

The role of parents in AIDS education

As Uganda advances into the last mile of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030, one truth remains constant: Families are among the most powerful agents of change.

Parents, guardians and caregivers shape values, influence decision-making and provide the early lessons that children carry throughout their lives. While government policies, health facilities, schools, and community structures play critical roles, the December holidays provide another great opportunity for parents.

COVID-19 taught the world that health education is not only for doctors and classrooms; it begins at home. In the same way, parents are encouraged to talk openly and confidently about HIV, prevention, treatment, and healthy life choices, which is essential for us to achieve our target of ending AIDS.

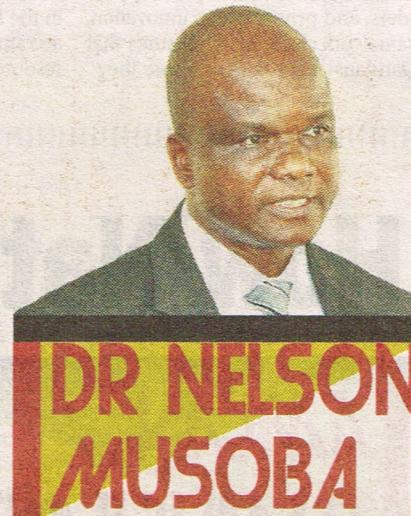
Children and adolescents today navigate complex environments.

The Internet exposes them to both accurate and misleading information. Peer pressure, rapid physical development and emotional changes can make them vulnerable to unhealthy decisions. Yet research consistently shows that children who have open, non-judgmental communication with parents are more likely to make safer choices.

Parents provide context that young people trust. They offer cultural grounding, moral guidance, emotional support and a space where questions can be answered honestly. When parents speak openly about HIV, what it is, how it spreads and how it can be prevented, they remove the secrecy that often fuels fear and misinformation.

Talking to children about HIV does not require complex medical language. What matters most is timing and approach. For younger children, parents can introduce simple ideas about staying healthy, making good decisions, and avoiding risky situations. As they grow older, the conversation can naturally expand to include sexuality, peer influence, HIV prevention and personal responsibility.

Starting early also helps normalise the subject. Instead of HIV being discussed only during a crisis, it becomes part of a healthy lifestyle



conversation just like hygiene, school-work, and manners.

Currently, the Ministry of Health is in advanced stages of rolling out a life skills framework for children and HIV.

This guide will provide simple and direct guidance on how to engage children regarding HIV awareness.

As the Uganda AIDS Commission, we continue to advocate for awareness on some of the basic guidelines that can frame a conversation between the parent and the child, especially among adolescents.

To end AIDS by 2030, every young person must be empowered with accurate knowledge. Parents can guide children to understand:

- How HIV is transmitted and how it is not transmitted
- The role of abstinence, faithfulness and protection in avoiding infection
- The availability of HIV testing
- The importance of knowing one's HIV status
- Modern prevention options, including PrEP

Parents have a huge responsibility because they are the foundation of their families and

their children depend on them for their safety and well-being.

Children need someone they trust as the rightful source of information. Many young people today engage in risky practices that expose them to HIV, teenage pregnancy, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, resulting in poor mental health or even death.

Parents should, therefore, create a positive environment and spend quality time with their children and set a good example for them to follow. Parents should equip their children with skills on how to deal with negative peer pressure that may result in risky behaviour.

Parents should understand and explain to their children changes that are happening during adolescence, especially the physical and physiological changes, attraction to the opposite sex and what to do when they encounter these experiences.

Ending AIDS is not just about prevention; it is also about compassion. Parents have a unique opportunity to teach children that people living with HIV deserve love, respect, and support.

By discouraging judgment, bullying, and discrimination, families contribute to a community environment where people can seek treatment freely and adhere without fear. Parents do not need formal meetings to teach children about HIV. Simple daily interactions can spark meaningful conversations: This can be while watching Television together, during chores at home, etc.

Ending AIDS by 2030 is possible, but it requires homes to become centres of knowledge and compassion. Parents should inspire children to dream big, safeguard their health, and understand that HIV prevention is an act of love. By nurturing informed and responsible young people, parents become frontline partners in Uganda's journey toward a future free of new HIV infections.

The writer is the Director General, Uganda AIDS Commission