



What do students expect to get from the MARC Bullying and Cyberbullying Student Assembly?

Snapshot analysis of 2 Westford schools, October 2013

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The Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center provides a student assembly program for K-12 schools. The assembly is held as a single 45-minute interactive presentation provided by graduate students trained by MARC, for multiple classes at a time. The presentation is “designed to help children develop the appropriate vocabulary to understand and deal with bullying issues in schools. Children are introduced to roles and emotional responses associated with bullying. Appropriate ways to deal with bullying are discussed and there is also a discussion of the difference between accidents that may happen and bullying.”²

The current analysis is based on a self-report pretest survey (pen-and-paper questionnaires) set up to find out how extensively students use internet and mobile phones, how familiar they are with problems that may occur when communicating online, and what are their expectations when facing a student assembly on bullying and cyberbullying. The tests were filled in by students in two middle schools (Blanchard Middle School and Stony Brook Public School for 6-7 graders, Westford, Massachusetts) both of which volunteered to participate in the survey. The students were tested before the assemblies by program coordinator Meghan McCoy in both schools.

We tested altogether 764 students, 50.3% (n=384) from Stony Brook, 49.7% (n=380) from Blanchard, from the 6th and 7th grades. Slightly more girls (n=442, 57.2%) filled in the test than boys (n=318, 41.6%). (Table 1) This allowed us to have a snapshot view of 764 middle school students before the assembly took place.

¹The Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (MARC) offers aggression management programs for preschools, elementary, middle and high schools. The Center operates at the School of Education at Bridgewater State University. The author was a visiting Fulbright scholar evaluating MARC from October 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014 on a mandate from the Hungarian National Eötvös Scholarship and the Fulbright Committee. More information on the Center is available at the following website: <http://marccenter.webs.com>.

² For more information on student assemblies, please consult the website: <http://marccenter.webs.com/assembly%20descriptions.pdf>

Table 1

Grades and Gender (q1) by School

Name of school	Grade		Gender		
	Grade 6	Grade 7	Boys	Girls	N.A.
Stony Brook	343 (89.9%)	41 (10.7%)	119 (31.0%)	263 (68.8%)	1 (0.3%)
Blanchard	188 (49.5%)	192 (50.5%)	199 (52.4%)	178 (46.8%)	3 (0.8%)
Total	531	233	318	441	4

The tests were voluntary and anonymous, and because they were conducted by the school administration, within the school, they did not require additional parental consent other than the one already given to the schools.

The snapshot analysis looks for answers to the following questions:

- How widespread is online gaming and communication via mobile devices among middle school students?
- What do students think about the responsibility of the school for bullying and cyberbullying incidents?
- How widespread is cyberbullying via text messages among students?
- Whether the students have actually spoken about the bullying or cyberbullying incident they suffered? If yes, which was the most likely group of trusted people?
- How prevalent do students think bullying and online bullying is in reality?
- Whether bullying and cyberbullying were discussed with an adult? (How important is talking about bullying according to adults?)

The questionnaires measured how students think about such important issues as:

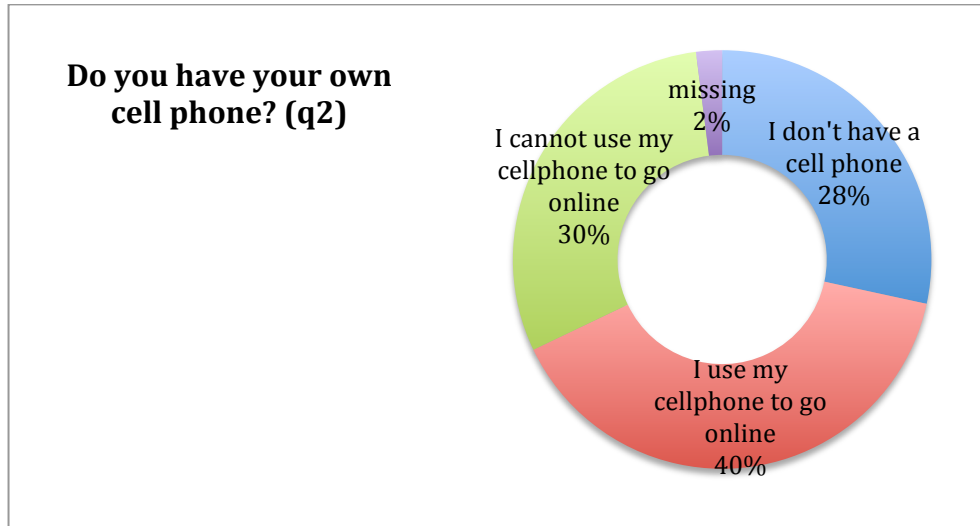
- The role of a bystander or an egger;
- The concept of online privacy (taking pictures, making audio or video recordings about someone's activity and posting those without permission etc.);
- Doing illegal things online and being unnoticed/unpunished;
- The concept of staying secure online (e.g. the requirement of changing login information, and giving out passwords).

We also included questions about the most wanted topics and issues students would like to hear and learn about at an assembly or a student training, such as how to respond to bullying and cyberbullying incidents that may occur, or what teachers/schools should do when bullying is happening.

Basic data

The greatest part of the responding students (40%) has a mobile phone with internet capabilities and children do use this function. At the same time, about a third of the respondents (30%) do not have a smart phone, and a further third of them (28%) do not have a mobile phone. (Chart 1)

Chart 1



Online activities and risks

We made sure to include such everyday online activities in our list such as online messaging, maintaining a profile on a social network website, online gaming, but we also included online dating, or websites and applications popular with students, such as Snapchat, Ask.fm or Instagram.

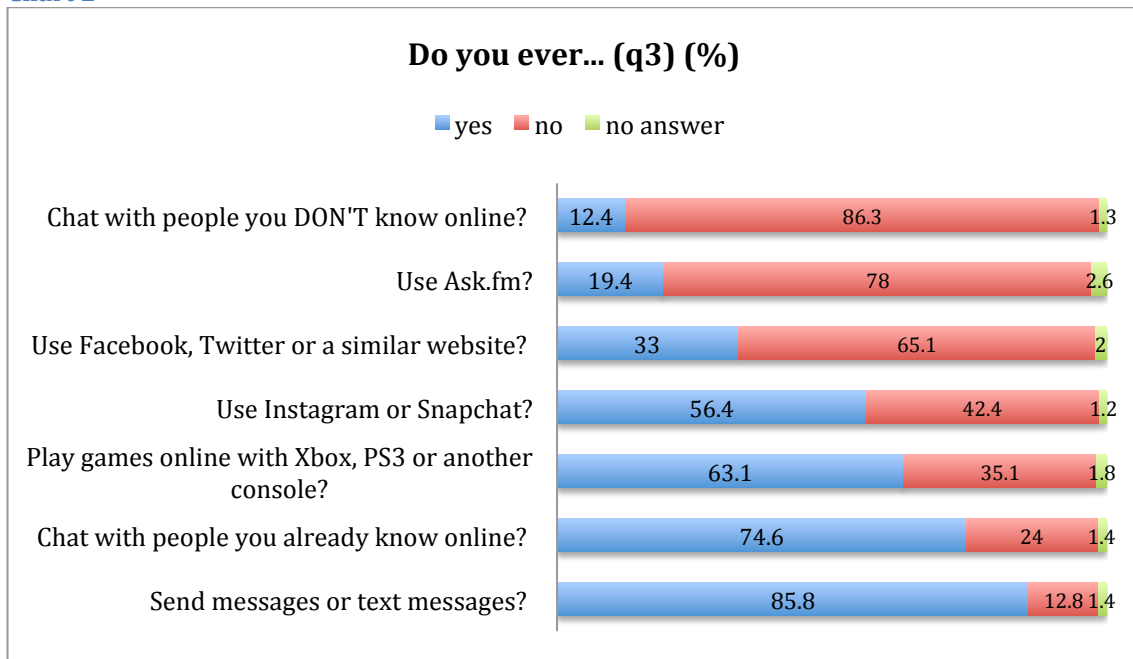
Snapchat is a photo messaging application where users set a time limit – usually 10 seconds or less – for how long recipients can view their photos or graphic images. The application drew the attention of experts in cyberbullying because users may share confidential contents, which may violate their own or others' privacy, while at the same time the application offers no guarantees for the deletion of content: The content does disappear, but even a picture displayed for just a few seconds gives an untrustworthy recipient enough time to take a quick screen shot, saving the image. The most important lesson in relation to the Snapchat application that all children should be aware of is that before they upload an image, they should consider whether they are prepared for a scenario where the image can be viewed and downloaded by anyone for the rest of their lives.

Ask.fm is a social networking website where users can ask other users questions, and the others can answer them – with the option of anonymity. Ask.fm supports anonymity, however being anonymous does not mean that others cannot identify the person. The website is particularly popular with teenagers, who tend to use it to share confidential information with each other. The users are usually from the same school, but at least they know and can identify each other – not rarely because they do not actually make use of the anonymity function. Overly honest answers may however make the users vulnerable, and the shared confidential information may lead to outbursts of group activity of an abusive nature.

Surprisingly, we found the least activity in relation to online dating and Ask.fm. (Chart 2) The great majority of respondents (85.8%) regularly send messages online or as a text message, and further 74.6% chats with others online – however, only 12.4% said they chatted with people they do not know. Online gaming – Xbox, PS3 – is very widespread, 63.1% spend some time doing that. Snapchat and

Instagram are more popular (56.4%) than social networking websites like Facebook or Twitter (33.0%), which are preferred by older students. Only a fraction of the respondents (19.4%) use Ask.fm.

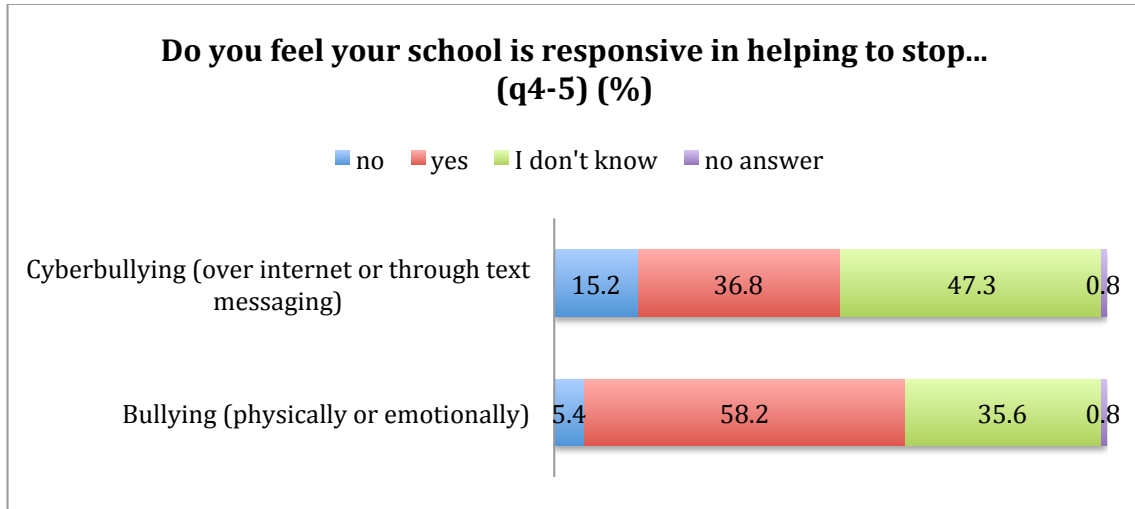
Chart 2



Responsiveness of the school

Students' answers were divided on questions regarding the school's responsiveness (q4-5, "Do you feel your school is responsive in helping to stop bullying (physically or emotionally)/cyberbullying (over internet or through text messaging)?"): First of all, students think the school is more responsive for abuse taking place in the public spaces of the school, than for cyberbullying, which is by its nature not directly visible or palpable (the school is responsive: bullying: 58.2%, cyberbullying: 36.5%). (Chart 3) In relation to cyberbullying, more students were unsure about their answers, than with school bullying (I do not know: cyberbullying: 47.3%, bullying: 35.6%). However, more students believe that the school is not competent in solving online incidents and does not have any responsiveness for solving those, while with school bullying, this ratio is very small (the school is not responsive: bullying: 5.4%, cyberbullying: 15.2%). What may be behind these differences is online "invisibility", the screen shield effect, according to which most cyberbullying goes unnoticed by everyone but the directly involved parties, and also most cyberbullying cases take place after school, off campus (on the school bus, at home, etc.).

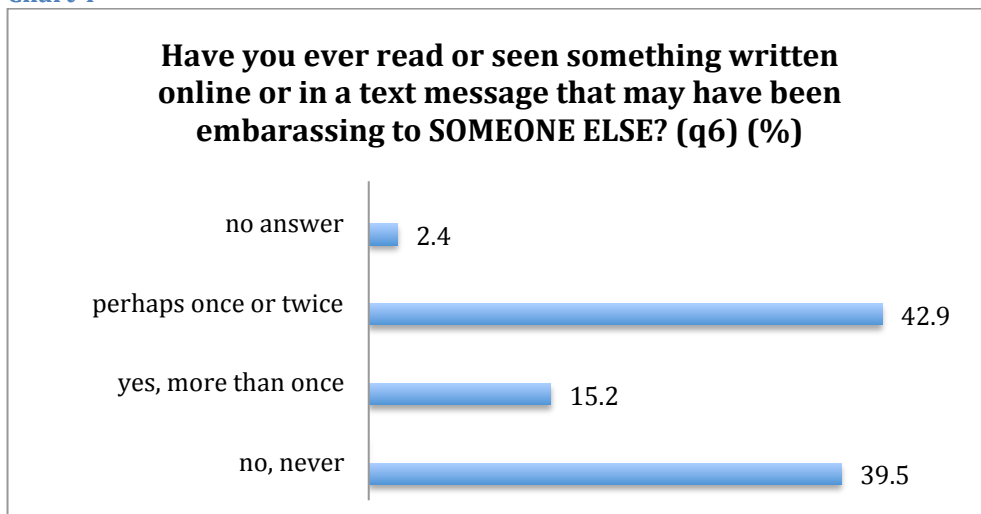
Chart 3



Prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying incidents and responsiveness of the school

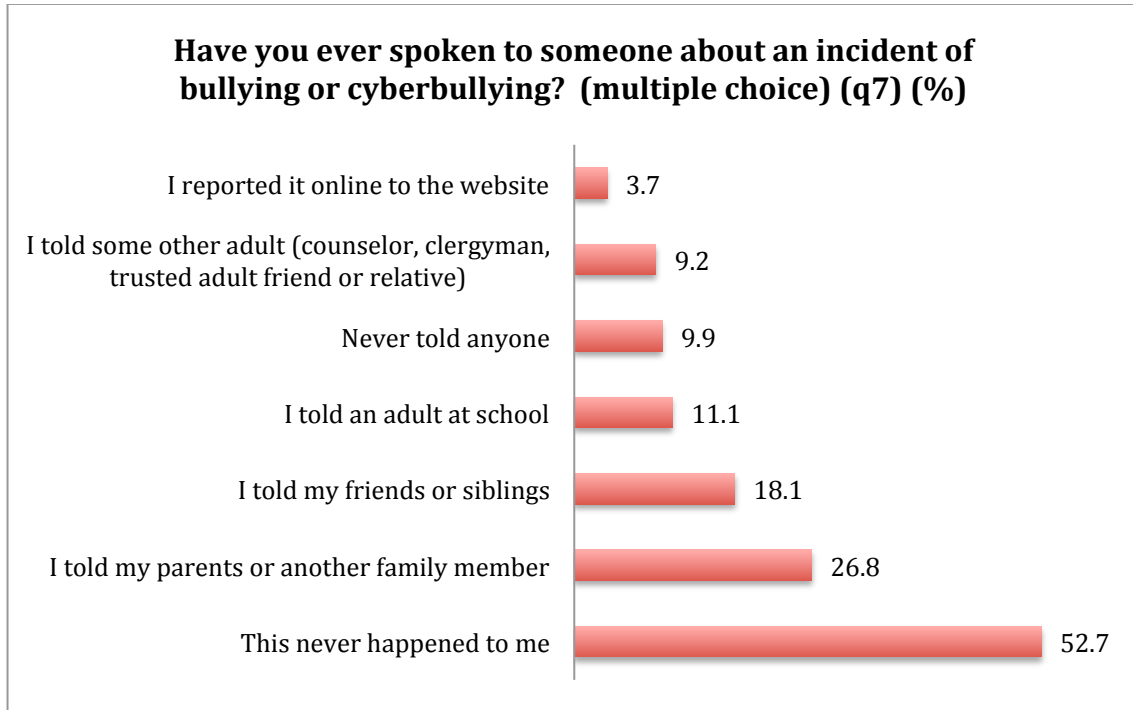
Most students have not yet (never: 39.5%) or only rarely (perhaps once or twice: 42.9%) experienced events when exchanging online or phone messages which may have been disturbing to *others*. (Chart 4)

Chart 4



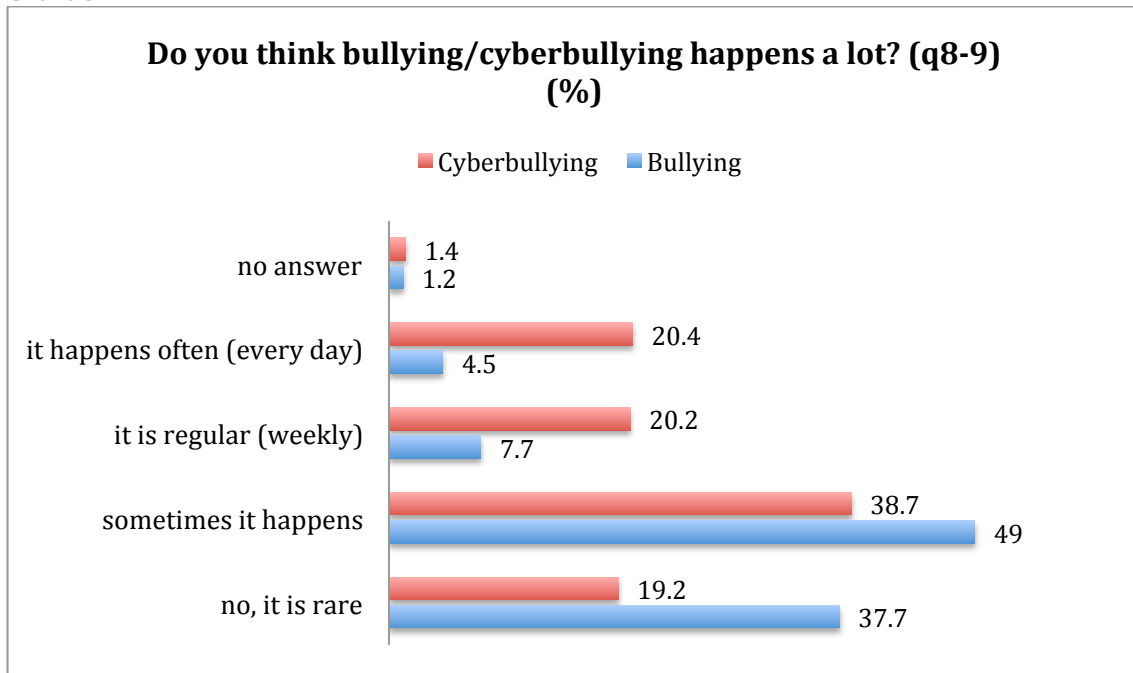
More than half of the students have not experienced any abuse at school or online, but if they did, they told their parents or other family members about it (26.8%). (Chart 5) They think that the second most reliable group is that of friends or siblings (18.1%), followed by their school (11.1%), non-related adults (clergyman, counsellor etc.) (9.2%), and websites (3.7%). If they have not told their parents, friends or siblings or a teacher at school, then they probably did not talk to anyone (I never told anyone: 9.9%).

Chart 5



Even though they do not think that the school is actually responsible for solving online incidents, the respondents believe that abuse is much more frequent online, than at school (it happens often, like every day: cyberbullying: 20.4%, bullying: 4.5%; it happens regularly, like weekly: cyberbullying: 20.2%, bullying: 7.7%). (Chart 6) It is perhaps not surprising that it is those students who believe that bullying is frequent (happens every day, week, or at least sometimes) who expect the school to manage bullying situations to the greatest extent ($p < .001$). As opposed to that, no significant correlation can be established between the estimated frequency of cyberbullying and the responsiveness of the school ($p < .078$). We cannot therefore say that victims of cyberbullying expect the solution from their schools.

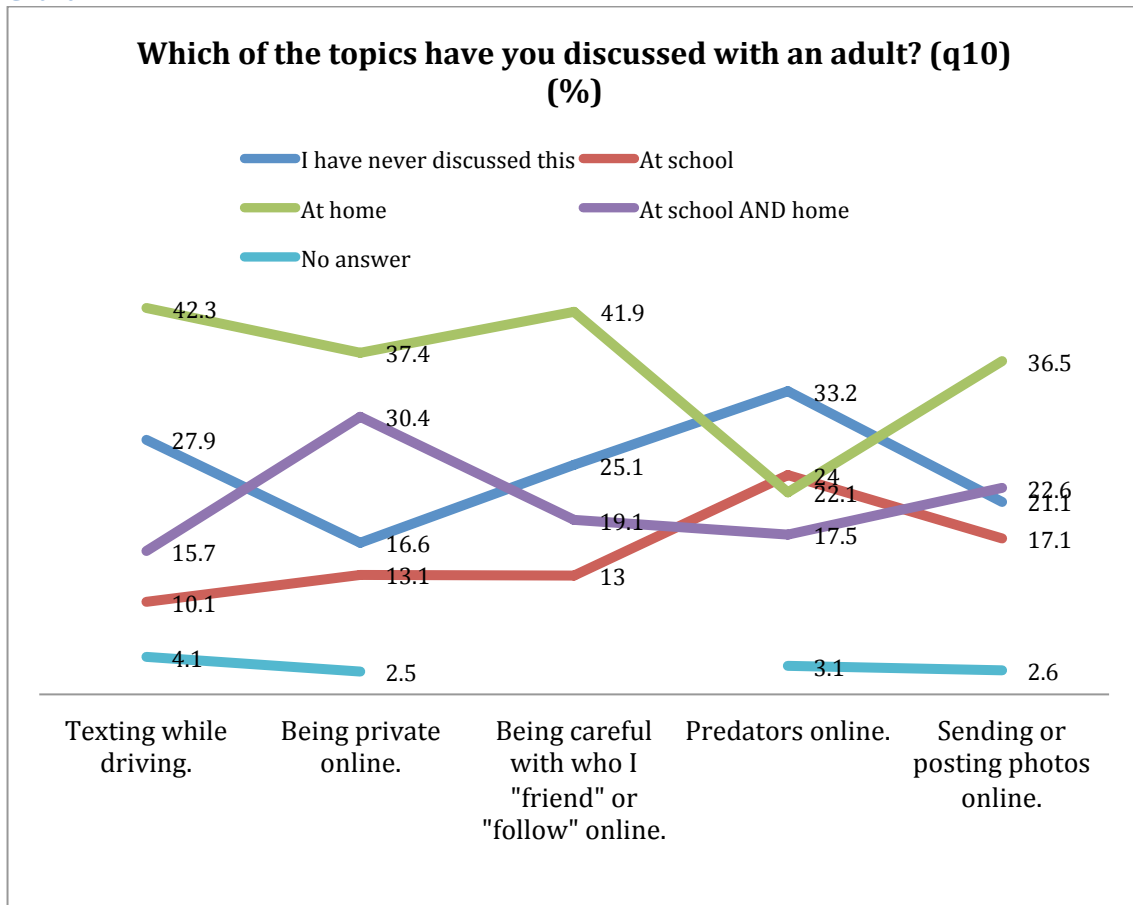
Chart 6



Talking about (cyber)security issues

Chart 7 shows issues related to security that students discuss with adults. (Chart 7) This shows that parents rather discuss any concrete issue at home, so that children hear more about online security (protection of privacy, online dating, publishing pictures or selfies online) at home, than at school. At home, they also talk more about using mobile phones while driving, which is also an important safety issue. What ever they do not talk about at home, is characteristically never mentioned to anyone. It is however remarkable that the next most common answer is that security issues are discussed both at home and at school. The most marginal issue, which they never mention to anyone, proved to be the problem of online predators (paedophiles), which shows that today most of the concerns of adults are also unanimously focused on deviance committed by peers (bullying, cyberbullying).

Chart 7



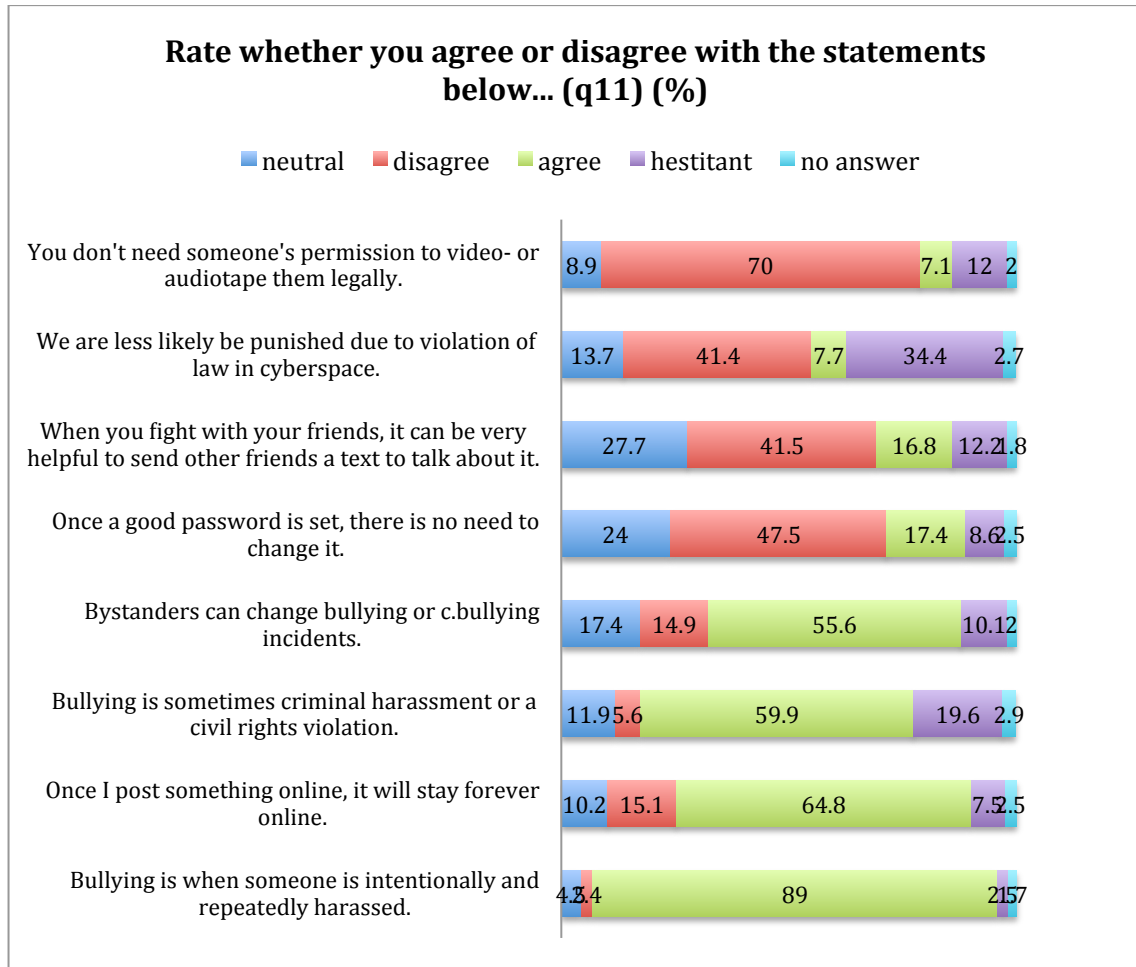
Actual knowledge about bullying and cyberbullying

The questionnaire tested students' up-to-date knowledge on bullying and cyberbullying. (Chart 8) Most students reacted adequately to statements about the phenomenon representing different approaches. For example, 89.0% agreed with the definition of bullying that we offered, according to which the two elements of the phenomenon are the intentional and repeated nature of the harassment, 64.8% rightly confirmed that whatever we post on an online platform will very likely stay there for ever, 59.9% rightly agreed that bullying is sometimes criminal harassment or a civil rights violation, and more than half of the respondents (55.6%) agreed that bystanders can change the bullying of cyberbullying situation. 70.0% rightly thought that we need a person's consent before we make a video or audio recording of them. In relation to three statements however, the ratio of wrong answers together with neutral or hesitant answers, and "no answers" was above the critical level (50%), therefore we can not say that the majority gave a correct answer. These are:

- Once a good password is set, there is no need to change it (disagree: 47.5%, others – agreeing+neutrals+hesitants+no answerers: 52.3%);
- When you fight with your friends, it can be very helpful to send other friends a text to talk about it (58.5%);
- We are less likely to be punished due to violation of law in cyberspace (58.5%).

These less understood questions require higher-level knowledge, and the identification of complex interrelations, such as the knowledge of the legal system, issues related to evidence procedures at school and in online space, and knowledge of the psychological background of texting and the management methods of bullying. At MARC student assemblies, these earlier mentioned simpler questions and the latter issues requiring knowledge of complex interrelations are both discussed in detail, through examples. How successful this is, can only be established with post-tests.

Chart 8



Expectations from an anti-(cyber)bullying program

When we asked what they would like to see in a (cyber)bullying program, the four answers that received the most points were related to using their own skills. The students would like to hear about:

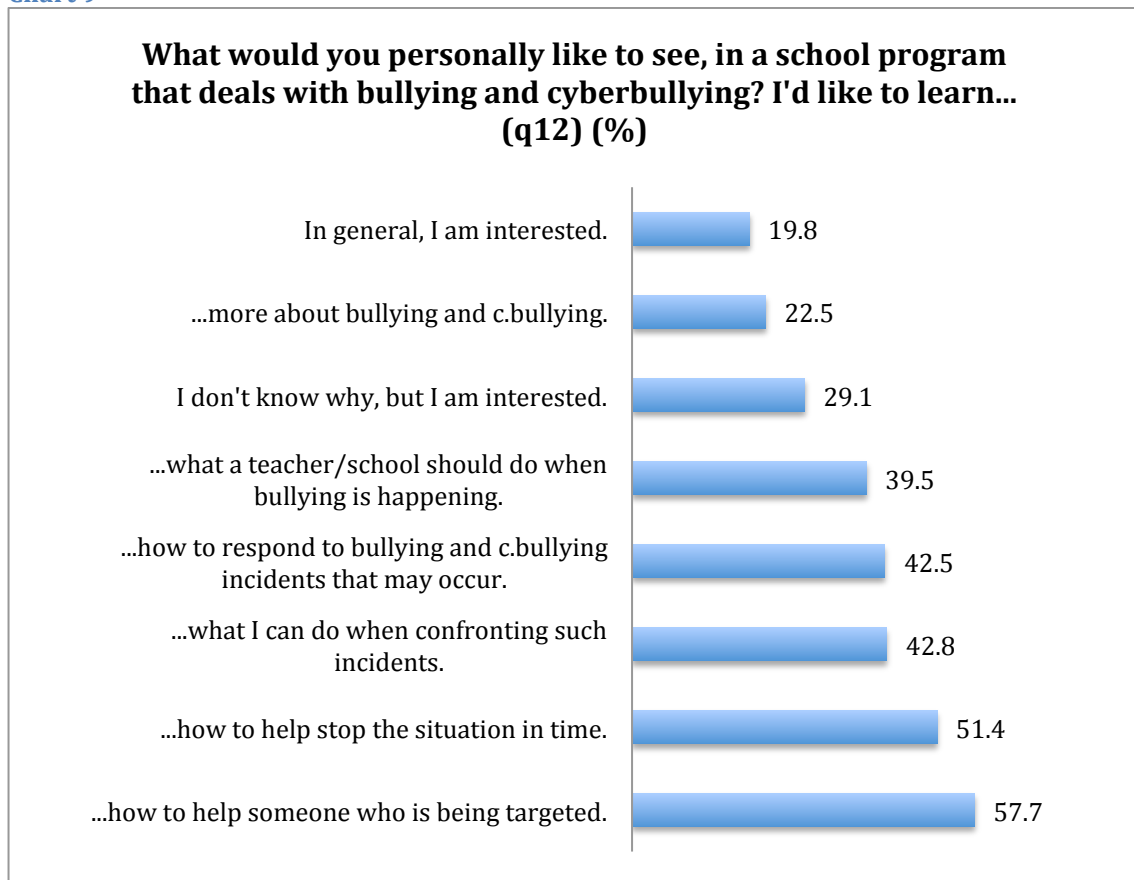
- how to help someone who is being targeted (57.7%);
- how to help stop the situation in time (51.4%);
- what they can do when confronting such incidents (42.8%);
- how to respond to bullying and cyberbullying incidents that may occur (42.5%). (Chart 9)

The need for more knowledge in relation to the role of the school and school staff only came after that:

- (I'd like to learn) what a teacher/school should do when bullying is happening (39.5%);

And that they would like to know more about the phenomenon in general (“[...] I am interested” – Mean: 23.8%).

Chart 9



We'd like to highlight those respondents in the above chart, who responded to q12 that they would want a school program, where they can learn how to help each other, without adult intervention. Our initial assumption was that these children think that learning self-help methods are important, because they themselves experienced, how widespread online bullying has become in schools, and they also have direct experience about the disturbing and hurtful effects of the situations that some of their friends were involved in due to bullying incidents.

Our hypothesis was confirmed: We found correlations between experiencing bullying and the search for self-help solutions. Those who would consider informing students about self-help solutions to bullying and cyberbullying were more likely to have experienced how others received disturbing online messages or text messages (q6). ($p < .003$), and were also more likely to say that they believe, bullying happens regularly at their school ($p < .005$), and online ($p < .001$). This correlation is slightly more expressed in those who believe that online bullying is very widespread (happens at least once a week). Students who experienced bullying/cyberbullying – as victims or witnesses to the abuse of others – are as we see more open to seeking self-help solutions, and they are the ones that believe that bystanders may make a real difference in bullying/cyberbullying situations.

Based on the above, trainers have **the task to give a better insight into the different roles that persons, involved in bullying or cyberbullying, may play**

in the escalation or prevention of dramatic situations.

Annex: The questionnaire

**The Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center - SURVEY
Questionnaire for students at Stony Brook and Blanchard Middle Schools**

This survey is voluntary and confidential. No personal data will be collected or processed. By completing the survey you can help Westford Public Schools refine their curricula and also help Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center to evaluate their programs. Thank you for participating.

1. Your gender?

Female	
Male	

2. Do you have your own cell phone?

Yes, but I can't use it go to online	
Yes, and I CAN use it to go online	
No, I do not have a cell phone	

3. Do you ever...	Yes	Some-times	No
Play games online with Xbox, PS3 or another console?			
Use Facebook, Twitter or a similar website?			
Use Ask.fm?			
InstaGram or Snapchat?			
Send messages or text messages?			
Chat with people you already know online?			
Chat with people you DON'T know online?			

4. Do you feel your school is responsive in helping to stop bullying (physically or emotionally)?

Yes	
No	
I don't know	

5. Do you feel your school is responsive in helping to stop CYBER-bullying (over internet or through text messaging)?

Yes	
No	
I don't know	

6. Have you ever read or seen something written on-line or in a text message that may have been embarrassing to someone else?

Perhaps once or twice	
Yes, more than once	
No, never	

7. Have you ever spoken to someone about an incident of bullying or cyberbullying? If yes, indicate who you decided to speak with below. (Check as many checkboxes as you wish)

I never told anyone		I told some other adult (a counselor, clergyman, trusted adult friend or relative)	
I told my friends or sibling(s)		I reported it online to the website	
I told my parents, or another family member		This never happened to me	

I told an adult at school			
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8. Do you think bullying happens a lot at school?

9. Do you think bullying happens a lot on-line?

No, it is very rare		No, it is very rare	
It happens sometimes, but not often		It happens sometimes, but not often	
It happens regularly (like each week)		It happens regularly (like each week)	
It happens often (like every day)		It happens often (like every day)	

10. Which of the topics below have you discussed with an adult?	At school	At home	I have never discussed this.
Texting while driving			
Being private online			
Being careful with who I “friend” or “follow” online			
Predators online			
Sending or posting photos online			

11. Rate whether you agree or disagree with the statements below...	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	I don't know
Bystanders can really change bullying or cyberbullying incidents.						
Bullying is when someone is intentionally, and repeatedly harassed.						
When you fight with your friends, it can be very helpful to send other friends a text to talk about it.						
You don't need someone's permission to video- and audio-tape them legally.						
Once I post something online, it will stay forever online.						
Bullying is sometimes criminal harassment or a civil rights violation.						
Once a good password is set, there is no need to change it.						
We are less likely to be punished						

due to violation of law in cyberspace						
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12. What would you personally like to see, in a school program that deals with bullying and cyberbullying? (Check as many boxes as you wish)

I'd like to learn more bullying and cyberbullying	
I'd like to learn how to respond to bullying and cyberbullying incidents that may occur	
I'd like to learn how to help stop the situation in time	
I'd like to learn how to help someone who is being targeted	
I'd like to learn what a teacher/school should do when bullying is happening	
I'd like to learn what I can do when confronting such incidents	
In general, I am interested in this topic	
I do not know exactly why, but I am interested	

13. What bullying and cyberbullying-related questions you would like to discuss at the assembly? (What you write here will be anonymous – no names and personal identification will be mentioned when discussing the question.)

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