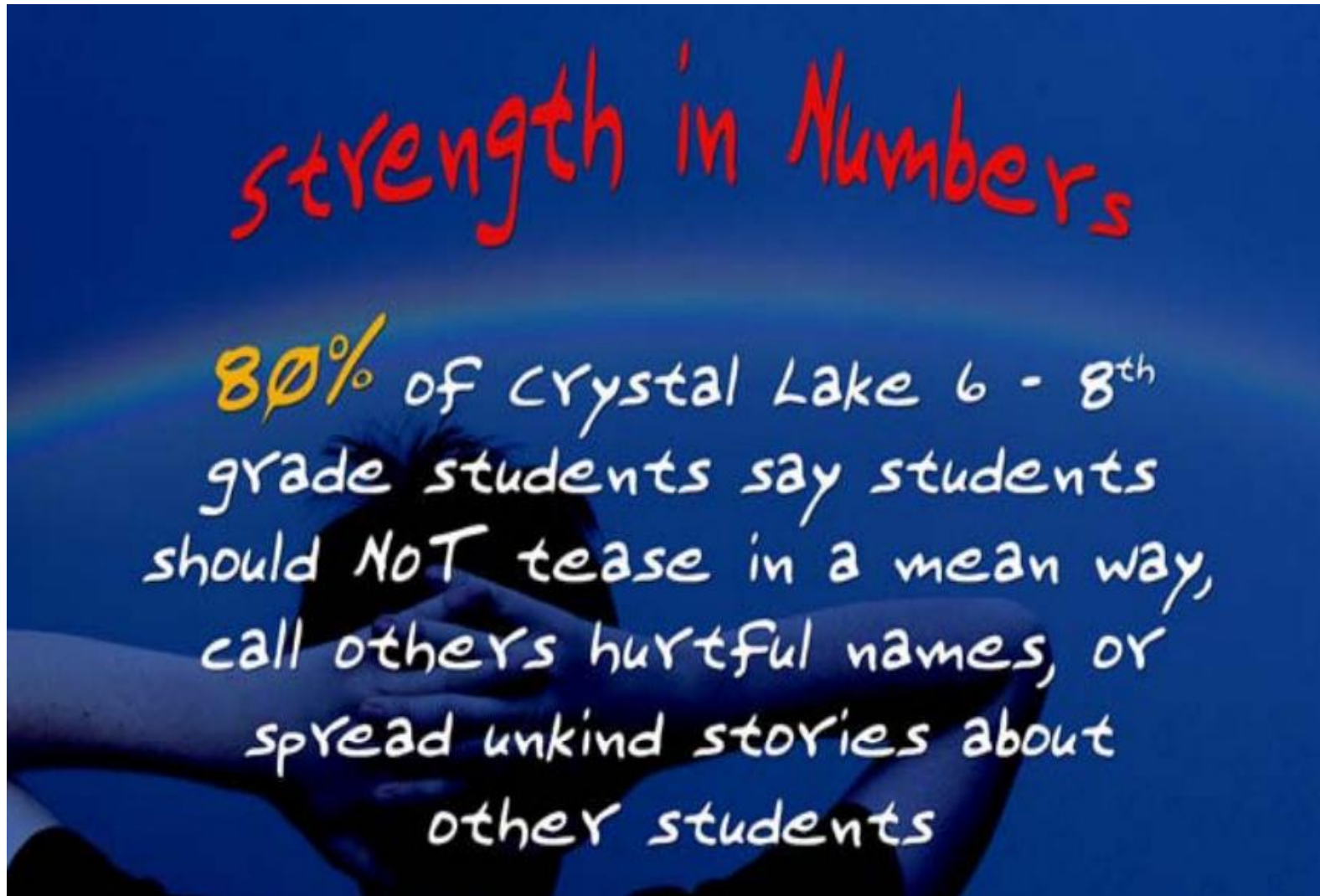
█ misperceived norm

▨ accurately perceived norm

Emphasize the positive

- People, especially youth, can benefit from positive images and role models
- Creating a *culture* of respect actually can lead to respect
- Respectful behavior truly is normal. Most kids do not bully

Examples of positive norming



Thanks

Larry Magid

Co-director, ConnectSafely.org

Founder, SafeKids.com

larry@ConnectSafely.org

