

Dr. Matt Bellace Speaks on "Helping Your Teen Make Healthy Choices"

October 26, 2012



Matt Bellace, PhD speaks to students and parents about healthy choices

Imagine listening to a neuropsychologist talk about teenage behavior and laughing as you did! That's exactly what happened when Middle and Upper School students and parents listened to Dr. Matt Bellace on Thursday, October 25. Matt Bellace earned his Ph.D. in neuropsychology from Drexel University. He has worked with over 100,000 students to help them learn to make healthy choices in their lives. His experience as a youth motivational speaker since 1995 is enlivened by his experience as a stand-up comedian. He spent the day with Middle School and Upper School students and the evening with parents.

It was his comedic timing and presentation that captured everyone's attention. He wove threads of his family life and personal experience together with his professional expertise and practice. Focusing on how to get a "natural high" through healthy activities, he presented L.E.A.D.: Lean on healthy people for

support, Express yourself in a healthy way, Achieve natural highs, and Don't be afraid to take a stand. He shared his own experiences making healthy choices and becoming a leader of a student group at Bucknell University in the 1990's. The group, Calvin and Hobbes, continues to provide opportunities for healthy activities and safe choices for university students.

Dr. Bellace had his student and parent audiences at ICS laughing with the help of audience volunteers. They were told that he would guess the activities that gave them a natural high by asking them a few questions. They were then sent out of the room to discuss their choices. At that point, he engaged the audience by telling them to think that each volunteer was talking about kissing as they gave their responses. The result was an audience that laughed heartily but paid close attention as each volunteer answered. He was able to guess the source of each natural high.

Though the laughter captured the audiences' attention, Dr. Bellace bolstered his presentation with a strong set of statistics on the onset of drinking, and substance abuse and its effects on brain development. Of teens who began drinking at age fourteen, nearly fifty percent were likely to develop an addiction as opposed to those who waited until age twenty-one. He referenced brain maturity as not being complete until age twenty-five and presented additional information about the effects of substance abuse on cognitive abilities.

He championed choices in sports, music, exercise, and, to the surprise of parents, even some video game time to achieve what he called the natural high. For parents, he discussed the need for family time wherever it might be found and to listen to their teens without judging. He discussed techniques such as active listening to help promote conversations between parents and teens and the use of logical consequences as a deterrent.

Dr. Bellace came to the attention of several Indian Creek faculty members who realized the power of his message and how well it aligned with Indian Creek's Human Development program. His presentations to Middle and Upper School students and to parents were sponsored by the PTO as one of their education seminars for this year. He is the author of *A Better High*, currently in its 2nd edition (available at the Upper School's Richardson Library), and a sought after member of the National Speakers Association.