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Students tutored on dos, don'ts of dating

By **Roberta Pennington**
Sheboygan Press Staff

Walking down the hall, a high school student reaches out his hand and pats a female student's behind.

Teenage laughter echoes in the high-school hallway.

Kohler High School senior Ben Buchanan has seen this happen at his school. In fact, he said, he's been guilty of it.

"Yeah, I've done that," the 18-year-old senior at Kohler High School said sheepishly, looking down at his feet. "There's like a select few (guys) that actually do it ... for laughs."

It may be funny for the guys, but when a girl laughs at the physical affront, it's usually just a masked reaction of her real feelings, said Amy Giffin, a Kohler High sophomore.

"Like someone grabs your butt or something, you just laugh because you don't want them to think that you're scared or intimidated or a prude," said Giffin, 16.

But by all definitions, sexually touching someone without his or her verbally expressed consent is sexual assault, said Mike Domitrz, author of "May I Kiss You? A Candid Look at Dating, Communication, Respect, & Sexual Assault Awareness."

"You should ask before you do anything to someone else's body," Domitrz said.

A nationally renowned expert on sexual assault, Domitrz was the keynote speaker at Kohler's "Wellness Day 2004," an annual event in which special guest speakers talk to students about issues ranging from mental health, drug abuse, fitness, getting organized and credit counseling to developing healthy relationships.

To help get his message across, Domitrz persuaded student volunteers from the audience to role-play in a variety of date scenarios.

"It's not just about asking, it's about respect," Domitrz said after playing a scenario with 15-year-old sophomore Lindsey Dvorak in which he asks permission to kiss her.

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In order to avoid turning a date situation into one in which one of the partners feels uncomfortable or even assaulted, it's crucial that before anyone makes a move, he or she ask the other for permission, Domitrz said.

"The more you speak out, the more you can protect yourself and put yourself in a healthy relationship," Domitrz said.

Dating shouldn't be a trial-and-error situation, he said. It's not about one partner seeing how far he or she can go before making the other person feel uncomfortable.

"It's not their job to say no," he said. "It's (your) job to get consent."

Following Domitrz's presentation, students said they heard his message loud and clear and would begin to think twice about how they plan to proceed with their partners in a romantic situation.

"It was very informational and lots of strong points were stated," said sophomore Aaron Damrow, 16. "Maybe next time when I'm with a girl ... maybe I'll ask her if she feels comfortable with what's going to happen."

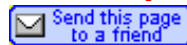
Now that the issue has been put in perspective for him, Buchanan said he isn't likely to continue grabbing girls from behind as they pass down the hall.

"I'd probably think about (the consequences) beforehand," he said.

BREAKOUT

For more information about preventing sexual assault visit the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault Web site at www.wcasa.org.

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