

SO WHAT SHOULD YOUNG PEOPLE DO WHEN THEY FALL IN LOVE?

By Martin Kitubi

She was beautiful. He was 14. As an adolescent, Godfrey Lubangakene Obua now 22, could not get this girl off his mind. He was in love.

Now a resident of Mbuya, a Kampala suburb Lubangakene was born with HIV, which he only got to know after the death of his parents.

Just like it happens with most adolescents, Lubangakene fell in love at 14 to a school mate. The girl was HIV-negative. He was so scared of revealing his status to her because he feared they would break up.

In his own words, the girl was the epitome of beauty, in fact he faced stiff competition from other boys in the school. To fit in, he even considered abandoning his drugs. The matter, however, weighed heavily on him.

After about two weeks of dating, Lubangakene opened up about his status to his friends. Rather than embrace him, they threatened to tell the girl in order to score brownie points.

"I was preparing to open up to the girl about my status, but I thought it best to tell my friends first and later the girl I loved. I felt threatened. I was scared of losing her due to the competition," he says.

Lubangakene is not alone. That is the dilemma many HIV-positive adolescents face when they fall in love. So, what should they do when

The dilemma of HIV-positive teenagers

they fall in love?

Lubangakene, who is a peer supporter at Reach Out Mbuya, an organisation helping people living with HIV, says several adolescents, especially those in boarding schools abandon their drugs for fear of losing their lovers or isolation by fellow students, which is not right.

"I urge the youth to open about their HIV/AIDS status to friends, they will get released of the burden and start living a positive happy life. Adherence to medication makes us live stronger," Lubangakene notes.

Other challenges which adolescents and children living with HIV face include family neglect and isolation something he endured early in his life, Lubangakene says.

As a five-year old, Lubangakene and his mother were forced by his grandfather to share a room with ducks at Lemo Village in Kitgum district. He says his grandfather purportedly took the decision to protect others from contracting HIV. They were not even allowed to share plates and the same house

with the rest of the family, which baffled him.

Although she did not tell him about his status, Lubangakene recalls that she used to give him tablets daily saying he had malaria.

According to Sarah Nasolo, a childcare assistant at Reach Out Mbuya, several adolescents live in isolation both at school and home, which has made some to abandon drugs.

She explains that poor adherence to drugs increases the viral load and cannot be detected, making it hard to respond to medication.

"We are investing in educating adolescents on relationships and families on loving those living with HIV/AIDS. All they need is love and encouragement to take drugs.

According to Nasolo, other factors, including domestic violence and mistreatment while in school have a negative impact on HIV/AIDS adolescents and, therefore, need to be worked upon, adding that when the viral load is at its lowest, chances of spreading the virus are

minimal.

According to the 2016, Uganda Population HIV Impact Assessment (UPHIA) by the health ministry, it indicated the total number of adults and children of all ages living with HIV/AIDS is approximately 1.3 million people.

Lubangakene opened up about his status to his friends

