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Parents get tips on talking to teen about sex

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Most of us gag at the memories of our parents attempting to 'educate' us about the birds and the bees, the flowers and the trees. Was it their approach? Was it the generation gap?

The answer is ... it's much more than those two questions and Mike Domitrz, a nationally- sought speaker on that very subject, was at the Fort Madison Middle School Wednesday night to help show parents (or the 28 adults who showed up) the proper approach to take with today's teens regarding dating and sex.

"We won't always agree with each other," Domitrz said to the parents. "But we can listen to each other and try to understand; the same goes with the young people."

Domitrz (pronounced Domish) says that parents can approach the issue of healthy dating and intimacy without endorsing sexual activity and without lecturing.

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"Once parents admit the feelings of confusion they had as a young person and discuss how scary or troubling some moments were, the child is more likely to connect with them," he said. "When you tell a child how different it was 'back in your day' you're telling them 'I have no idea what you are going through'."

If you have no idea what they are going through, do you really expect them to listen to your advice?

Domitrz said that no matter which 'times' you grew up in, these difficult relationship feelings cross all generations.

"We need to teach young people to expect to be respected," he said. "Respect is not opening doors for people, paying for meals, or other signs of chivalry. It's holding your date in the absolute highest esteem and not putting them in a position they may not be ready for."

Domitrz touched on technology as well, stating that dating isn't like it used to be in the fact that young people are now getting to know each other through other communication mediums such as social networking websites like MySpace and instant messaging each other online through vehicles like AIM. Through these communication avenues people talk much more openly.

"And text messaging has become the new way to communicate for young people," he added. "They'll say so many things in a text that they would never say in person or on the phone."

One thing that Domitrz echoed throughout his conversation with parents is 'tell them the truth'.

"Students of today are different," he said. "They will not accept 'because I said so'. They want you to explain 'why' and they are



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right in making that request of educators, activists, politicians, parents and others.”

Domitrz added that if you want your teen to make the tough and correct choice when faced with decisions, you must give them the proper foundation of decision-making.

“When your child understands the ‘why’ of your decisions, going against peer pressure is much easier,” he said.

Domitrz went a bit further with this and said that in addition to knowing the ‘why’, you must teach the TRUTH and be willing to hear the TRUTH yourself.

“Time and time again, students across the country tell us that our program is so successful because of the manner in which we relate to the students. They love that we want to hear ‘their side of the story.’”

Domitrz said that when talking to teenagers about dating and sex (or many of the other areas that are novel to them) you must NOT lecture them. This makes them feel anything BUT comfortable. They hate lectures. Talk WITH them and LISTEN to them. Then teach them what is the ‘right thing to do’.

Another thing to ask yourself is, does your teen view you as an open parent ? Or a judgmental parent?

One parent spoke to this question. She said, “Teens want to go talk to the ‘cool’ mom about certain things.”

To which Domitrz replied, “Don’t be mad about that because the young person has someone who is listening to them. Talk to that ‘cool’ mom and find out what she is doing right.”

Domitrz concluded his conversation with parents by asking them to slow down and connect with their child.

“Do you remember how much you hugged your child when he/she was three years old? Probably all of the time. Did you hug your child as much when they were 10 as you did when they were three? Likely not. Now, how much do you hug them when they are 14?”

Domitrz added that you must keep that connection with your child ... if it’s lost, reconnect with them. Talk to them eye-to-eye, passionately. Let them see you cry. They will know how much you love them ... how much you adore them.

“Because believe me, the boyfriend/girlfriend is telling them

more than you are (in most cases)," he said. "And dads, if you don't talk to your daughter/son because the love makes you cry ... that's how much you love them ... and tell the young people, 'That's how much I love you.'"

For more information on Mike Domitrz and his teachings visit www.canikissyou.com. You can e-mail him with questions at mike@thedatesafeproject.org. He will get back to you in less than 24 hours in most instances.

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