

Knowing how to transport your child and ensure their safety should be every parent's concern.

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Early this year, the First Lady, and minister of Education Janet Museveni, expressed her concern in regards transportation for school-going children. Speaking to journalists at State House in Nakasero, she suggested, "If parents cannot afford school shuttles, they should walk their children to school or escort them on boda bodas in order to ensure they are safe."

According to the Museveni, parents are the first persons responsible for their children's security to and from school.

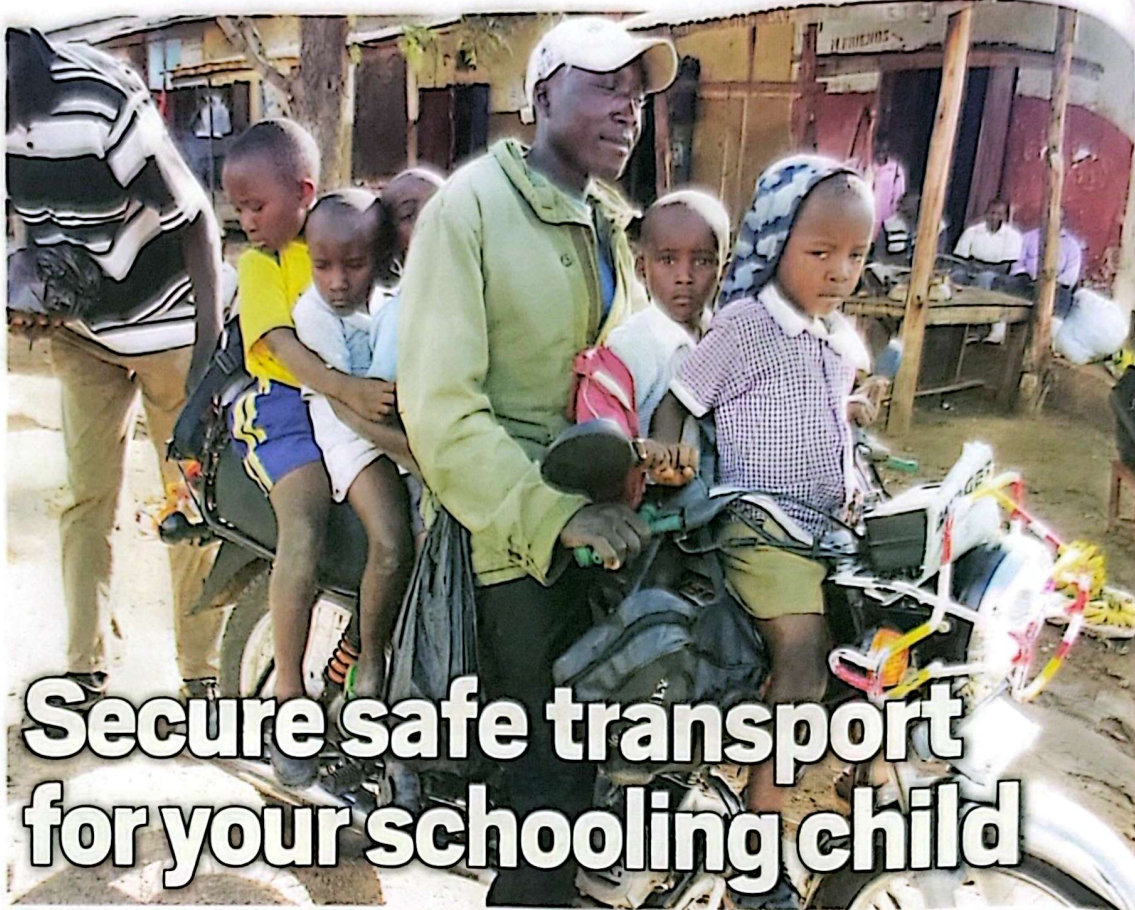
She recommended: "Parents should take up the responsibility to ensure that they follow up their children to be safely dropped off to school and back home."

But what is the safest option to consider when it comes to securing transport means for school-going children?

Do not compromise safety

When considering which means of transport is secure for your child, you may need to know what is most affordable and available for you that does not compromise your child's safety.

"My son used to arrive home late and very exhausted. The school shuttle would make rounds around Kirinya, Banda, before dropping him off in Seeta. Besides, it was costly too. I



A boda boda rider transports children to school in Mbarara Town. Children should be escorted by an adult if they are using boda boda for transport. PHOTO BY COLLEB MUGUME

Secure safe transport for your schooling child

2,000

PRIVATE SHUTTLES CHARGE BETWEEN SHS2,000 AND SHS10,000 AS DAILY TRANSPORT DEPENDING ON WHERE A CHILD STAYS.

decided to transport him to and from school myself. However, I ensure that he is always kept warm in a jacket and he tightly clings to my back as I ride," narrates Samuel Kiwanuka, a boda boda rider.

Similarly, Sandra Mutesi was disappointed that her son was made to sit on the engine (*kameme*) of a commuter taxi as she returned home from school with her aunt.

"Being a single mother with a demanding job, I would send my sister to pick up my children from school. However, I became uncomfortable when my youngest revealed he was once made to sit on the *kameme* of a taxi, which was hot. I, therefore, had to opt for the school shuttle," shares Mutesi, a mother of four.

Consider private options

Damalie Wasukira, the communications officer at Safe Boda Uganda, a private boda boda transport company, says parents should ensure the boda boda they pick for their child has a helmet. "Besides helmets, the



A mother escorts her children to school in Kampala recently. Parents are advised to escort their children to school to ensure they are safe. PHOTO BY ALEX ESAGALA

company assigns a professional rider for a child and a unique identity card number to drop and pick them up from school," she says.

Hellen Ayo, the managing director of Maria Kid's Shuttle, a private company that provides transport to and from school, says parents and schools should ensure comfortable and convenient transportation for their children.

She says, "We understand the need for school-going children to reach home safe and in time, so we ensure that we avoid delays in every possible way," explains Ayo.

According to Ayo, a child's safety is a vital element. "We have a specific number of children we carry to avoid congestion in the shuttle. We also encourage them to wear seat belts and also have female drivers who understand children better," she adds.

Who is responsible?

According to Patrick Nasinyama, a lawyer at Paul Byaruhanga Advocates, both the school and parent are held responsible by law for safe transportation of a school-going child.

He says: "If a child gets knocked

IMPORTANT TIPS

- For walks to and from school, ensure that your child is always accompanied and helped to cross the road after school by the teachers.
- When using a boda boda, sit on it with your child who is below the age of five. Also warn the rider against speeding and riding recklessly.
- If you opt for a school shuttle, advise your child to avoid placing their heads out of the bus window and encourage them to always wear seat belts.

down by a car on their way home from school, both the school and parents are to blame. The school should be concerned about who should accompany a child home from school. Parents too should be responsible to ensure their children are safely transported or accompanied from school."

As the popular African saying goes, "It takes a village to raise a child", it should therefore be everyone's duty to see that school-going children get safe transport means.

Safety is key

A recent report on accidents by the police states that about 18 people were killed and 72 injured from boda boda accidents in May and June.

Boda boda riders are sometimes reckless on the road. This calls for passengers vigilance to ensure the rider is careful on the road. It is tricky for a child though who may not have the authority to get a rider to listen to them.

Is your child at ease in the shuttle?

Although shuttle services provide relief from the burden of transporting children to school, parents must ensure they are fit for their children's welfare.

...ON THE COVER

"I cannot allow my daughter to go to school, every day, on a boda boda (motorcycle). I have this mentality that they are risky and dangerous in terms of accidents and the exposure to cold air can easily cause health complications," Scali says. After her daughter's classes have ended at 12pm in the afternoon, the shuttle takes the little girl back home.

Irresponsible attendants

Despite the convenience associated with using shuttle services, some parents note that their children's physical and emotional needs are not catered for during the journeys.

A case in point, a father of two, who preferred anonymity, says he was disturbed when his four-year-old daughter told him that she was always scared of the shuttle because her "uncle" who drove it threatened to slap her and throw her out of the window whenever she cried.

The parent says he was forced to confront the school in question, during one of the parents' meetings.

"I requested that they have at least a female matron in the van but they told us they cannot because they have little manpower already," he says. He decided to transfer his daughter to another learning facility.

Anthony Kato Ssentongo, the head teacher Global Junior School, says, "to try resolve such issues, they have a system where besides the driver, the shuttle also has a teacher whose sole responsibility is to monitor the activities of the learners inside the bus. But since this matter has been brought to light, we will step up our supervision".

He adds: "But I must also on the other hand state that these shuttle services face a number of challenges. With children coming from different backgrounds and brought up differently, it is quite difficult to control some of them."

Poor timekeeping

Becky Claire Asiimwe, a mother of a six-year-old son, says her only issues with shuttles is that they sometimes either delay to pick up children or drop them back home late.

"There have been occasions in the past where the school shuttle picks up my son from home at 9am and yet lessons start at 8am or return them home at 9pm," Asiimwe says.

Poor communication

Stellah Bukenya Wanyana, the managing director Ellah Kids Shuttle, says sometimes, parents are to blame for the shortfalls in the transportation.

"For example, there is poor communication from parents, a case in



Pupils board a school bus in Kampala recently. Both parents and schools must ensure the means of transport children use to and from school do not compromise their safety and comfort. PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

HOW I DO IT...

For the past three years, Abdulatif Kigonya, a swimming coach at Green Hill Academy, has a special arrangement with some of parents whose children study at the school. He drives children in his Toyota Noah. The maximum number of children who sit in the vehicle are 10. Kigonya ensures that the children arrive at the school by 6.15am to give them adequate time to prepare for the lessons that start at 7am. To ensure there are no delays, in the afternoon, when classes for the first group of children end at 4.15pm, he drives them back home and takes the second batch of students at 5.15pm. With this, most of his customers do not complain of delaying their children.



notify us of the days children are not meant to go to school," she says.

Wanyana adds that other issues include ill-mannered children, poor road network, among others.

To limit some of these issues, Wanyana adds that they always ensure to ask schools for their programmes and proceed to follow up with the respective parents.

They also engage children in story telling thus deterring them from engaging in fights.

However, shuttle owners are worried that if the business is not regulated, maladministration will not end soon and most parents may keep disgruntled.

8am

THE TIME FIRST LADY SAID CHILDREN SHOULD REPORT TO SCHOOL.

WE FACE A LOT OF CHALLENGES

"Sometimes there is poor communication from parents, a case in point, a failure from the parents to notify shuttle owners of the days children are not meant to go to school. Also ill-mannered children and poor road network, among others stand in the way of good service delivery."

STELLAH BUKENYA WANYANA, MANAGING DIRECTOR ELLAH KIDS SHUTTLE



How to help children cope

- Ensure that children retire to bed early to be able to wake up in time.
- Advise the child to behave well on the shuttles.
- Look out for basic safety indicators on the shuttle when it picks your child such as seatbelts.
- Know the driver, if possible befriend him because he is in charge of your child safety.
- Exchange numbers with the driver.
- Check if there is a bus assistant to supervise and control children behaviour on the shuttle. Some schools allow a teacher on board.
- Check for the sitting arrangement and capacity. Are the children overloaded?
- Respect time management, especially where it involves collection centres for children such as popular stages so that you do not delay others.
- Choose an arrangement where toddlers are separated from older children.