

# When your child abuses drugs

**VICE.** Your child may no longer want to associate with your disciplinarian style but finds solace in using drugs, explores **JOSEPH KATO.**

**P**aul Ntuuyo, a Senior Three student at one of the schools in Kansanga, a Kampala suburb recently stunned his father when he did not return home from school.

The 16-year-old lives with his father, Alex Kintu, a taxi driver. Kintu returned home close to midnight only to find the house locked. However, Ntuuyo's friend who lives in the neighbourhood was home.

On calling the school officials, "Your son told us that he goes back home early to take care of his sick father." They always took the youngster's explanations for

gospel truth because he had never told lies.

## The search

Like any other parent, Kintu mounted a search for his child. He approached the boda boda riders at the stage near his home who claimed to have last seen Ntuuyo in the morning on his way to school.

He went to Kansanga Police to file a case of a missing child. At the mention of his child's name, the officer at the counter frowned asking Kintu to describe his son. Unfortunately, the officer had not recorded any suspect in school uniform. Kintu requested to check those in the cell and there, Ntuuyo crouched but not in uniform.

Ntuuyo with eight others had been arrested for smoking marijuana in one of the buildings under construction at around

8pm. Kintu was advised to return the next day to stand surety for his son since it was past midnight.

Despite his father's canes, Ntuuyo has since then not changed his lifestyle.

## Why use drugs

Rosemary Ongorok, a behaviour therapist and director of East African Professional Counsellors' Institute, highlights factors that would make a child abuse drugs as ranging from social to institutional. Some desire to taste a drug due to peer influence or the desire to imitate what they watch in films.

Also exposing children to the substances. "Exposure may result from say a parent that brews alcohol at home or grows drugs. Children from the former can easily become alcohol addicts," says Ongorok. She adds

that if a parent is a smoker and usually sends children to buy the cigarettes, they might attempt to smoke and before you know it, a chain-smoker-in-the-making," she says

Lack of parental love and guidance. A child who watches TV and listens to radio more than talks to their parents will seek solace elsewhere.

Children may take drugs to try and take their minds off their problems such as poverty, poor performance in school and the assumption of looking stylish and brighter among their peers pushes children into drug abuse.

## Effects of drugs

According to an online quiz,

## HELP THEM

Ongorok says a parent should wait until the child is sober and talk to him or her about the effect of consuming drugs. Avoid blaming or criticising the child. This is likely to put the child on the defensive. Instead, show empathy and help a child realise the problems they are in.

Find out the scope of the child's relationship with drug. For how long has the child been using the drug. This will give you an idea of the scale of the problem.

Try to find the root cause of the problem. Sometimes it is insecurity, inferiority complex or it may be a feeling of rejection. Try to make the child talk about it.

Robert Baguma, a teacher, says show the child that you are ready to help in any way. Get him to understand and accept your side instead of his friends. Continue to build a good relationship. Give the child time and encourage the child to give up the habit.

Seek help. If the problem does not get better after a long time, seek help from other professionals such as counsellors, rehabilitated addicts, sometimes you may have to consult a doctor, or join drug addiction therapy groups.



these are the drug effects on your child.

**Bloodshot eyes.** Red eyes are the result of the swelling or dilation of blood vessels on the outer surface of the eye. If only one eye is affected, the cause is unlikely to be drug use.

**Anger outbursts.** Prolonged drug use can lead to angry outbursts, paranoia and violence. It can also be a sign of medical problems such as diabetes, brain injury, depression and borderline personality disorder, as well as anger management issues.

**Lack of motivation.** Drug abuse can cause loss of enthusiasm for activities that were previously enjoyed or easily completed. MDMA causes confusion, depression, anxiety and sleep problems which can lead to lack of motivation. Heroin, crack cocaine and marijuana diminish mental functioning, which reduces the ability to plan and complete tasks.

**Twitch or shake.** Tremors can affect the hands, arms, head or eyelids but rarely affect the lower body, and often occur when you move or try to hold your arms, hands, or head in a certain position. Tremors can be sometimes be accompanied by head nodding, a shaky voice and a loss of balance.

**Deceitful.** Drugabusers commonly start being deceitful, lying and even stealing from friends, family, teachers and employers. With amphetamine and crack cocaine, changes to brain chemistry can result in paranoia, delusions and even psychosis, which can lead to secretive, dishonest and confused behavior.

**Staying out late.** This is a typical teenage habit, but in combination with things listed above, it is possible that this could be an indication of drug abuse. Of course, it is most likely that the drug of choice is alcohol in this case.

Help them recognise that they have a problem on the road to recovery which takes tremendous courage and strength. "Facing your addiction without minimising the problem or making excuses can feel frightening and overwhelming, but recovery is within reach. If you're ready to make a change and willing to seek help," says Ongorok.