

# Counselor presents “Secret Lives of Teens and Tweens” to parents

By Greg Fitzpatrick

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*(Photo by Greg Fitzpatrick)*

*Parents and guardians were in attendance for Jon Mattleman’s talk, “Secret Lives of Teens and Tweens,” that was presented at Southwick Regional Wednesday evening.*

Mental health counselor Jon Mattleman presented his “Secret Lives of Teens and Tweens” talk to parents and guardians in the auditorium of the **Southwick Regional School** on Wednesday night.

Focused on kids in the range of 11 to 21-years-old, Mattleman’s presentations to schools, community centers, and faith communities are known as high energy and help parents explain what their kids are thinking and what they go through in their daily lives. Southwick Regional School Principal Joe Turmel met Mattleman two years ago when attending one of his talks at West Springfield High School. The presentation was not only important for Turmel as a principal, but also as a father. “I left the presentation with some really wonderful strategies,” said Turmel.

Mattleman opened up the discussion by reminding parents that their teenagers can be frustrating and exhausting, but they deal with it for good reason. "We adore our kids, that's why we're here," said Mattleman.

A native of Needham, Mass. and has both a daughter and a son, Mattleman noted that teenagers like to keep secrets from their parents because they're afraid to disappoint them. When disappointed, boys will feel ashamed, and girls will feel guilty and angry. The discussion went on to include kid's fear of analysis, judgement, and feedback from their parents. Teenagers will shut down when parents analyze their kids. Mattleman said it's critical to step back and allow the kid to talk. "It's really important to be a better listener," said Mattleman.

Respect was another key point that the professional therapist tried to get across to the audience. "When they're disrespectful to you, it means someone in their day was disrespectful to them," said Mattleman. He added that sometimes the best thing to do is to back off and approach them about the situation hours later.

Mattleman told a number of stories about dealing with his own kids and also stories that parents have told him, including on how to handle your teenager coming home drunk, anxiety, and other issues that parents may have to face. Risk-taking behaviors was also a crucial talking point. In 2017, a youth risk behavior survey surveyed 1,200 students at Wilmington High School in Wilmington, Mass and 17.6% or 211 of those students said they've been cyberbullied. Mattleman went on to say that suicide is the second leading cause of death for kids ages 10 to 24-years-old. "We all need to do better when someone is in distress," said Mattleman.

Parents in attendance found the presentation to be helpful when dealing with their own kids. Jeffrey Zastawny has a son who will turn 13 soon. "It was pretty interesting," said Zastawny. "It's hard for kids these days." Kim Monczka thought the talk helped open her eyes as to what the realities that teenagers face. "It makes you re-examine," said Monczka. "It makes you a little more aware of what's going on."