

## **“A Better High” by Matt Bellace**

**Target Audience:** Middle School Students

**Ideal Audience Size:** 100-5,000

**Duration:** 45+ minutes

This funny yet age-appropriate presentation focuses on natural highs, emotional resilience and mental health. It has been described as the perfect combination of stand-up comedy, interactive demonstrations and inspirational stories. Matt empowers middle students to seek out positive friendships, express their feelings in productive ways and pursue healthy natural highs. During the program, he also discusses how to use emotions to be more resilient and do something great.

### **Outcomes:**

- Understand the concept of natural high and why it is different than a chemical high.
- Be able to identify their unique natural highs and the value of using them to cope with stress.
- Understand the importance of supporting each other in positive ways and having friends who are alcohol, tobacco, and drug free.
- Have fun and associate having fun with prevention in middle school.

### **Brain Matters:**

During early adolescence, teens experience an intense period of learning and social growth. Their frontal lobes remain immature, so many struggle with impulse control and appropriate emotional reactions. At the same time, peers become a major influence over their behavior. As a result, it is the perfect time to introduce the concept of positive social support and natural highs. It could help delay the onset of substance use by encouraging the pursuit of “positive risks.”

### **About Dr. Matt Bellace:**

Dr. Bellace has a PhD in clinical psychology with a subspecialty in clinical neuropsychology, the study of the brain and behavior. He was twice awarded the Student Intramural Research and Training Award (IRTA) in neuroscience by the National Institutes of Mental Health to study memory in primates. His clinical training included working with patients at the Comprehensive Epilepsy Center at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital (Philadelphia), treating learning disorders in a pediatric neuropsychology private practice in suburban Philadelphia and performing cognitive behavioral therapy at Drexel University’s Student Counseling Center. Matt completed his clinical internship working with traumatic brain and spinal cord injury patients at The Mount Sinai Medical in New York City. In 2005, Matt successfully

defended his dissertation, “Activation of the Hippocampus During Emotional Learning,” which was later published in the *International Journal of Neuroscience*.

Matt’s professional speaking career began in 1995 following the success of a student group he founded at Bucknell University. Then Bucknell President William “Bro” Adams, lauded the group as “revolutionary,” for its efforts to encourage students to make healthy choices on campus, including acquiring a former fraternity house for its members. Matt’s speaking work began in high schools and colleges, but quickly grew to national conferences, professional organizations and the military. Matt had spoken in forty-seven states and across Canada, annually appearing in front of over a hundred thousand people a year. Although the pandemic halted live events, it has ushered in a new opportunity for reaching an even more diverse audience through virtual programs

As a stand-up comedian, Matt has performed at clubs and colleges across the country, including Caroline’s on Broadway and Gotham Comedy Club in New York City. During the pandemic, his Zoom comedy shows brought laughter to quarantined audiences to audiences of all ages. Matt’s credits include truTV’s hit show *The World’s Dumbest*, the 2005 Just for Laughs Festival in Montreal, National Public Radio and The New York Times.

<https://www.mattbellace.com/>