

What's Happenin' in Winsted: Gilbert School students learn important life lessons delivered in a funny way

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Gilbert School students learned some important lessons about substance abuse and suicide last week that were delivered in a very funny way.

Students on Thursday were entertained by clinical psychologist and stand-up comedian Matt Bellace. He met with middle school students in the morning, high school students in the afternoon and parents at night.



Psychologist and comedian Matt Bellace talks with students at Gilbert School in Winsted about how to manage stress, coping mechanisms, bullying and other ways to sustain without resorting to substance abuse during an assembly on Thursday. The program was made possible through the Northwest Coalition. Jim Shannon Republican-American

During his session with the high school students, Bellace kept them engaged by calling some of them up to the auditorium stage to participate in different

exercises. He talked about how music can be therapeutic in overcoming pain and grief. He asked a couple of students what their favorite songs were and had one student rap along to some of Eminem's "Lose Yourself."

Bellace talked about how taking deep breaths and meditating for 20 minutes can calm one's mind, and reduce anxiety and stress. By doing this, people can feel recharged and make better decisions, he said.



Gilbert School students listen to psychologist and comedian Matt Bellace during an assembly Thursday in Winsted. Jim Shannon Republican-American

He also talked about how helping others and staying active releases a natural hormone in the body that makes people feel good. He called this a "natural high," which lasts longer than highs from drugs and alcohol, and does not cause hangovers.

Bellace advised the students to pursue their passions and express their emotions in healthy ways. He told them to learn from their mistakes, failures and pain to become strong, resilient and productive citizens.

"You have a choice," he said. "What are you going to do with your legitimate pain? Are you going to take it and become a great student? A great athlete? A leader who changes things? Are you going to build something that people can (depend on)?"

“Or are you going to take your pain and be another in a long line of people who pursue alcohol, other drugs, violence and bullying behavior? Are you going to be that person who tears down a community or are you going to build it up?”

Gilbert Principal Susan Soijka said Bellace’s presentation was initiated through a regional coalition of Gilbert School, Region 7 school district, community members and Northwestern Connecticut Community College. The main objective is to help guide students toward healthy activities without preaching, and providing them with information and data from which they can make decisions.



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