

"Social media is with us, and the least we can do is to help them manage it. Being open to discuss challenges such as sex solicitation, building relationship from strangers on social media with your child keeps them knowing and cautious as they use it. Know your child's whereabouts and friends and advise them to befriend people they know in real life on social media. But mostly tell them to relate cautiously with strangers on all social platforms."



FROM THE EDITOR



Study a course that suits you

There are more than 30 institutions of higher learning in Uganda today and each registers a big number of students. But there are also various courses of study at each of these institutions. Some are unique to particular institutions while most cut across. And every year, there is a fresh student at the crossroads wondering what course of study to pursue.

Yet studying a course one is passionate about has been said to have become cliché. Like our main story today points out, there are other guiding principles such as affordability that one should consider before choosing a course. Students must minimise on future regrets in case what they study does not become helpful to them after school.

This aside read about how neglecting the activities your child takes part in on social media could become a nightmare in your life and how best you can fund your own university fees.

Have a good week.

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POLICY/PRACTICE

ESSENTIALS AND ALTERNATIVE IDEAS

# Guard your school-going child from online predators

The internet is a great way to stay up-to-date on the news, do research for school projects, and communicate with friends, but it can also be dangerous. It is the parent's responsibility to ensure your child's safety while online.

BY DERRICK WANDERA  
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Smartphones have become popular among school-going children even when most parents stop their children from owning them. With smartphones comes internet access for as low as Shs300, money that is affordable to most students. It is thus becoming increasingly difficult for parents to regulate their children's access to social media. But how can parents safeguard their children from online predators?

Jimmy Muhereza, a 19-year-old former student of Turkish Light Academy, bought his first smartphone from savings.

He joined Facebook and among his first friends was a white woman.

"She sent me a friend request which I accepted. Although she appeared white from the pictures, I later found out she was Ugandan. We would chat often and she requested me to meet her during holidays. When we met, she offered me some money in exchange for a sexual relationship with her. I refused and even disregarded her threats," Muhereza narrates.

Monitor the children

Tracy Taremwa, a mother of three, says monitoring a child's communication channels is very vital because you can keep them from straying. Taremwa says because of her vigilance, she managed to track down the neighbour who had been abusing her 15-year-old daughter.

"When I checked my daughter's messages, I found out that they had been sent to her by a strange man. I probed to know whose number it was...only to discover it belonged to a neighbour and my go-to boda boda cyclist. It was unfortunate. Parents must endeavour to know who their children are communicating with," says Taremwa.

Kidnap cases

There have been a number of cases reported on media of kidnappings



Parents should be vigilant to know who their child relates to on social media to prevent them from attacks by online predators. NET PHOTO

that have been instigated by social media and cyber manipulators. In 2015, the then police spokesperson Fred Enanga reported an increase in the cases of misuse of social media among which were kidnap. "Some people have lost millions of shillings while others have received death and kidnap threats. This could destabilise the country," said Enanga.

Felista Nantezi, 54, a resident of Kiswa, Bugolobi, says her granddaughter had gone missing from school only to find that she had been dumped in an incomplete house in the neighbourhoods and police's investigations revealed social media had been the main communication forum between her and the kidnap-

pers. "Police advised me to confiscate her phone because this is where she had been communicating with the criminals who took her and abused

SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE RISING

According to Uganda Communications Commission's survey of June 2014, at least 8,531,081 were ardent users of different social media platforms such as Facebook, twitter, Instagram, viber, snapchat and others. This number is believed to have changed drastically by last year and that means more exposure and usage of social media.

her sexually for three days before abandoning her in that new building," she Nantezi says.

Illegal behaviour

Shafik Mugerwa, a counsellor attached to Goodwill Hospital in Busika, says homosexuality is a perception that is first bred into someone's mind and if they are not helped, they yield to the temptations since they come with lots of money to give to those that are interested to join them. "Children are offered large sums of money which becomes very inviting," the counsellor advises. The gay recruiters post videos and material that can easily lure the young people if not well guided.

## Preventive measures

Befriend your children.

Shafik Mugerwa, a counsellor, advises parents to advise their children in a friendly not hostile way as children might get scared of interacting with them.

"If you do not want children to run away from you, discover the wrong path on their own and take refuge in people who might turn out even more catastrophic, you need to be very

friendly as you share with them. Take time to listen to them and get what they like to read and at that point you can help them know what they need and do not need," says Mugerwa. Mugerwa, however, says, "Do not let your children get addicted to social media. Monitor them and allow them to use social media for research and constructive work."

Know the pages they follow.

Tracy Taremwa, a mother of three, says she resorted to checking the pages her daughter follows on Facebook and the kind of material published therein. "Make sure you scan through what your children like and what they are exposed to. Ensure they like pages that are helpful and educative," she advises.