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AUTHOR GIVES ADVICE ON DATING

Abby Weingarten, Herald Staff Writer

BRADENTON --- May I kiss you?

It is a question too rarely posed between daters. That's what author Michael **Domitrz** told hundreds of parents and teenagers Wednesday night in the Saint Stephen's Episcopal School gymnasium. Pulling participants from the bleachers, he placed them in hypothetical situations --- parties, first dates, first kisses --- during his talk, "A Candid Look at Boy and Girl Relationships: Never Give Up Your Self Respect."

The 33-year-old Milwaukee-based author and speaker was relaying a message about consent --- one he learned the hard way.

Thirteen years ago, when **Domitrz** was in college, he came home to his dorm room one day to find a note on his door that read "Call home immediately."

Domitrz phoned his mother who told him that his sister had been raped. At that moment, **Domitrz** experienced a rage he had never known before. He could not seek vengeance, he said --- it would lead him to prison and only cause more grief for the family. Instead, he channeled his frustration into public speaking and writing in an effort to educate others about mutual respect.

Since, he has toured the United States and Canada, speaking to students from fifth grade to college age. He has appeared on more than 30 radio and television shows discussing his book, "May I Kiss You? A Candid Look at Dating, Communication, Respect & Sexual Assault Awareness."

The main point **Domitrz** strives to convey is what the term "consent" truly implies. Sexual assault, **Domitrz** told the crowd, is any sexual conduct without consent, and under the influence of drugs and alcohol, the definition is blurred and no longer reliable.

The school's Making Good Choices Council and Parents' Association, organized the talk, said Jan Pullen, the head of the school. For the past five years, the association has flown in a nationally recognized guest speaker with school money and funding from Brighthouse Networks and the Bradenton/East Manatee Herald.

"Parents always say that the one thing they're uneasy about is talking to their children about dating and intimacy," Pullen said.

For some parents and children, this is not the case. Gerry Ridner and her 15-year-old daughter, Karen, arrived together Wednesday night to share the experience of **Domitrz's** talk. The mother and daughter have a frank, honest relationship and discuss topics ranging from sex to drugs to peer pressure.

"These are topics all parents should talk to their kids about," Gerry Ridner said. "I feel very blessed that she is so open with me about these things. It's almost a gift nowadays with the world the way it is."

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