SHIELD OR STORM? THE COMPLEX BOND

This month is known for celebrating women. In light of the observance, we turn our focus on the highly fragile daughter-father relationships. Over time, individuals, societies and cultures have found different ways of dealing with the bonds, especially when the father never wants to let go of a daughter. **Ranell Dickson Nsereko** delves into the excesses of such love, and experts discuss how it helps in the development of the girl child.



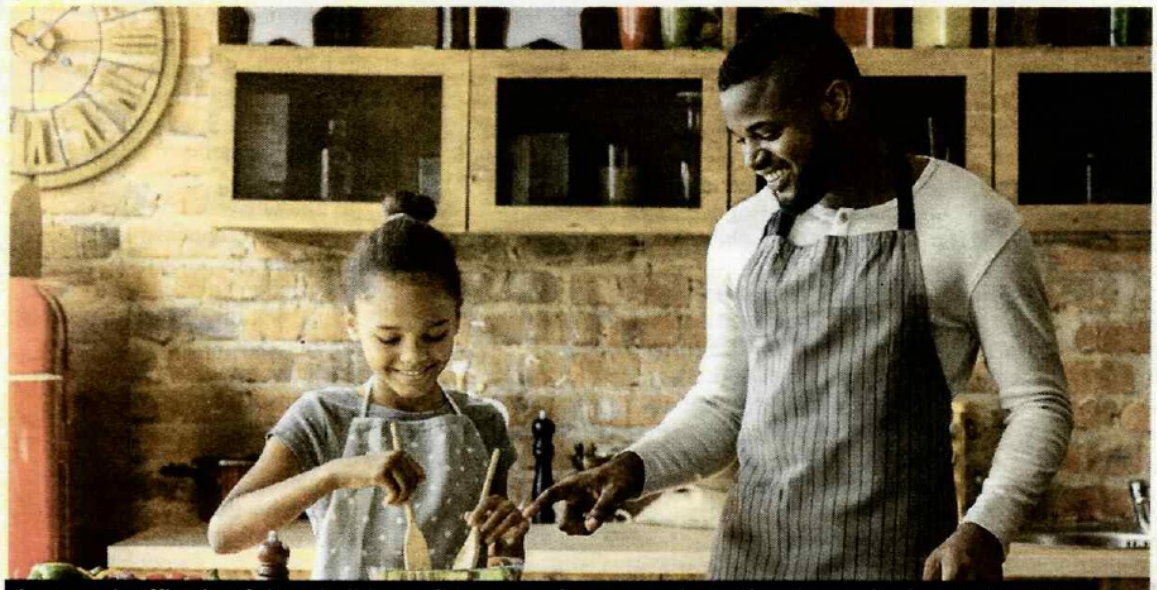
Experts say a girl starts to bond with her father at the ages of three to six

The words are often spoken jokingly, sometimes dramatically, but always with conviction: "I would kill for my daughter."

Those words took on a chilling meaning recently when security agencies arrested 41-year-old Herbert Musasizi in Gulu district in connection with the murder of an 18-year-old student, Martin Bukenya.

Kampala Metropolitan Police spokesperson Rachael Kawala said the suspect was apprehended as investigations continued into the February 14, 2026 incident that shocked residents of Mabanda cell in Gombe division, Wakiso district.

Police say the incident occurred at approximately 8:00pm at the Musasizi's residence in Nansana municipality. Investigations indicate that Musasizi allegedly beat Bukenya to death after reportedly finding him inside his home with his 14-year-old daughter. Bukenya, a student of Hillside Secondary School and a resident of Kirinyabigo, Kawanda in Nabweru division, had his life cut short in what authorities described as a violent confrontation. Sources who participated in Musasizi's interrogation said he told Police that he was incensed when he found Bukenya "having sexual intercourse" with his daughter on his (Musasizi's) bed.



A present, affirming father builds confidence, self-worth and emotional security in her daughter

Beyond the criminal investigation now underway, the tragedy has reopened a difficult conversation about fatherhood, protection, anger and the powerful emotions tied to the bond between fathers and daughters.

According to psychology, the bond starts at a very early age, three to six years, during the phallic stage of growth. At this stage, a girl starts competing with her mother for her father's affection. More often than not, this competition spills out to the rest of the world and the father returns it in equal measure.

» COUNSELLORS SAY THE FATHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP SHAPES HOW A GIRL SEES THE WORLD.

In many Ugandan homes, especially where fathers are single-handedly raising their daughters, this love becomes both shield and compass. A single father learns to braid hair, attend school meetings, understand teenage tears, and decode moods he was never trained to interpret. In the process, he does not simply raise a girl, he grows into a deeper version of himself.

Counsellors say the father-daughter relationship shapes how a girl sees the world and how she expects the world to see her. A present, affirming father builds confidence, self-worth and emotional security.

"A father is often a daughter's first example of male love," one Kampala-based family therapist says.

"The way he listens, protects, apologises or even disciplines her influences how she will later choose partners and respond to relationships."

Yet, counsellors are equally clear; protection must never cross into possession or violence. Healthy fatherhood is firm but measured, protective but not explosive. Emotional regulation, counsellors say, is one of the greatest gifts a father can model for his daughter.

Interestingly, many fathers find it easier to talk to their daughters about women in their lives, girlfriends, marriage struggles, and even heartbreak, as compared to their sons. Daughters are often seen as emotionally safe spaces. They listen without competition. They advise without ego. In some homes, a father will sit with his teenage daughter and confess, "I think I like someone," long before he tells his boys. It is a quiet acknowledgment that daughters often understand the heart better than sons.

My friend shared how her dad shows his love in the simplest yet most profound way. Even though she has a good, paying job, whenever they talk and he senses she might be stressed, unhappy, or low on cash, he doesn't wait for her