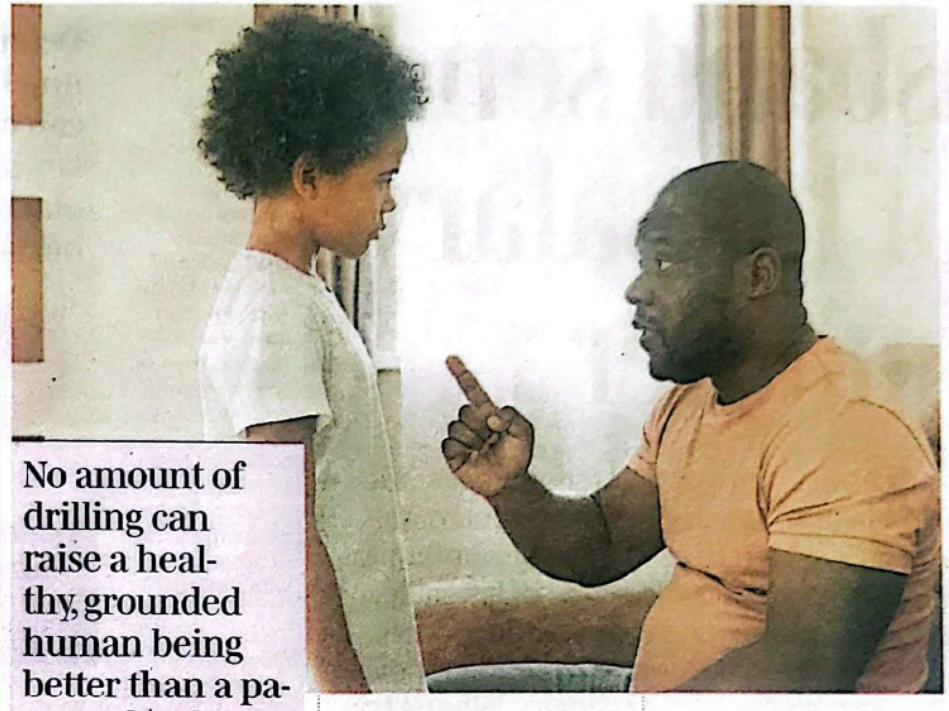
Can a stranger raise your child better than you?



No amount of drilling can raise a healthy, grounded human being better than a parent who shows up every day with intention and love



Sylvia Mwesigye
Another Perspective

In the early 2000s, the Nnaabagereka of Buganda brought back an old tradition called the Kisakatte. Teenage girls from across the kingdom were gathered together and taught what was expected of them as young women. They learnt about personal hygiene, how to cook, how to care for a home, and how to understand the changes in their bodies.

They were also taught their place in the world as both Baganda and Ugandans. Parents liked this programme. They sent their daughters to take part. It continued until the Covid-19 pandemic came and the lockdowns began, and then it stopped.

Before the Kisakatte, there were other programmes including the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides who held annual camps at Kazi and other places. The Boys and Girls Brigades ran holiday camps where teenagers gathered to learn planning, self-reliance, loyalty and punctuality.

These camps had a strict but relaxed feel. If your team lost a game, you lost points. That was all. There was no beating. There was no harsh punishment. Young people enjoyed these camps. They kept coming back.

They learnt skills such as tying knots and working together. They learnt how to find their way in a bush and how to get along in a group. They lost points, went home, and came again the next holiday. The system had its limits, but it did not harm them.

It is immensely tempting to enrol children in any programme that promises to return them focused and structured, a temptation that has only intensified over time. Always, there has been a profound allure in handing over the difficult work of shaping a human being to someone who guarantees a finished product.

It is the temptation of the shortcut, the quick fix, the belief that somewhere there is a formula that will work where patience has failed. But we are dealing, we must remember, with human beings. And a human being mishandled is a consequence that travels through time, through relationships, through the self that child will become.

Raising children is not easy. People say this all the time, so much so that it can start to sound empty. But it is still true. There is no instruction book. There is no single method that works for everyone. Parenting is a personal responsibility, and no one should hand it over to someone else. The truth is so simple that we often miss it; you cannot raise two children the same way.

They are different people. They come into the world with their own personalities, their own struggles, their own way of seeing things. And because this is true, it means something important; a stranger cannot do this job better than you. A stranger does not know who your child really is. A stranger does not understand what your child needs.

When you are raising teenagers, the road can feel long and hard. The temptation to give up and let someone else handle it can be strong. You may want to hand them over to mentors, to teachers, to relatives, to religious leaders. It is exhausting work. But you must stay with it.

In teaching your children, you often learn about yourself. Parenting does not happen in one day or one month. It happens every day. You have to keep showing up. And here is the hardest part, but also the most beautiful; children learn more from watching you than from listening to you. They see your real patience.

They also see when you are faking it. They notice when you are annoyed, even when you try to hide it. They learn from all of it.

Do not be tempted to ignore the hard moments with your children. If you do not help them work through those difficult times, those struggles will come back to haunt them later in life. When you discipline through beating or harsh words, you do not teach respect; you create fear and bitterness.

Children carry these experiences with them. Cruelty teaches cruelty. Anger teaches aggression. This is not complicated. No boot camp, no rigid program, no dream of a perfect child can change this truth.

And no amount of drilling can raise a healthy, grounded human being better than a parent who shows up every day with intention and love.

CamScanner