

Date Safe: 'Can I kiss you?'

By Karl Weisel

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WIESBADEN, Germany — "Why don't we ask for intimacy?"

"Are married people awkward?"

"Does every human being deserve to have a choice before we do something with his or her body?"

These were just a few of the questions posed by Mike Domitrz during a visit to Wiesbaden's Taunus Theater May 11. Domitrz, founder of the Date Safe Project and an award-winning author and publisher, talked to Soldiers about healthy dating habits, intimacy, bystander intervention and sexual assault prevention on behalf of the Wiesbaden Family Advocacy Program.

The fast-paced, laughter-inducing presentation featured frank discussions and role playing aimed at encouraging listeners to become better communicators. As part of his "Can I Kiss You?" program, Domitrz invited Soldiers to demonstrate their methods of approaching intimacy with a partner, often to the appreciative laughter of the audience.

"How can you ask your partner for more than a kiss," asked Domitrz, telling audience members, "We were never taught how to ask. You don't see people asking in the movies."

"Whether you are married or single, you know it's easy to misread each other," he said, encouraging everyone to become more expressive — to overcome any fear of rejection. While people may make assumptions about a partner's wants or needs, without an open discussion, no matter how romantic or not, a person can never truly know the desires or needs of another person. "Find out what your partner likes or doesn't like. ... Body language gives you the signals; it never gives you the answers."

Being truly aware of another person's wants, desires and consent to intimacy can also help prevent unwanted sexual advances or assault, said Domitrz.

Adding alcohol to the mix only adds to the confusion when it comes to knowing the line between consent and an unwanted sexual advance.

"Why do you get someone drunk to hook up with them," asked Domitrz, pointing out that people use inebriation as a way to persuade people to do things they normally wouldn't. After members of the audience agreed with the speaker that using alcohol as a tool for sexual advancement is wrong, he advised them that it is their responsibility to step in and "de-escalate the situation" when their colleagues or friends are involved in similar situations.

Domitrz told the group that he decided to try and make a difference in issues surrounding sexual assault after his sister was raped while he was still in college. Describing how he reacted to the news and how few people would actually address the issue of sexual assault, Domitrz said he set out to research issues of intimacy and assault and share his story with other people.

"Why don't more survivors of sexual assault come forward," asked Domitrz, acknowledging that rape victims sometimes blame themselves or feel there is really no one to confide in.

"Too often we think of survivors as people whose lives were ruined when actually they are amazing individuals," he said, explaining that it is crucial that people open themselves up to the victim, rather than only expressing hatred or an urge "to kill" the perpetrator. "It's not about you; it's about the survivor."

In summing up, Domitrz, who also talked to community members in Heidelberg, Kaiserslautern and Baumholder, reminded his listeners of his three core messages — to always ask first to avoid misunderstandings when it comes to intimacy, to intervene when someone is in trouble and to be available to truly listen and be open to helping a victim of sexual assault, rather than turning away in anger.

"Asking is spontaneous ... it is sexy, romantic ... it's the way to go," he said.

For more information about the Date Safe Project visit doyouask.com. For information about sexual assault prevention call the Family Advocacy Program at mil 335-5254 or civ (0611) 4080-254.

