

Be keen on students' mental and emotional well-being

The story of a 14-year-old learner of Kololo Junior School in Wakiso District, who reportedly committed suicide on Tuesday, is heartbreaking. The boy is said to have been found hanging in a dormitory.

This is now the third learner who has been found dead due to suspected suicide since the new school term began. On Sunday, a 21-year-old male student was found hanging from a tree in Kayanda Kato Village in Buwunga Sub-county, Bugiri District.

Another 13-year-old male Primary Three pupil at Naiku Primary school is suspected to have hanged himself in Mbale District. Last year, a Senior Three student at Mpoma Girls School reportedly set herself on fire in protest after being forced to return to school. In February last year, a 16-year-old student of Seeta High School's main campus also allegedly died by suicide in the school dormitory. These are just a few of the young lives that have been lost to suicide. These sad stories speak to a serious public health crisis. One that must be urgently and effectively given attention. It is not enough to send our children to school, pay the school fees, and buy school requirements and then demand good grades at the end of the school term.

The issue:

Mental health

Our view:

Let's make it easy for them to open up and talk about their struggles. Create a conducive relationship that enables and encourages conversation about difficult topics and their struggles.

It is increasingly important for parents, guardians, school administrators, teachers, and all stakeholders to probe the mental and emotional well-being of learners. There's no knowing why exactly the aforementioned learners chose such a tragic end, and it would be foolish to apportion blame to anyone, but even in the midst of such tragedy, we must continue to try our best to cover all the bases. Parents, guardians, schools, and other caretakers must prioritise mental and emotional well-being. The world today, with all its advancements and technology disruptions, presents a plethora of fora that could destabilise young minds.

We must do our best to protect them or at least offer guidance even when it is not sought. As the school term progresses with such reports, it is only natural for parents to harbor

fear about the well-being of their children. This fear should be what propels us to be intentional, deliberate, and inquisitive about the emotional and mental well-being of our children.

A lone school counsellor might not be able to achieve much, but the joint effort of all stakeholders will surely make a difference. Even as we strive to make our schools safe from fires, violent strikes, drowning accidents, suicides, and depression should also be added to that list. Let's strive to educate ourselves about mental health, emotional well-being and signs of depression.

We must also fight the silence that surrounds suicide cases and perhaps stop another young life from choosing death. Learners struggle with many pressure including financial, social, academic, and family-related issues, etc. Let's make it easy for them to open up and talk about their struggles. Create a conducive relationship that enables and encourages conversation about difficult topics and their struggles.

Our commitment to you

We pledge:

- To be accurate and fair in all we do.