



Speaker Tom Pincince travels to schools around Connecticut to talk with students about the importance of practicing social media safety.

Photo by Allie Rivera

Learning how to stay safe on social media

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

Students at Cromwell High School learn about history and mathematics within the walls of the school, but staff and administration want to ensure that they stay smart and safe outside of school as well.

On Sept. 28, they listened to guest speaker Tom Pincince and his presentation on the importance of social media safety.

"What I won't do is stand up here and say 'don't use social media' because that's not reality," Pincince said. "But some of the bad habits they develop come at a very young age."

The assistant athletic director at Central Connecticut State University, he does these presentations on his

own time because he feels social media safety is an important topic for young people. Having spoken at more than 30 schools across the state, he views social media as a tool that young people should be taught.

"When you learned how to drive, no one just threw you the keys and said 'here you go,'" he said. "When you get a phone, someone just handed it to you and you learned on your own or from friends."

Pincince said that he was inspired to start talking to students about this topic by his daughters who are ages 7, 10 and 12.

"I look at how young kids start with this and what they're doing with it and it's scary," he said.

He stressed the importance of knowing who can see what is posted on social media sites.

"The important thing with social media is that you know every single person who follows you because it's about safety," he told the crowd.

To further prove his point, Pincince related to the students an experiment he had tried the night before.

"Last night, knowing I was coming here, I went on various social media accounts and I followed 100 of you. It was easy," he said, as many in the crowd shifted in their seats. "I tried to follow 100 of you. How many do you think I successfully followed? Ninety-three."

"Of those 93, 72 of you I was able to just click the button and follow," he added. "Another 21 actually said yes to me when I asked if I could follow. A total stranger. The other seven just haven't answered yet."

While Pincince said he doesn't tell student to stop using social media, he hopes that those who listen to his presentation will start to use the platforms in positive ways.

"There is the power of positive social media and the power of negative social media," he said. "We're getting them to realize that it's their responsibility, but it's hard when you're 14, 15, 16 years old to realize that."

To articulate this point, he told

November 2016 | CROMWELL LIFE 25



"Nothing you do on social media, nothing you do on your phone, nothing you do on your computer ever goes away."

- Tom Pincince

the story of a running back at Elon University who, unhappy with his playing time, unleashed a lengthy tirade on Twitter on the bus ride home from a game. The posts insulted his coaches and teammates and before the bus had returned to their school they had gone viral.

The coach on that team was Pincince's brother. "He called me up and said 'How do I delete those tweets?' And I told him the truth. You can't," Pincince said. "Nothing you do on social

media, nothing you do on your phone, nothing you do on your computer ever goes away."

He told the Cromwell High students that by the time the Elon student got off the bus, he was dismissed from the football team.

"Every decision you make has the potential to go viral, good or bad," he told them.

Actions on social media can also affect future college and career prospects, Pincince told the students.

"Nine out of 10 college coaches said their perception of a recruit was

negatively impacted by a social media post," he said. "What you do has consequences."

To limit the possibility of creating negative social media attention, he encouraged students to judge their posts with the acronym THINK - is what you are posting Thoughtful, Helpful, Inspiring, Necessary and Kind?

"Do not post when you're angry, stressed or upset," he said. "That's when you'll make a bad decision."

David DeCarli, CHS assistant principal, said that many of the lessons that Pincince taught students could be applicable to adults as well. "It's a statement that we hear all the time. We keep hearing that the pictures never disappear," DeCarli said. "What you put out there, you don't have control over anymore."

He believes Pincince's presentation resonated with students and he

hopes that many will take the advice into consideration.

"To me, the power of his presentation was that he followed 100 students," DeCarli said. "If one kid went home and changed his settings this afternoon, it's worth it."

DeCarli also was impressed with Pincince's analogy about learning to drive a car.

"We don't throw our kids our keys and say 'Okay, you learn how to drive,' but you're giving them a very powerful device, usually with no instruction," he said.

Pincince said that, while he understands that not every student may be swayed by his presentation, if any teenager decides to take proper safety precautions, his time will be well spent.

"We want them thinking about those things they do on a daily basis," he said. "They need to start making good decisions." **CL**