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‘May I kiss you?’

Author, speaker conveys healthy approach to dating

[Denise Konkol](#)

Special to Parenting

HALES CORNERS —

Society bombards us with messages about sexuality. Scantly clad celebrities and television programs and movies laden with sexually suggestive scenes are commonplace.

Take heart, however. Though our popular culture sends out complex and confusing signals, parents can focus on basic issues of respect and consent to help our kids make the right decisions.

To help clarify issues, Mike Domitrz, husband, father of four and a parishioner at St. Mary Parish in Hales Corners, has spoken on dating, respect and sexual assault to youth in middle school through college, and even professional athletes, for 14 years.

His journey began in 1989 at college in Chicago, where a call from home “abruptly halted his world.”

“My mom called to tell me that my sister, Cheri, had been brutally raped,” Domitrz recalled. The ensuing two years would take him from “wanting to kill my sister’s rapist to questioning myself and saying, ‘Am I any better?’”



TEACHING RESPECT — Mike Domitrz, a nationally recognized authority on healthy dating and sexual assault awareness, speaks to middle school students at St. Mary School in Hales Corners in April. Domitrz is a member of St. Mary Parish, Hales Corners. (Catholic Herald photo by Sam Lucero)

Domitrz moved to Whitewater in 1990, and attended college there where he heard a speaker on sexual assault whose definition of the act gave Domitrz pause.

“ He defined sexual assault as any sexual contact without consent. I took a look at myself and I realized that I hadn’t always asked permission before touching someone. How did that make me any different from the man who attacked my sister?”

In early 1991, Domitrz, a nationally recognized expert on healthy dating, consent, and sexual assault awareness, began lecturing on the topic. For the next two years, he presented the program in high schools and colleges.

Domitrz stepped out of full-time speaking in 1993 and developed a speaking program on team building based on a coaching position he held at that time.

However, the call to speak on the issue most personal to Domitrz never diminished. After attending a national speakers’ convention in the summer of 2002, he went back to speaking full time on dating, consent and respect.

By January of 2003, Domitrz had written “May I Kiss You,” a book, which mirrored his speaking program and focused on dating, communication, respect and sexual assault awareness. The program is one of the hottest tickets on the speaking circuit, but for Domitrz, it’s been a calling to a ministry.

“ I do feel the work I do is a calling. The traveling never gets tiring because I know I’m going somewhere to get the opportunity to inspire some new way of

thinking in a young person's mind," said Domitrz, although he admitted, "I don't change anybody — people change themselves. All I'm trying to do is ignite a fire, plant a seed that they will take care of and nourish. Every day before I go on stage, I thank God for this opportunity to make a difference in people's lives."

However, Domitrz admitted the program can often be misunderstood. "Parents hear 'sex' and they think the program is on sex, and that their child doesn't need to be exposed to it. If they actually hear the program, they'll realize it's about creating higher standards for people of all ages," he explained. "If young people applied this philosophy to their lives, the amount of sexual activity in their age range would decrease dramatically because people would hold themselves to higher standards ... and they would realize that they weren't ready for this very special act between two people."

In addition, he said, "Parents need to ask themselves, 'How am I role modeling?'" Periodically, when you want to kiss your partner, right before you do so, say 'May I have a kiss?' Your kids may laugh and say, 'Why're you doing that?' but that's healthy and it makes a point for conversation."

Domitrz recently spoke to middle school students at St. Mary Elementary School in Hales Corners. The answers they gave to questions proved they pay attention to the media — and get the wrong message.

He asked the students to come up with anything that had been said of Kobe Bryant. The Los Angeles Laker star had been charged with sexually assaulting an employee of the hotel at which he was staying. They couldn't say much negative beyond that.

However, when asked about what negative things were said about the victim, the responses, included, "She had a lot of boyfriends in the past," "She went to his room to see him" and "She's mental."

As Domitrz pointed out, "sexual assault is the only crime where society blames the victim for not stopping the crime. If you get mugged, no one's going to blame you if you can't stop the crime from happening."

After many of Domitrz's programs, he receives e-mails from kids who "explain situations they have been in that are horrific — they can't tell their parents or their teachers because they're afraid of how they'll be treated. We get into the schools and tell them, 'It's not your fault, you're not alone and the way you feel now is OK', and they're saying, 'Finally — someone's saying what I've been needing to hear.'"

The need for this message is what keeps Domitrz focused. However, he is inspired by the faith of his sister Cheri, a victim of rape.

Domitrz said Cheri told him she believes her sexual assault opened the door to his ministry. "What more powerful calling is there, than a survivor of sexual assault to say that seeing me doing my work gives what she had to go through a meaning and a purpose? There is no greater inspiration for me than Cheri's words.... That is an act of faith that God has given us, and I ask God for that direction to stay focused on that ministry each night and day that I'm out there."