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CONTACT: Stacey Cooper
206-859-5600

Is Temperament Innate?

Talaris features Dr. John Medina on Interactive Webcast

Seattle, WA – Yesterday morning, the Talaris Institute proudly hosted Dr. John Medina, a developmental molecular biologist and author of several books including the *New York Times* bestseller *Brain Rules*, for the second in its series of interactive webcasts for parents and parenting professionals. Dr. Medina, a father of two boys under the age of fourteen, began his presentation with a smile and an assurance that, “Parenting is an amateur sport!” Like many in the audience, he roundly confessed that he is not a parenting expert, but as a scientist he had much to share regarding how biology and environment impact temperament.

Dr. Medina began by relaying a study by Dr. Jerome Kagan titled “Baby 19.” In this longitudinal study, Dr. Kagan determined that babies have inborn temperament and that “reactivity” is one of several aspects of temperament. The research classified some children as calm or low reactive and others as high reactive. “Baby 19” was identified as a highly reactive child. This fifteen-year study revealed that the reactive tendencies identified in “Baby 19” as an infant remained constant as a teen. In other words, temperament is innate or, as Dr. Medina characterized, “babies come with tons of preloaded software.”

Medina explained that there is no single gene identified for temperament. Instead, a person’s temperament is most likely comprised of a combination of genes. Medina also noted that temperament is not solely determined by genetics. Nature and nurture both play a role in how a child learns to navigate the world. Medina further clarified, “temperament is about tendencies not destiny. My best advice to parents of highly reactive children is to get to know their trigger points....pay close attention to their emotional ecologies and the way you respond their emotions.” Dr. Medina talked about emotion coaching as set forth in Dr. John Gottman’s book *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*, and said that the way parents feel about emotions and the way they handle their child’s emotions play a role in how children react to their own stress levels.

Online audience members posed questions to Dr. Medina through the Parenting Counts Center and were able to learn more about topics such as the role of birth order in temperament, and how parents can support children of different temperaments.

Following the event, Katie Simons, Executive Director of Talaris Institute, noted, “Because our mission at Talaris is to serve as a bridge between what researchers know, and what parents practice, we are thrilled to be able to share Dr. Medina’s insights with parents and early learning professionals around the world.”

Early learning professionals who were part of the live audience continued the discussion of temperament with Dr. Medina and Talaris research staff immediately after the webcast.

This webcast is available online for on-demand viewing at www.ParentingCounts.org/webcast.

About Talaris Institute

Talaris Institute is a Seattle-based nonprofit whose mission is to support parents and caregivers in raising socially and emotionally healthy children. To learn more about Talaris Institute, please visit www.talaris.org.

About Parenting Counts

Parenting Counts is the research-based family of products developed by Talaris Institute. As a source of trusted information, Parenting Counts offer a complete product line of high-quality, research-based, easy-to-use tools and materials to help make a difference in the lives of parents and children. For more research-based parenting information please visit www.ParentingCounts.org.

About Dr. John Medina

Dr. Medina is a developmental molecular biologist specializing in the genes involved in human brain development and the genetics of psychiatric disorders. Medina was the founding director of the Talaris Research Institute (now Talaris Institute) originally focused on how infants encode and process information at the cognitive, cellular and molecular levels. Medina holds joint affiliate faculty appointments at the University of Washington School of Medicine, in its Department of Bioengineering, and at Seattle Pacific University, where he is the director of the Brain Center for Applied Learning Research.