

LOOSE TONGUES.

In the privacy of our homes, we can say anything we want. However, the little ones are always listening and their opinions of adults are formed by the words we say, writes JOSEPH KATO.

Be mindful when criticising your child's teacher

It was 13 minutes to 11am. Tom Nankunda* arrived at his child's school for a meeting between parents and teachers. He found most of the parents had settled into their seats, waiting for the meeting to kick off. Nankunda, being the secretary of the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA), had a reserved seat in the front row.

He had come into the meeting with his six-year-old daughter. As he was about to sit down, a female teacher walked towards the podium to welcome the parents. Suddenly, Nankunda's daughter shouted, 'Daddy, Daddy y'oyo omusomesa gwe wag-amba nti malaya' (Loosely translated as "Daddy that is the teacher you said is a prostitute!")

You should have seen how Nankunda hurried to cover his daughter's mouth with his hand. But it was too late. Almost everyone, including the teacher at the podium, had heard the girl's statement. All eyes turned to Nankunda and his daughter.

Feeling embarrassed, he tried to pinch the girl's lips but the parents in a seemingly sarcastic manner, stopped him from hurting the girl, saying 'Tomu kuba! Ekya wandibadde wakikola da.' (Meaning "Do not beat her! You should have disciplined her a long time ago.")

Embarrassed, Nankunda delegated another parent to speak on his behalf as he excused himself and left. Although he indicated that he had other urgent programmes to attend to, the parents felt the embarrassment was too much for him to contain.

Children soak in information

It was clear that the child had perhaps heard her parents making several negative statements about the teacher. Nankunda's experience could be a reflection to parents on what they say about teachers in the presence of their children.

Ahmed Abigaba, a teacher, says whatever the parent says sinks deep into the child's mind, and is reflected in the child's behaviour towards the teacher.

"If something is positive, the child will reveal it to the teacher. For instance, if it is a good story where the parents mentioned the teacher, the child would be excited to find out more from him or her," Abigaba says.

He adds that if nega-

Your words matter

There are a lot of things parents say about teachers and schools in the presence of their children, who take them as gospel truth. Parents often discuss the teachers' conduct such as, dress code, behaviour and comprehension of some matters.

If you say the teacher does not know how to dress the child will believe you. If you say the teacher is a thief, your child will see him as a thief every time he meets him in class or the school compound.

Once a child hears anything negative about a teacher, he or she will lose interest in whatever that teacher teaches and this translates into poor performance. So, we need to think carefully before we say anything at home.

Bena Nakku
Behavioural and family counsellor

tive statements have been made, children express them by either disassociating from the teacher or lose respect for him or her. The teachers may begin wondering why the child behaves weirdly towards them.

Citing an example, of a child who hated a female teacher, Abigaba says some children, especially very young ones, often speak out because they are not aware of the implications.

"At my former school, a girl in Top Class told a female teacher that she had stolen her father. At first, we took it lightly but we became concerned when the child kept repeating the statement."

When teachers inquired about why the child was accusing their fellow teacher of 'stealing' her father, they found out that the girl's father was in love with the teacher and as a result, had abandoned his marital home.

"We realigned the girl's mother intentionally or unknowingly made the negative statements so that child could repeat them to the teacher. Our teacher could not stand the embarrassment and eventually quit."

Tame your tongue

Allen Kajumba, a teacher and counsellor, says in most cases, parents speak evil about teachers under the in-

fluence of anger. She says sometimes parents pick disagreements with teachers as a result of a punishment given to their child for poor performance or arguments at drinking joints.

"Sometimes parents meet with teachers in bars, where they develop disagreements. The parent may then - in the child's hearing - use inappropriate language to describe what happened at the bar. In some cases, teachers also transfer the anger to innocent children at school."

Abigaba adds that sometimes parents give teachers nicknames. He says he has heard children calling teachers strange names without knowing that they are offensive. "Once, a child called a teacher *Kakopo* and we were surprised. We interrogated the child and we were shocked when he said his father had given the teacher the name because at a funeral, she had been burnt by porridge while using a broken cup."

Kajumba says not only teachers are victims of negative comments made by parents but even other elders in society. "A child will never respect a priest, an Imam or a pastor who was described as a bad person by parents."

Children see, hear, learn and then, act out what they see their parents doing or hear them saying. Parents should be careful about what they say in front of their children because if those words are repeated in public, the parent will lose respect.

* Name has been changed to protect the source.



Be careful:
Your children watch your every action and imitate it. They will also share the opinions that you have about other people around you.

SHUTTERSTOCK

