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## CHAPTER 9

# Perceptions of School and Community

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Adolescents spend an increasingly greater amount of time away from home as they get older. A majority of their time is spent in school and in the broader community. It is important for adolescents to be connected to these environments and to feel there are meaningful opportunities for them to explore and practice their emerging abilities. Adolescents are more at risk for problem behaviors if they have low grades and/or drop out of school. In New Hampshire, almost 1 in 10 teens over the age of 15 is neither in school, nor at work, nor in the armed services (Terry & Hall, 1996). These teens are called "idle teens". In Exeter 15% of this age group are "idle teens." (Terry & Hall, 1996).

Likewise, adolescents with a large amount of free time may be more vulnerable to engaging in risky behaviors such as drug use and early sexual intercourse. Knowing adolescents' perceptions of their school and community can help adults better understand teen motivations and behaviors. For example, adolescents who are more committed to school and involved in prosocial activities are less likely to engage in risky behaviors because they perceive there is more to lose from such behaviors (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992; Dryfoos, 1990; Elster, Lamb and Taverre, 1987; Mensch and Kandel, 1988).

### **Perceptions of School**

We asked local students to respond to the statement, "*I enjoy going to school.*" Fifty-seven percent (57%) of all local youth "*agreed*" or "*strongly agreed*" that they enjoyed going to school. Overall, females reported more agreement with the statement than males (62% vs. 52%). With regard to school level, more middle school students reported they enjoyed school in comparison to high school students (64% vs. 52%).

Figure 9-1 displays the percentage of local teens by grade and gender who report they "enjoy going to school."

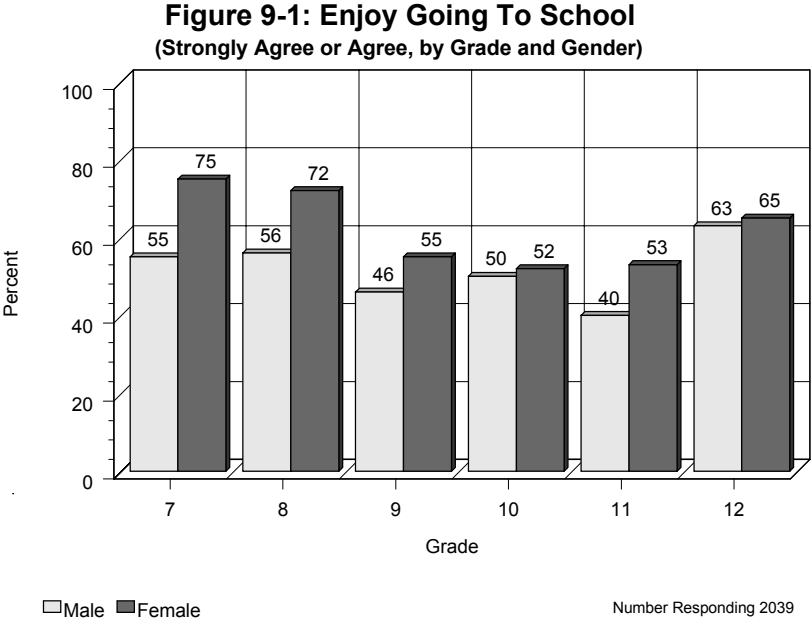
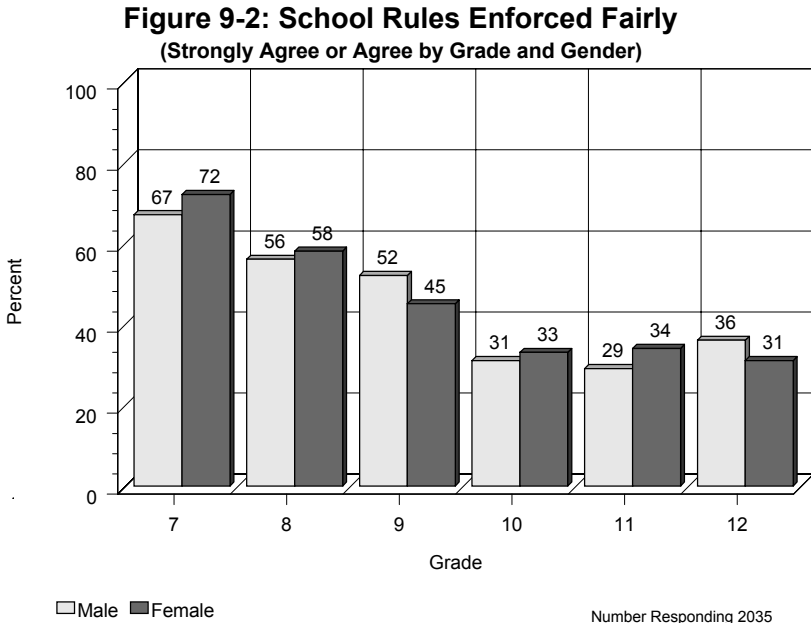
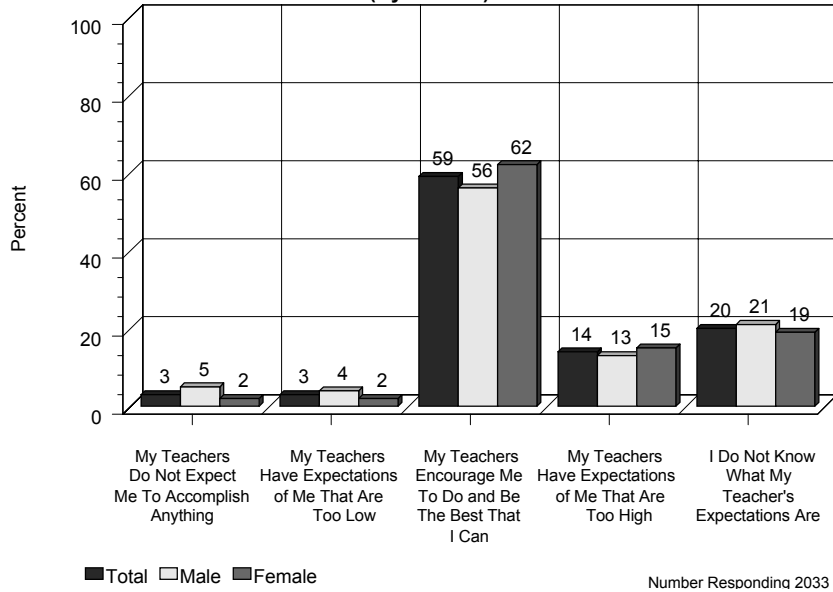


Figure 9-2 displays the percentage of students by grade and gender who "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement, "The rules in my school are enforced fairly". Overall, 47% of students reported they felt the rules were enforced fairly. More middle school students (63%) than high school students (37%) reported they felt this way.

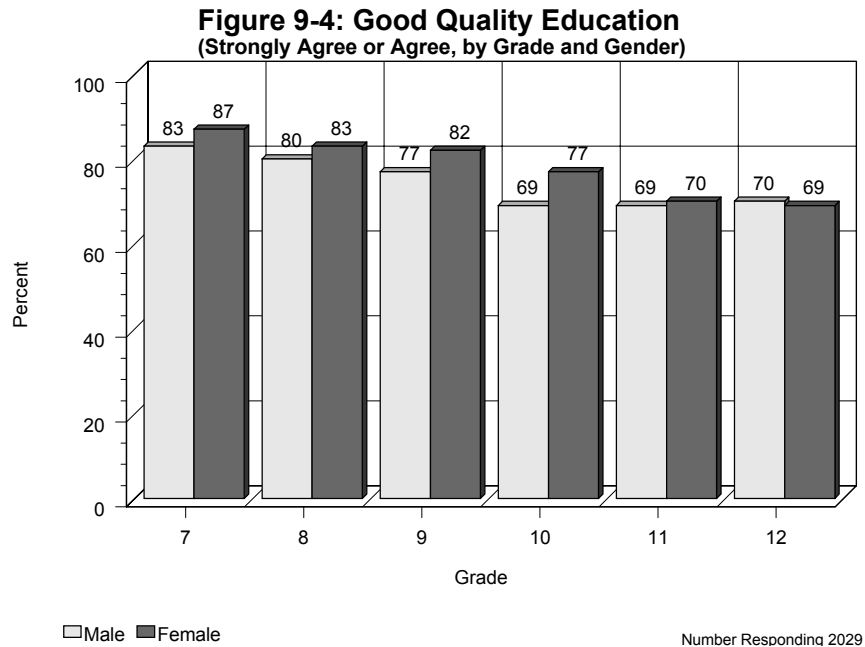


Students were also asked what they thought their teachers' expectations of them were. Overall, 59% of students feel teachers encourage them to do and be the best they can. Twenty percent (20%) of all students feel they do not know what their teachers' expectations of them are. Figure 9-3 shows all responses broken down by gender.

**Figure 9-3: Teens' Perceptions of Their Teachers' Expectations (By Gender)**

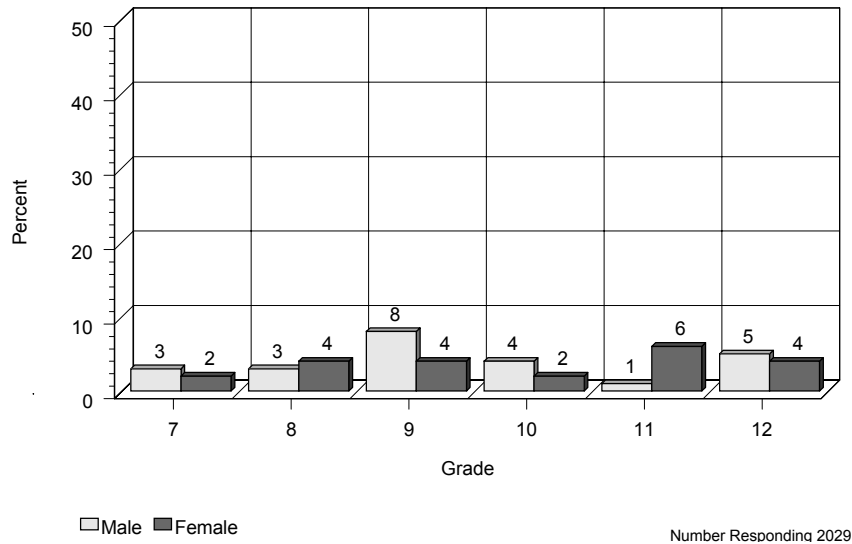


Students were also asked whether or not they felt they were getting a "good, high quality education at their school." Seventy-seven (77%) of students "agree" or "strongly agree" with that statement (middle school, 83%; high school, 74%; males, 75% and females, 79%). For both males and females, the level of agreement is higher in middle school than in high school (middle school males, 81%; high school males, 71%; middle school females 85%; high school females, 76%). Figure 9-4 displays the information broken down by gender and by grade.



When students were asked if they felt they would drop out of school before completing high school, 4% "strongly agreed" or "agreed" (middle school, 3%; high school, 4%; males, 4%; females, 4%). Of course, those high school students who have already dropped out are not reflected in these percentages. Figure 9-5 shows those who strongly agreed or agreed by grade and gender.

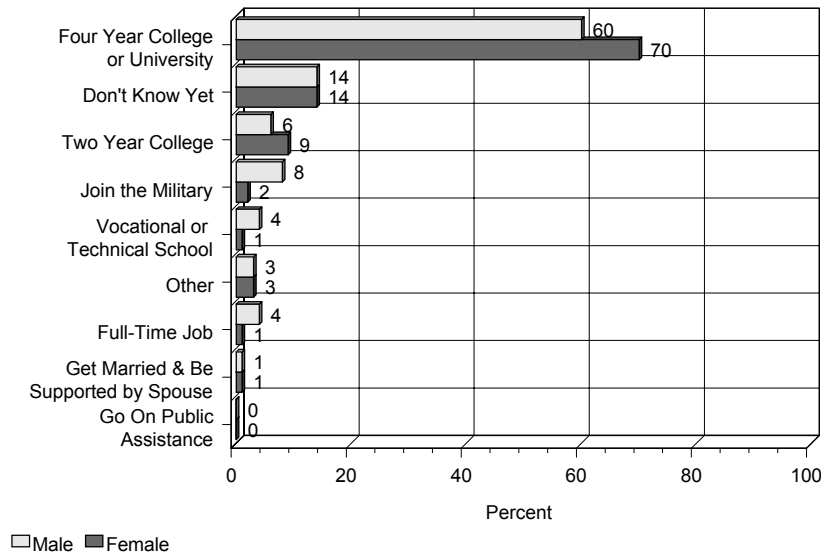
**Figure 9-5: Teens Who Feel They Will Drop Out Before They Complete High School**  
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)



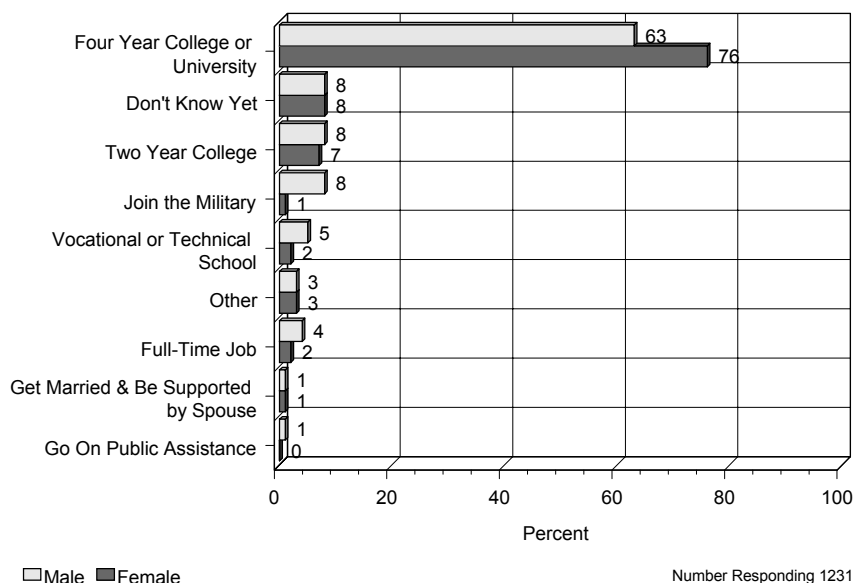
## Future Plans and Career Plans

Figure 9-6 shows the future plans middle school students have for after high school graduation. Figure 9-7 shows the same plans for high school students. The rate for females who have plans for future education rises from 80% in middle school to 85% in high school. The rate also rises from middle school to high school for males (middle school males, 70%; high school males, 76%). "Going to a 4-year college or university" was by far the most common response by both males and females and in both school levels.

**Figure 9-6: Future Plans After High School**  
(Middle School Students, by Gender)

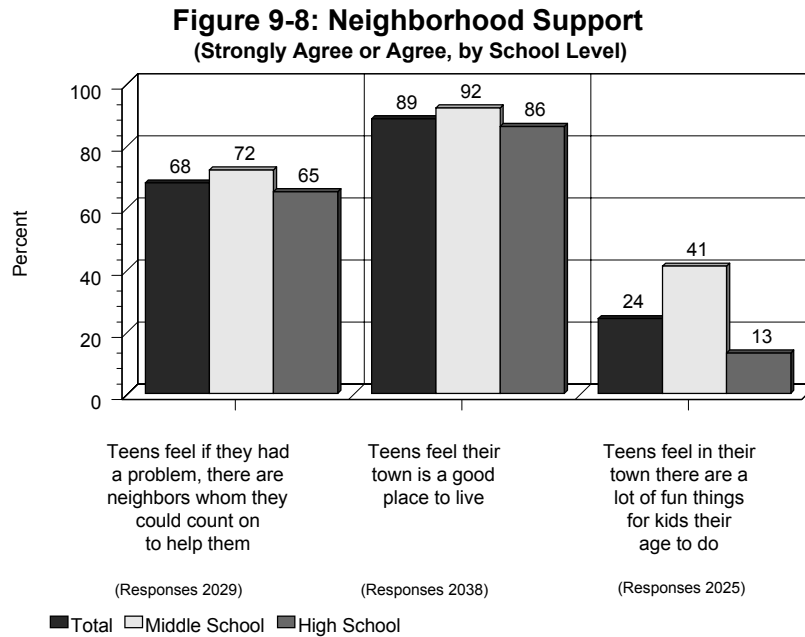


**Figure 9-7: Future Plans After High School**  
(High School Students, by Gender)



## Perceptions of Community

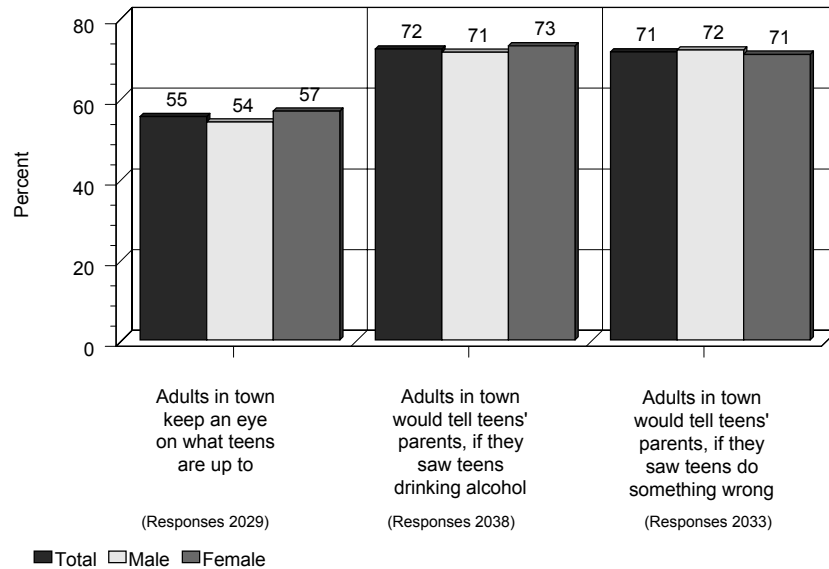
Neighborhood Support - Students told us they felt their community cared about them, and this is seen in Figure 9-8. They felt there were adults other than their parents who they could turn to with problems and for help. Sixty-eight percent (68%) reported there are neighbors they can count on if they are in trouble and need help. Although 89% felt their town is a good place to live, only 24% thought there are a lot of fun things for kids their age to do. Far more middle school students (41%) than high school students (13%) reported they feel there are fun things for kids their age to do.



Neighborhood Monitoring

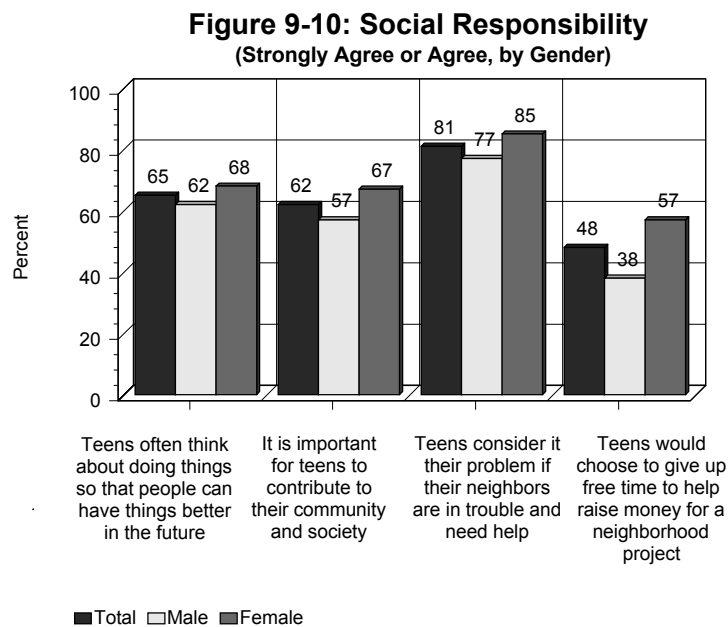
As shown in Figure 9-9, over half of students surveyed (55%) "Strongly agreed or agreed" the adults in their community kept an eye on what teens were up to (middle school, 60%; high school, 52%). Seventy-two percent (72%) said adults in town would tell their parents if they saw teens drinking alcohol (middle school, 83%; high school, 65%) and 71% felt if they were to do something wrong, adults in town would tell their parents (middle school, 80%; high school, 66%).

**Figure 9-9: Neighborhood Monitoring**  
(Strongly Agree or Agree, by Gender)



## **Social Responsibility**

Figure 9-10 shows many teens have a well-developed sense of social responsibility towards their community. Almost two-thirds (65%) reported they often think about doing things so that people can have things better in the future (males 62% and females, 68%). Sixty-two percent (62%) said they feel it is important for teens to contribute to their community and society (males, 57% and females, 67%). Over four out of five students (81%) said they consider it their problem if their neighbors are in trouble and need help (males, 77% and females, 85%). Almost half (48%) would give up their own free time in order to help raise money for a neighborhood project (males, 38% and females, 57%).



Number responding 2018-2025

**Abuse and Violence in the School and Community**

Figure 9-11 displays by gender the percentage of teens who reported current or past emotional or verbal abuse by another teenager, someone they were dating or an adult. In general, 32% have experienced this kind of abuse. More high school youth (35%) than middle school youth (26%) reported being emotionally or verbally abused at some point in their lives. More females than males reported past or present emotional or verbal abuse (females, 35% and males, 30%).

**Figure 9-11: Teens Who Have Been Emotionally or Verbally Abused (By Gender)**

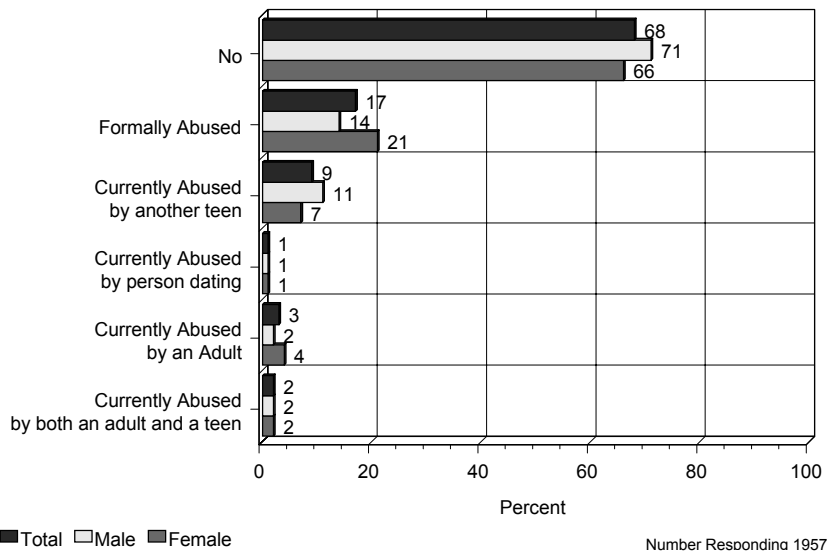
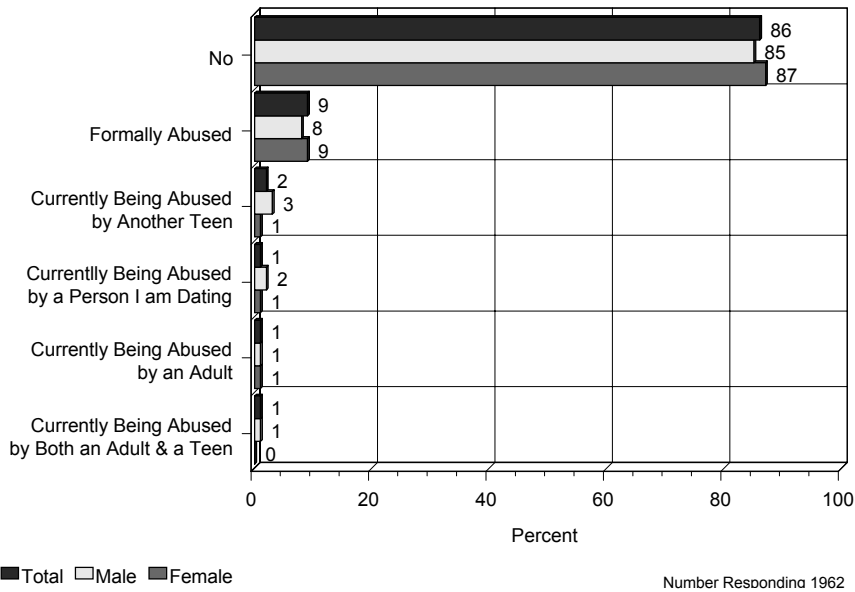


Figure 9-12 shows 14% of local teens reported current or past physical abuse (e.g. beat up, hit with an object, kicked, or some other form of physical force). There was only a slight gender difference between levels of previous abuse; however, males reported a higher level of current physical abuse than females (males, 7%; females, 3%). More high school youth than middle school youth reported physical abuse at some point in their lives (high school, 15%; middle school, 11%).

**Figure 9-12: Teens Who Have Been Physically Abused (By Gender)**



## School Safety and Youth Violence

Recent school tragedies the past few years have raised concerns regarding youth violence and our children's safety at school. Although sometimes it may appear otherwise, the majority of our schools are safe and school crime has actually decreased in recent years (Annual Report on School Safety, 1998). Figure 9-13 shows the majority of youth surveyed (78%) report they feel safe in school (middle school, 77%; high school, 78%).

**Figure 9-13: Perceived School Safety (By School Level)**

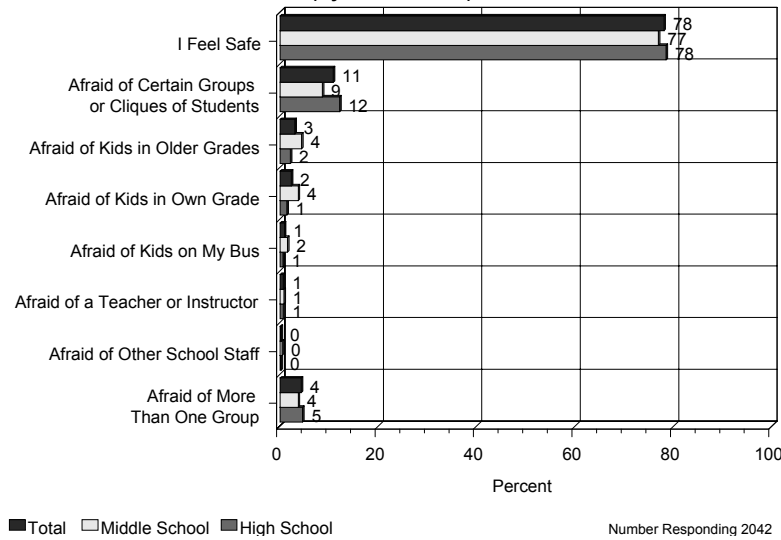
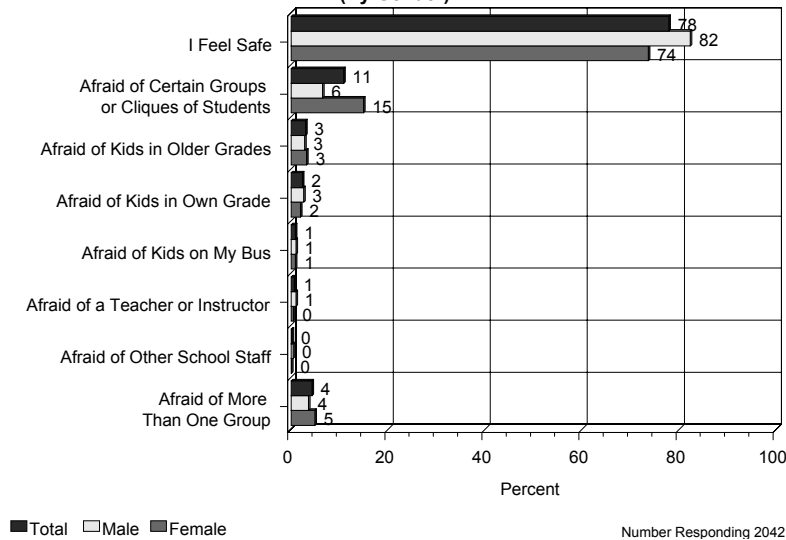


Figure 9-14 shows fewer females report feeling safe than do males (females, 74% and males, 82%).

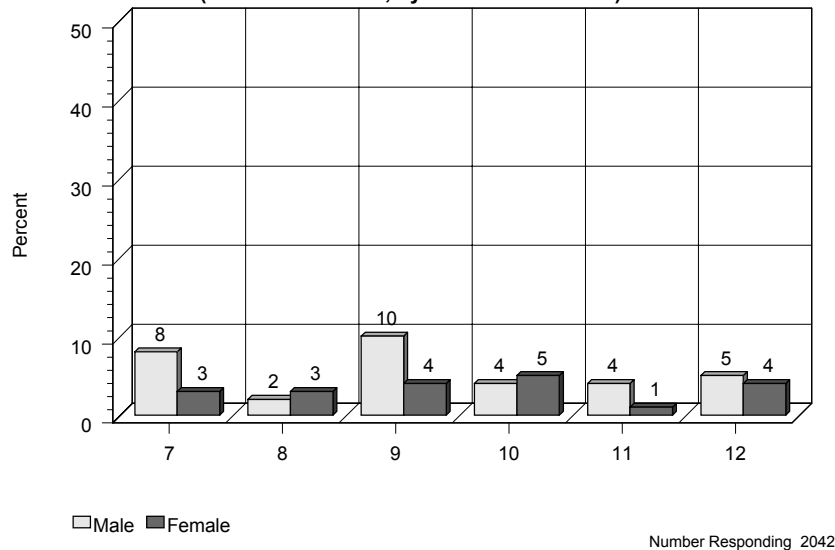
**Figure 9-14: Perceived School Safety (By Gender)**



We also asked local youth how many days in the past month they did not go to school because they felt unsafe. Four percent (4%) answered they missed school on one or more days in the past month because they felt unsafe (middle school, 4%, high school, 5%; males, 5%; and females, 3%). Figure 9-15 shows by grade and gender how many students did not attend school on one or more days in the past month because they felt unsafe.

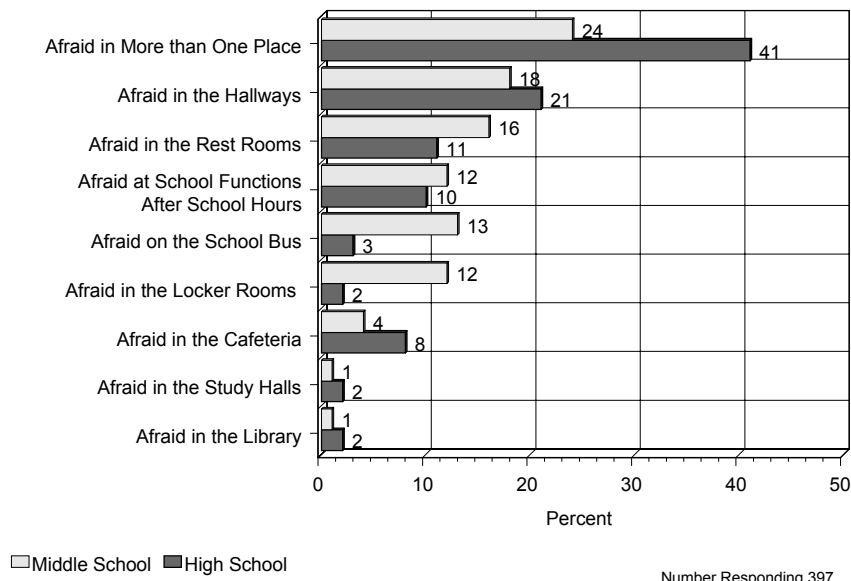
A national survey found 4.0% (N.H., 2.1%) of high school students (*grades 9-12*) surveyed felt too unsafe to go to school (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1998). New Hampshire ranks 31<sup>st</sup> out of the 33 states surveyed.

**Figure 9-15: Teens Who Missed School on One or More Days Because They Felt Unsafe**  
(In the Past Month, by Grade and Gender)



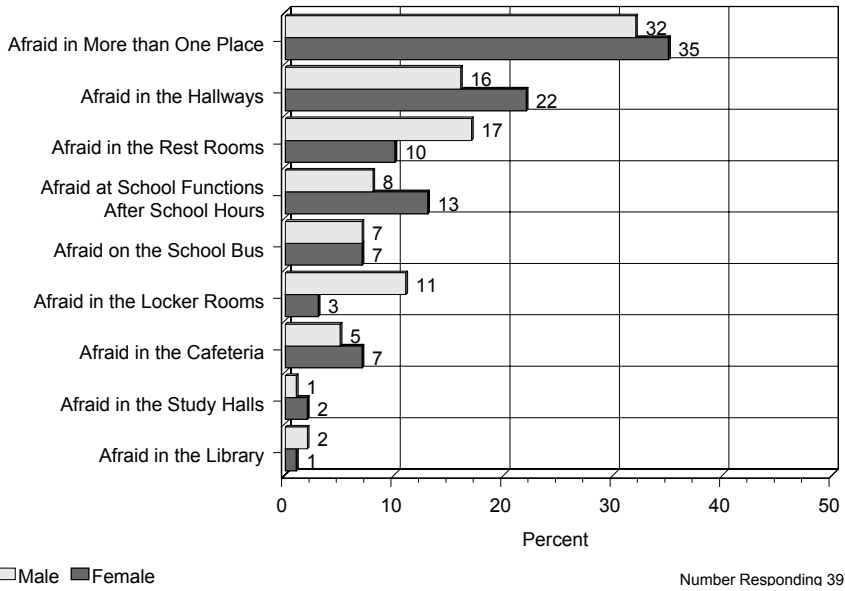
We asked students, "Where at school do you feel unsafe?" Of all students surveyed, 20% reported they feel unsafe in at least one place at school (middle school, 21%; high school, 19%; males, 16% and females, 22%). Of those who reported they feel afraid, 34% feel afraid in more than one place (middle school, 24%; high school, 41%; males, 32% and females, 35%). Figure 9-16 shows more middle school students than high school students are afraid in the rest rooms, in locker rooms, and on the bus. Slightly more high school students are afraid in the hallways and in the cafeteria.

**Figure 9-16: Where at School Teens Feel Unsafe**  
(Of Those Who Feel Unsafe, by School Level)



More females than males feel afraid in the hallways, in the cafeteria and at school functions after hours. More males than females report feeling afraid in the rest rooms and in the locker rooms. Figure 9-17 shows all responses of those who reported they feel afraid in at least one place at school broken down by gender.

**Figure 9-17: Where at School Teens Feel Unsafe**  
 (Of Those Who Feel Unsafe, by Gender)



We asked local youth, "During the *past month*, on how many days did you carry a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club on school property?" At the time of the survey, 4% of local youth reported they carried a weapon (e.g. a gun, knife or other sharp weapon, club, baseball bat, or pipe, etc.) onto school property during the past month. Middle school youth were slightly less likely to carry a weapon on to school property than high school youth (4% vs. 6%), as Figure 9-18 shows.

**Figure 9-18: Days Teens Carried Weapons on School Property**

(In the Past Month, by School Level)

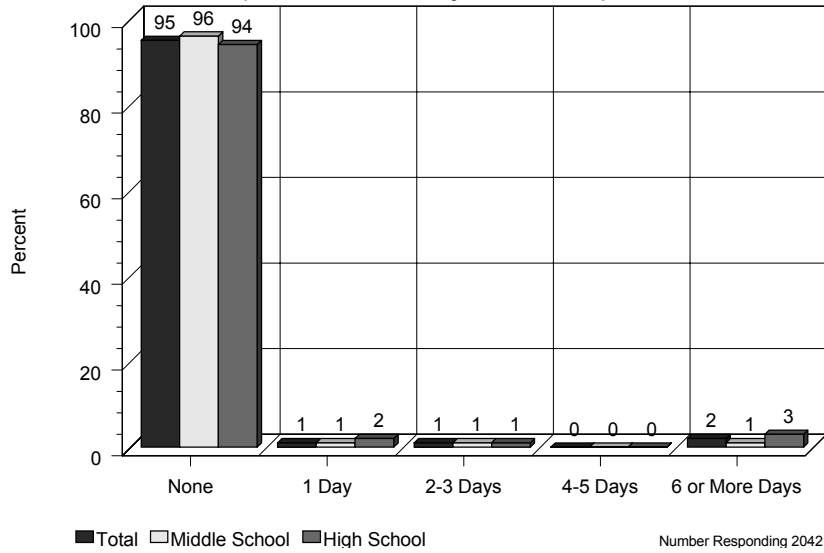
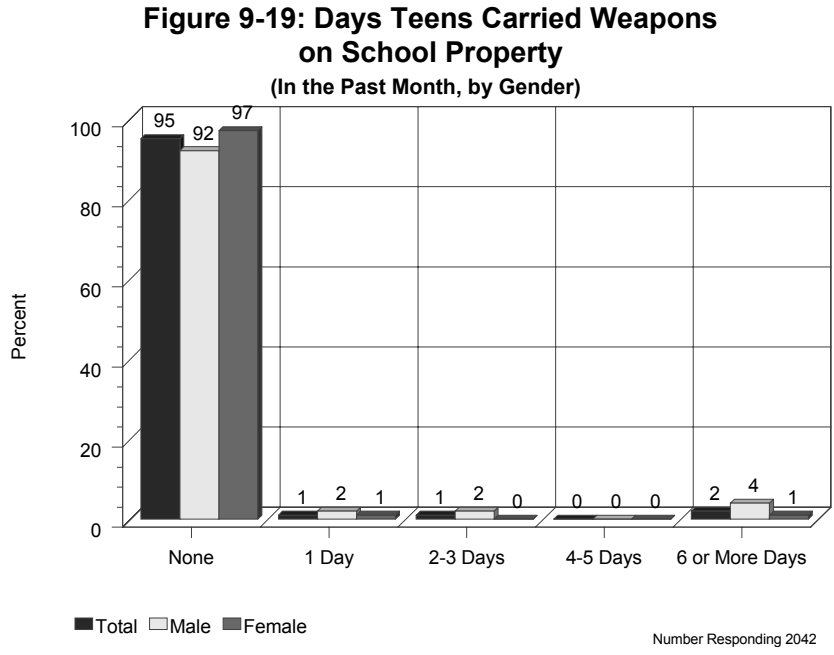


Figure 9-19 shows the days teens carried weapons on to school property by gender. While 8% of the boys carried a weapon on school property at some time in the past month, only 2% of the girls did so.



Nationally, 8.5% (N.H., 7.4%) youth (*grades 9-12*) reported they carried a weapon on to school property in the month preceding the survey (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1998). New Hampshire ranks 30<sup>th</sup> out of 33 states surveyed.

We asked local youth, "During the past month, on how many days have you seen or been aware of others in your school who were carrying a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club on school property?" Figure 9-20 shows 22% of local youth reported they were aware of someone who had carried a weapon on school property in the past month (middle school, 20%; high school, 23%).

**Figure 9-20: Days Teens Were Aware of Others Who Carried Weapons on School Property**  
(In the Past Month, by School Level)

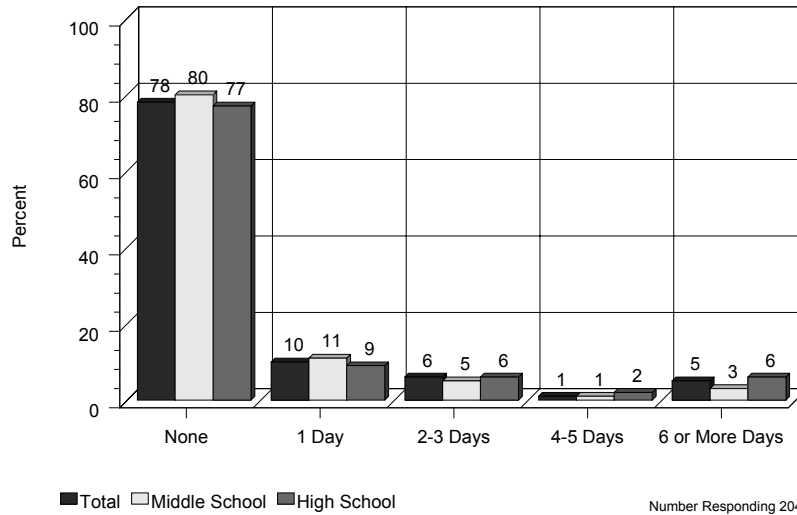
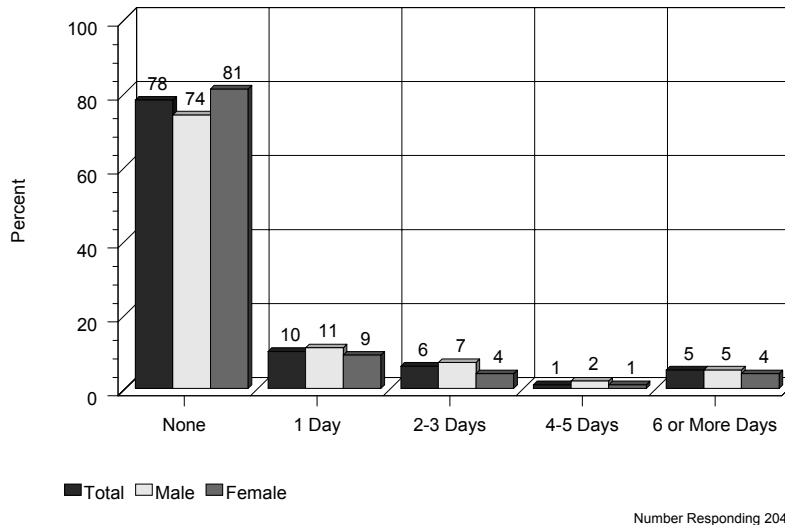


Figure 9-21 shows more males (25%) than females (18%) were aware of others who carried a weapon on school property.

**Figure 9-21: Days Teens Were Aware of Others Who Carried Weapons on School Property**  
(In the Past Month, by Gender)



Students were asked, "In the past year, how many times has someone threatened or injured you with a weapon such as a gun, knife or club on school property?" Overall, 9% of local teens reported they were threatened or injured with a weapon at least once in the past year while on school property. Figure 9-22 shows no major differences between middle school and high school responses to this question.

**Figure 9-22: Number of Times Students Have Been Threatened or Injured With a Weapon on School Property**

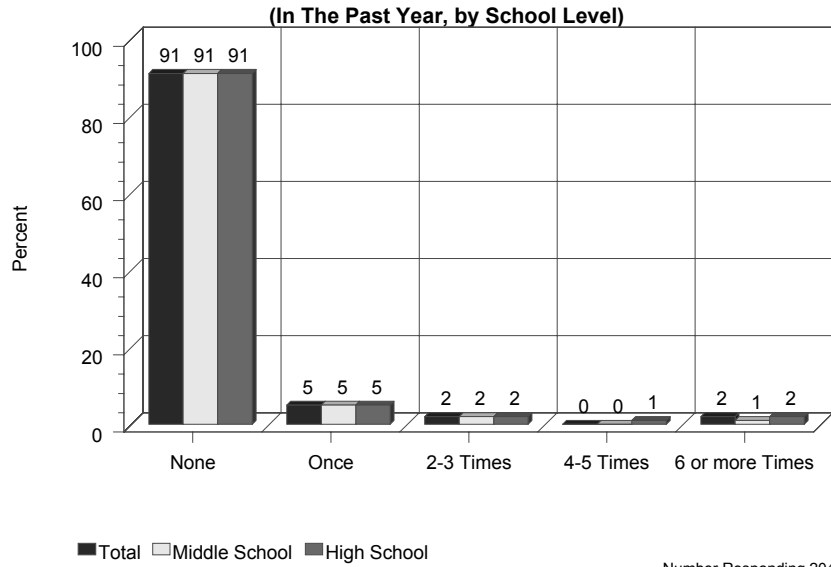
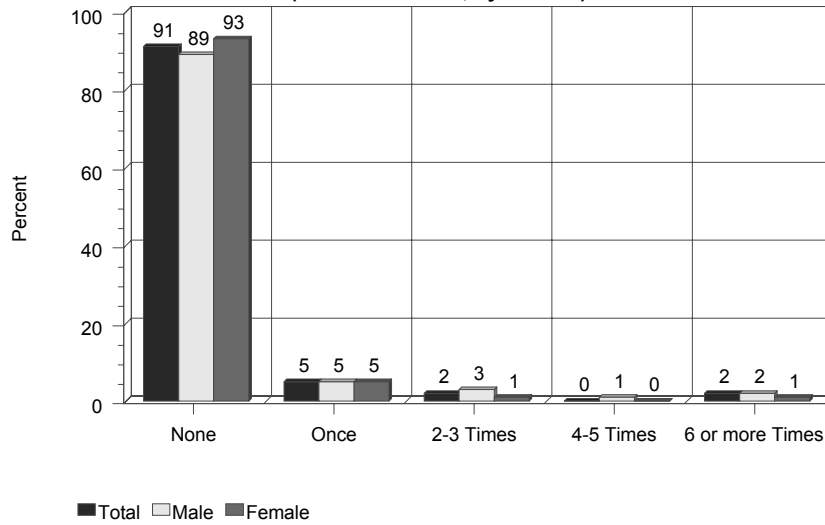


Figure 9-23 shows males were more likely to have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property than females (males, 11% and females, 7%).

**Figure 9-23: Number of Times Students Have Been Threatened or Injured With a Weapon on School Property (In The Past Year, by Gender)**



Number Responding 2040

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1998) found 7.4% (N.H., 6.6%) of the nation's high school youth had been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property at least one time in the past 12 months.

We asked students, "What would you do if you heard a serious threat or someone talking about plans that could injure anyone in your school?" TAP data show the majority of students (78%) would tell one or more persons (middle school, 77%; high school, 78%; males, 69% and females, 85%). Figure 9-24 shows all responses broken down by school level.

**Figure 9-24: What Teens Would Do If They Heard a Serious Threat (By School Level)**

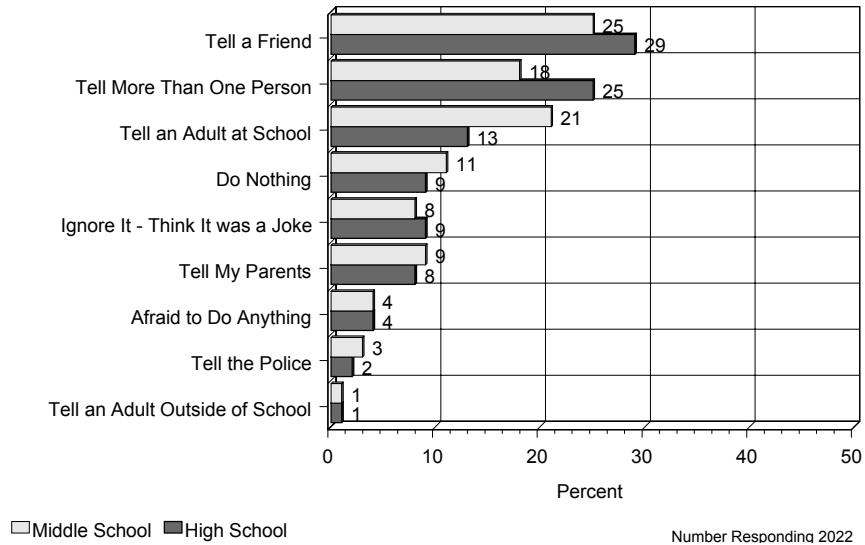
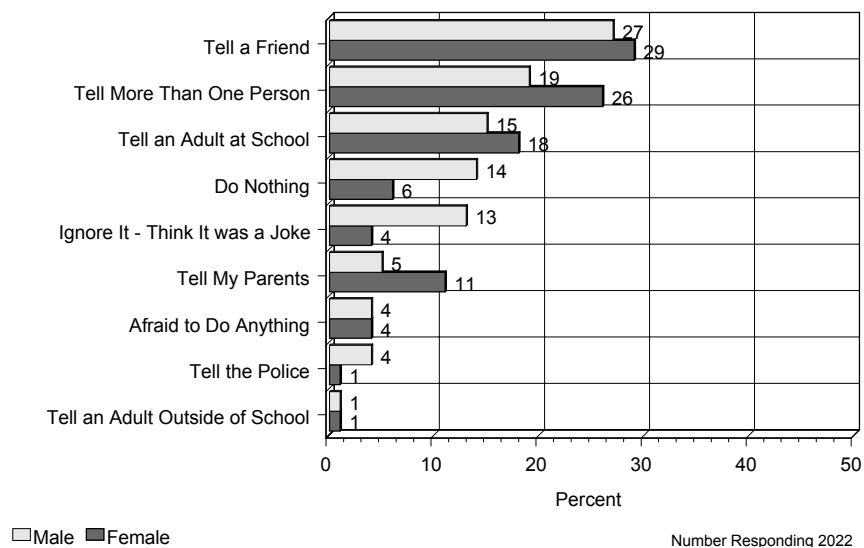


Figure 9-25 shows all responses broken down by gender.

**Figure 9-25: What Teens Would Do If They Heard a Serious Threat (By Gender)**

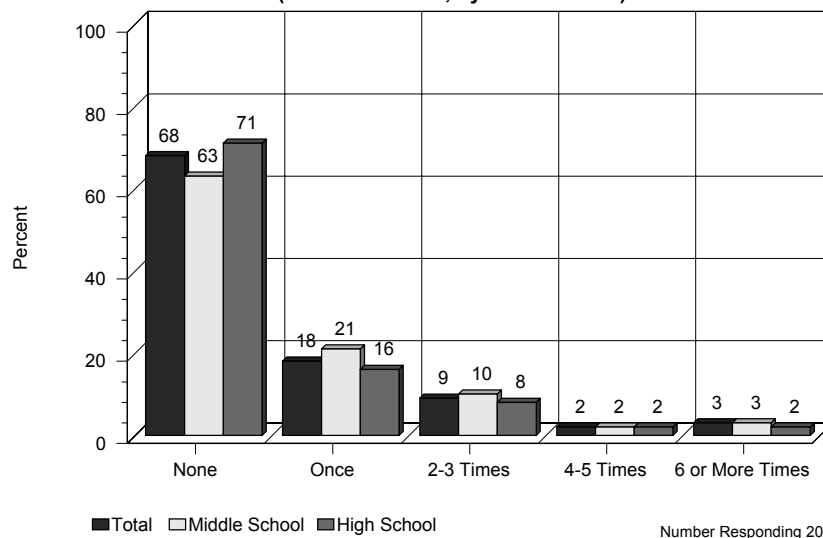


TAP found 32% of local youth reported having had property stolen or damaged at least once in the past year (middle school, 36% and high school, 28%). Males were more likely to have had their property stolen or damaged than females (males, 35% and females, 28%). Figure 9-26 shows the breakdown of responses by school level and Figure 9-27 shows the breakdown by gender.

The Centers for Disease Control (1998) found 32.9% (N.H., 31.1%) of high school youth surveyed (*grades 9-12*) have had property stolen or deliberately damaged on school property at least once in the 12 months prior to the survey. New Hampshire ranks 18<sup>th</sup> out of the 33 states surveyed.

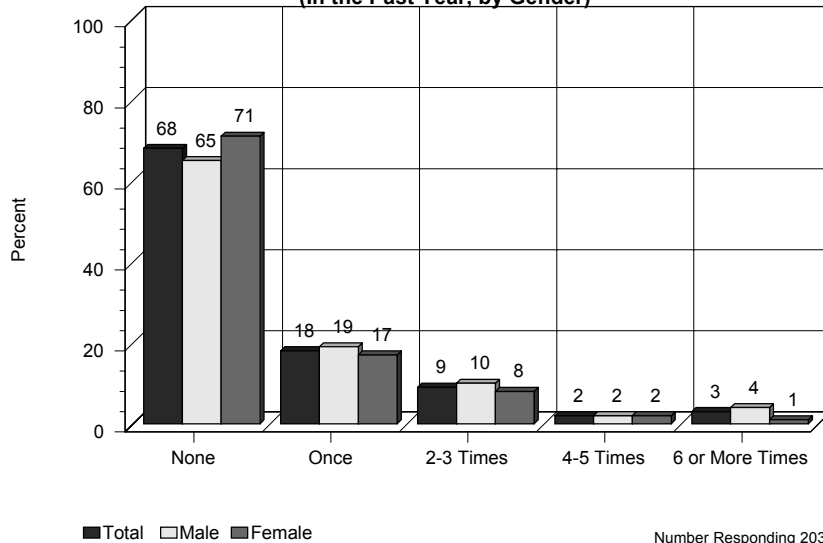
**Figure 9-26: Number of Times Students Have Had Property Stolen or Damaged**

(In the Past Year, by School Level)



**Figure 9-27: Number of Times Students Have Had Property Stolen or Damaged**

(In the Past Year, by Gender)



Students were also asked about the number of physical fights they had been in during the past year. Thirty-three percent (33%) of local youth have been involved in one or more physical fights in the past year. For males, the incidence of fighting decreases from middle school to high school (middle school males, 52%; high school males, 41%). Incidence of fighting decreases to a smaller degree for females (middle school females, 23%; high school females, 21%). Figure 9-28 shows 38% of middle school students and 30% of high school students were involved in one or more fights in the past year.

**Figure 9-28: Number of Times Teens Were in a Physical Fight  
(In The Past Year, by School Level)**

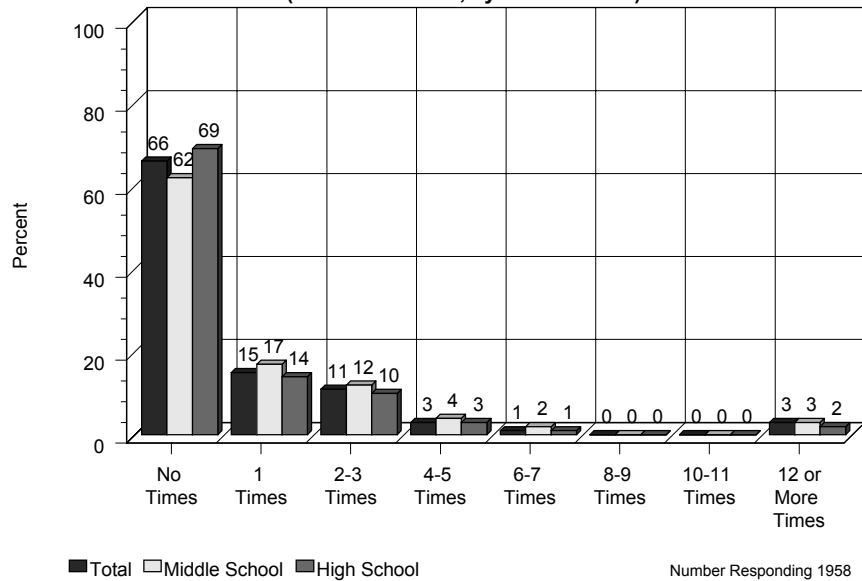
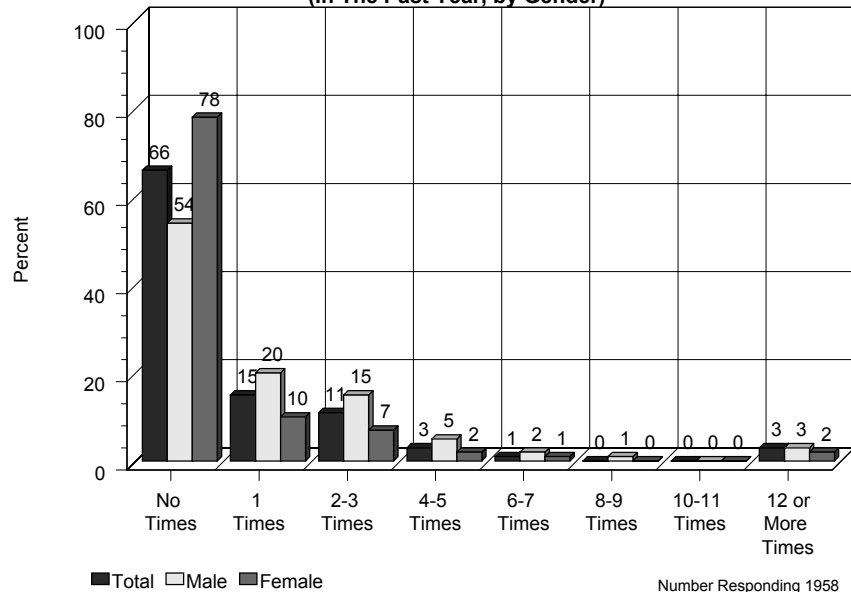


Figure 9-29 shows more males than females were involved in a physical fight on one or more occasions in the past year (males, 46% and females, 22%).

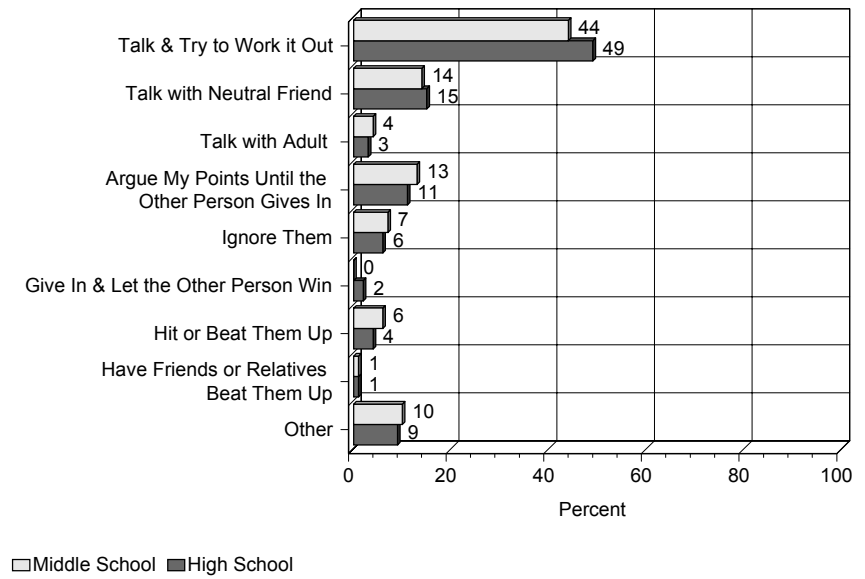
On the national level, 36.6% (N.H., 30.8%) of high school students surveyed in grades 9-12 have been in a physical fight at least one time in the past year (Centers for Disease Control, 1998). New Hampshire ranks 30<sup>th</sup> out of the 33 states surveyed by the CDC.

**Figure 9-29: Number of Times Teen Were in a Physical Fight  
(In The Past Year, by Gender)**



How teens handle anger and disagreements may indicate whether or not they physically fight. We asked local youth how they usually try to solve a problem if they were angry with someone or disagreed with them. The majority of students (65%) would try to solve the problem by talking and trying to work it out, either alone or with the aid of a neutral friend or an adult. Figure 9-30 shows more high school students (67%) than middle school students (62%) would try to solve the problem by talking.

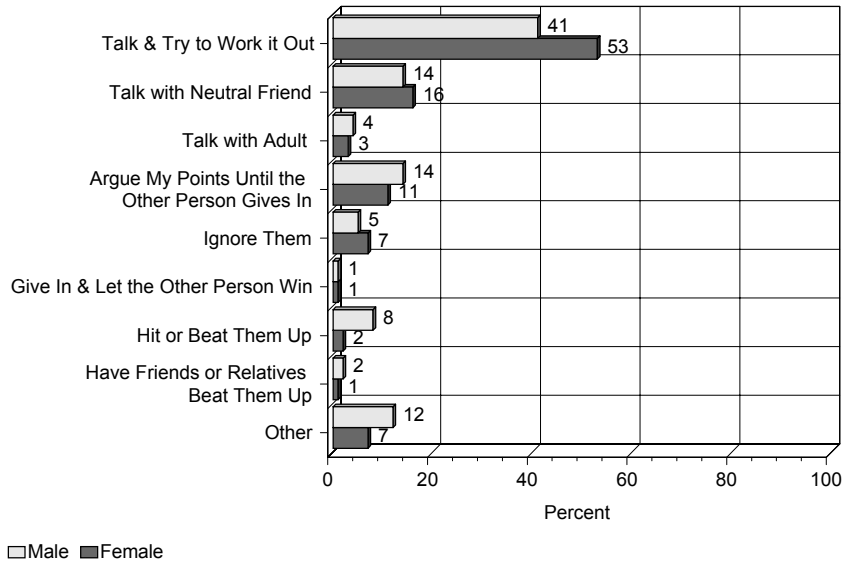
**Figure 9-30: How Teens Handle Anger/Disagreements  
(By School Level)**



Twelve percent (12%) of students surveyed would verbally argue their points until the other person gives up (middle school, 13%; high school, 11%; males, 14% and females, 11%). Only 6% would hit or beat them up or have their friend(s) or relative(s) beat them up.

Figure 9-31 shows more males than females usually use physical force to try to solve the problem when they are angry with someone or disagree with them (males, 10% and females, 3%).

**Figure 9-31: How Teens Handle Anger/Disagreements  
(By Gender)**



## Peer Susceptibility

Teens sometimes feel pressured by friends and acquaintances to do things to fit in and be popular with their peers. Peer pressure may cause an otherwise stable adolescent to engage in behaviors that put himself or herself in danger. For example, Hawkins (n.d.) found youth who have many protective factors in their lives (such as coming from a well-managed family, getting good grades, living in a well-connected community, etc.) are more likely to use drugs if they socialize with other youth who use drugs.

We asked teens to respond to the statement, *"I let friends talk me into doing things I really don't want to do."* Of all youth surveyed, 81% responded *"never"* or *"rarely"* to this statement and only 4% reported they did *"a lot of the time"* or *always.* Figure 9-32 shows all responses broken down by school level.

**Figure 9-32: Teens Who Let Friends Talk Them Into Things They Don't Want to Do**  
(By School Level)

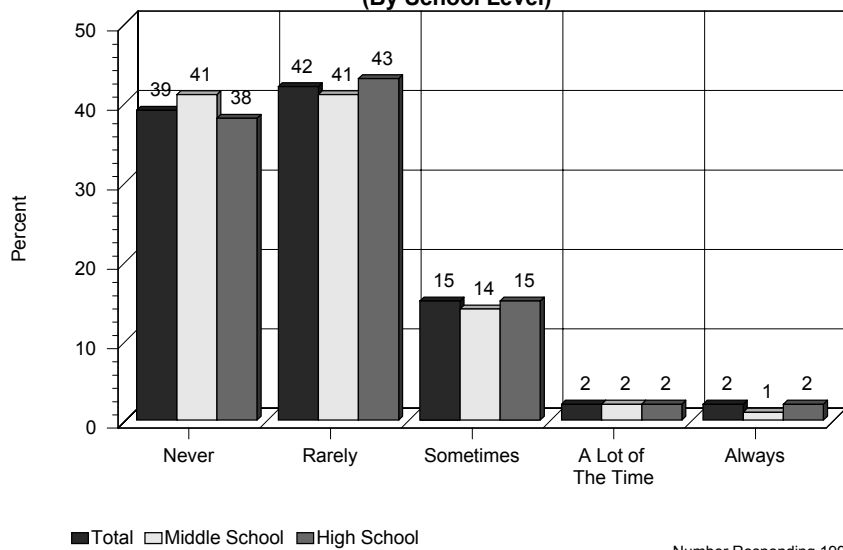


Figure 9-33 shows all responses broken down by gender.

**Figure 9-33: Teens Who Let Friends Talk Them Into Things They Don't Want to Do (By Gender)**

