



Program Tells Teens of 'A Better High'

Laughter, good experiences can affect brain chemistry without the negative consequences of drugs, an expert says.

By [David Greisman](#) | May 10, 2011

Laughter isn't just the best medicine. It's also "a better high," according to an expert who will be speaking to teens and their parents tonight (Tuesday) at Atholton High School in Columbia.

Matt Bellace, a New York City-based motivational speaker, comedian and clinical neuropsychologist, mixes jokes and information to put forth a different kind of anti-drug message.

"I'm not going to tell you drug are bad. They're certainly not healthy," Bellace said. "I'm going to tell you the things we can do – like running and laughing and eating great food and knowing great people – have an effect on your brain chemistry that's similar to a lot of drugs.

"Laughing and cocaine are similar on MRIs. I'm not going to argue that laughing is a more intense high, but it's a way to generate the same chemical response."

Bellace will be speaking at 7 p.m. at a program co-sponsored by HC DrugFree, a Columbia-based nonprofit dedicated to keeping youth free of drugs, including alcohol.

He'll also speak to parents about communicating with adolescents and will have a question-and-answer session.

Throughout will be the theme of brain development and how the mind works, he said.

“They’ll hear about how certain substances, certain activities affect the brain,” Bellace said. “Everyone wants to feel good. They want to feel happy. Students need a way to de-stress from life today.

“A lot of students from wealthier communities, you see an increase in substance abuse, partially because students are feeling more pressure to achieve. They often turn to drugs and alcohol to deal with those pressures and to deal with social pressure.”

The humor in his program is a good vessel for the message, he said.

“Most of the time the audience responds well to me using comedy to break down the barriers and make it seem less intimidating,” he said. “They come in assuming the worst, that I’ll yell and scream and use scare tactics. They never thought that it’d be fun and interesting.”