

Is that teacher right for your child?

BY OWEN WAGABAZA

Having a day care or nursery teacher seems so easy; after all, it is only about looking after children.

But, Isaac Ssendikadiwa, a retired primary school headteacher says parents should not take this lightly. "It takes effort to get good teachers for your toddlers, since these are critical years for children's brain growth," he says.

As a parent, you must be concerned about getting the right teachers to handle your toddler while she is at school.

What issues must you pay attention to? Ssendikadiwa says that parents need to know that working with toddlers takes energy, patience and knowledge about child development. Attaining excellence in the field means a teacher going above and beyond the job description.

Ssendikadiwa, now an education consultant says: "With such skills, the child will grow socially and emotionally."

"Their ability to think, use and recognise language and fine motor skills will be developed through play, art, dance, music, movement and interacting with others," he explains.

He says that the child will be learning to become an effective learner as they develop their communication skills, build their self-confidence, learn to be creative and develop skills necessary for reading, writing and mathematics.

"Make sure that you child's teacher have the drive to unlock your child's door to learning and overcoming any obstacle they may have."

Parents, you also need to ascertain whether your child's teacher is creativity and flexibility. Ssendikadiwa says that if your child's teacher is to plan lessons and engage the little children,

"This calls for creativity. From what the teacher does or says, you can tell whether or not your child is in the hands or not."

He also notes that adapting lessons to individual learning styles requires flexibility.

"Regardless of how organised your child's teacher is and how well she has planned the day, she must also be willing to change plans and ideas as needed," he notes.

"A good early childhood development teacher should develop art activities that encourage children to experience the world in a new way and should further use creativity and flexibility to make everyday a positive one," he adds.

Patient and humorous

Gwiine Rukare, a headteacher in one of the city nursery schools, says working with young children all day takes huge measures of patience and humour.

"The nature of their age makes children jumpy, with short attention spans and little self-control. Every child is different, making the job even more challenging," Rukare says.

"After a long, tiring day full of challenges," Rukare says: "Teachers of kindergarten pupils must come back and meet the same and new challenges the next day."

"A patient nature, therefore, combined with a sense of humour, helps your child's teachers take the ups and downs of every day in stride, while focusing on the end goals," she adds.

Communication skills

Parents also need to ensure that their child's teachers have learnt effective skills for working with young children and for communicating with them. Rukare says your child's teachers must have the ability to communicate with you about your child's needs, skills, problems and achievements.

Many parents feel uneasy about leaving their children at school for the majority of the day. However, helping them feel involved in their children's life really counts, according to studies. Discussions with the parent should be



Children enjoying music lessons with their teacher. Nursery teachers are supposed to be humorous and creative

"A GOOD TEACHER SHOULD DEVELOP ART ACTIVITIES THAT ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO EXPERIENCE THE WORLD IN A NEW WAY AND SHOULD FURTHER USE CREATIVITY AND FLEXIBILITY TO MAKE EVERYDAY A POSITIVE ONE."

positive and in upbeat terms, so that they are reassured that a teacher cares about the children they have entrusted to their care.

Training

To be an effective teacher, one's training counts.

There are three categories of nursery school teachers. The first category considers teachers who have Uganda Certificate of Education documentation. Such teachers can get certificates in handling nursery school children. They can also be allowed to upgrade to diplomas, degrees, masters or even doctorates in philosophy. These can even be primary school teachers.

The second category is for individuals who are trained to handle teaching after obtaining a Primary Leaving Examination certificate. These are also childcare teachers. The last category is for such teachers that run community child care centres. As long as one can read and write, such a person qualifies to teach in a kindergarten.

Respect for differences

Daphne Kato, the principal of Kampala Parents School, explains that every child has a unique personality and learning style. To reach each child and teach them effectively, parents need to ensure that their children's teachers respect these differences and work with each child's

style, rather than trying to force the child to adapt to another style.

"In this global society, teachers must also be prepared for multi-cultural classrooms with many ethnicities, cultures and traditions represented," Kato says.

"A classroom where these differences are not merely tolerated, but are welcomed and embraced creates an open and exciting learning atmosphere for your child," Kato adds.

She says that appearance also plays a big role in making a good kindergarten teacher.

According to Kato, children like to mimic the actions of the adults around them. Therefore, a good daycare teacher should realise this and serve as a positive role model for the children in his or her care.

"This includes dressing comfortably to make it easy to interact with the children and avoiding revealing clothing." She adds that appearance also involves avoiding inappropriate behaviour, such as smoking, whistling, hitting, pushing, or using foul language.

Another important quality for daycare or nursery teachers is for them to have taken courses and earned at least a certificate in first aid. "This is aimed at helping them recognise signs of common illnesses and child abuse and know when to take action if a child shows a change in mood or behaviour."

Kato advises that those without such safety

THE CHECKLIST

- 1 Patient and humorous:** The nature of their age makes children jumpy, with short attention spans and little self-control
- 2 Communication skills:** Your child's teachers must have the ability to communicate with you about the children's needs, skills, problems and achievements.
- 3 Training:** Any of the three levels of training: Uganda Certificate of Education, Primary Leaving Examinations and community child care can make a good teacher.
- 4 Respect differences:** Children's teachers should respect child differences and work with each child's style.
- 5 Discipline:** Teachers should set good examples for the children.

skills should acquire them. "They should attend trainings that teach one how to handle first aid emergencies, understand child developmental stages and work creatively with children."

Discipline

Your child's teacher, educationists argue, should also be able to set rules or use appropriate ways to discipline children to avoid chaos in a daycare setting.

According to Kato, a nursery teacher creates simple rules for children to follow and uses strategies, such as behaviour charts, time outs and redirection, to encourage children to follow the rules.