

TEEN

VISION

New Kid Code

HOW TO PASS THE FIT-IN TEST AT A NEW SCHOOL.

PHOTO BY GOOGLE BANANA/
 PROMPT BY HUMPHREY WAMPULA.

BY RITAH MUKASA

You've just stepped into a new school. New uniform. New classrooms. New faces that look like they already know where the dining hall is while you're still wondering where the toilets are.

Exciting? Yes.
 Terrifying? Also yes.

Your mind starts racing: Are the teachers strict? Will the food be edible? What if everyone already has friends?

Whether you're loud and social or the quiet observer in the corner, fitting into a new school can feel like being dropped into a movie halfway through the plot. Sometimes, it even

starts with the strangest moments.

Train your mind first.

For Brian Okwii, a boy-child advocate, memories of joining secondary school come with equal parts laughter and pain.

Back then, new students were nicknamed "nyongos", a label that basically

translated to fresh prey for senior students. The big boys ruled the territory like lions around a watering hole.

"I would queue properly for meals but still miss food," Okwii recalls.

Being small did not help. He was shorter than most boys his age. No beard. No deep voice. Nothing that

could intimidate a bully. His family background was humble too, which meant limited pocket money and only the basics.

School felt less like education and more like survival training.

Then one day something unbelievable happened. While standing in the food line—hungry enough

to hear his stomach protesting—Okwii overheard some big boys whisper that the food was finished. The queue was long, and panic spread quickly.

Suddenly the seniors jumped over the gate and stormed toward the kitchen. The cooks ran away, fearing an invasion.

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What's KAWA NOT KAWA

NICOLE AHULRA, 16 AND (RIGHT) DENISE DESTINY AKANDHO, 16, IAMPALA



KAWA?

...making friends that last forever, not just one school term, one moment or one school year.

NOT KAWA?

...worrying about the future. As long as you are putting in 100% in what you do everyday, the future will be chill.

SEND US UR DOPE PHOTO AND TEXT US WHAT'S KAWA—WHAT'S NOT VIA OUR WHATSAPP: +256 783 002 805.

EDITOR'S WAGWEZ!

Hey Squadrino! Jump in!

Somewhere between last year's mistakes and today's expectations, it's easy to feel stuck. As if your past version is a label you can't peel off. I don't believe that. Growth is messy, surprising and completely allowed. If you're carrying something heavy, like stress, regret or confusion, don't carry it alone. I've learned that real strength often begins with a simple conversation. Talk to someone who cares: a school chaplain, counselor, or a teacher you trust. Change rarely happens in silence. Sometimes it starts the moment you decide to.



HUMPHREY WAMPULA
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Okwii followed the crowd, hoping to at least scrape the bottom of a saucepan. But in the chaos he was pushed straight into a huge cooking pot.

Luckily, it was empty. "I sat there eating the leftovers and tossing some to my friends," he says, laughing today at the memory.

Looking back, the moment taught him several lessons:

- School life demands patience and resilience.
- Ask for help when things get tough.
- Rough beginnings don't define your future.
- Kindness builds friendships that carry you through school.

His advice to newcomers? Prepare your mind.

"Respect the school system. Learn quickly. Choose good friends. And speak up when you face challenges," Okwii says. "Every difficult moment is secretly training your strength."

WALK IN WITH CONFIDENCE.

Whether you're joining Senior One, Senior Five, or transferring to a new school midstream, adolescent mentor Joyce Atimango says the nervousness you feel is completely normal.

"It's okay to be excited and anxious at the same time," she explains. "Every new beginning carries uncertainty."

Atimango remembers the night before she joined Senior One. Sleep refused to come. Food lost its taste. Her mind replayed every possible worry like a

broken radio.

But once school started, she realised something important: everyone else was nervous too.

Because the entire class was new, friendships formed quickly. By the end of the term, the strange place started to feel like home.

Her advice is simple:

- Smile and introduce yourself.
- Be curious.
- Give yourself time to adjust.

Most importantly, get involved.

Join clubs. Participate in school activities. Volunteer for leadership roles in class or societies.

"Leadership builds courage and responsibility," Atimango says.

If someone is unkind, don't let it crush your spirit. Not everyone will like you, but the right people will find you.

"Mistakes are not failure," she reminds students.

"They are part of learning." After all, school is not just a place where you memorize notes.

"It's where your talents, character, and dreams begin to grow."

WHEN BOARDING FEELS LIKE A LIFE SENTENCE.

When Eunice Achola joined Senior One at just 12 years old, she thought boarding school was the worst punishment imaginable.

She had been in day school, comfortably living at home. Boarding suddenly felt like being dropped on another

planet.

"It felt like a death sentence," she says.

One small moment, however, stayed with her forever.

Her father carried her on his bicycle to buy the dress she would wear for interviews at the prestigious Aboke Girls Secondary School.

"That simple act told me something powerful," Achola remembers. You can do this.

Still, adjusting was hard.

She moved from urban life to a rural school environment. Everything felt strict and unfamiliar. Communication with home was limited to letters that sometimes took weeks to arrive.

Loneliness crept in.

But slowly, the struggle began to shape her. She became more disciplined, more independent, and more resilient.

Then tragedy struck.

In September 2006, the school was attacked by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels. Many girls were abducted. Achola survived but had to transfer to another school.

Instead of sympathy, some students mocked her.

"They called me Kony's wife," she recalls, referring to rebel leader Joseph Kony.

The words cut deeply. Her confidence collapsed.

But her parents stood firmly behind her. Whenever she felt like giving up, they reminded her of her worth.

Eventually, Achola completed university.

Her message to students

today is powerful:

"Your circumstances do not define your destiny. People may doubt you. Sometimes you may even doubt yourself. But stay in school and keep building your future."

FIRST WEEKS: WATCH, LEARN, ADAPT.

According to Gillian Patricia Atuheire, Executive Director at Wema Uganda, the first weeks in a new school are like entering a new game level.

You don't rush in blindly, you observe first.

"Watch how things work," she advises. "Listen. Learn the culture."

At the same time, build positive friendships.

You don't have to become the most popular student in school. But you can start by doing simple things:

- Greet people.
- Join group activities.
- Help classmates when they need it.

Small acts of kindness travel fast in school communities.

"A smile, respect, or helping someone with notes can open many doors," Atuheire explains.

But remember: discipline matters from day one.

Teachers quickly notice students who:

- Keep time.
- Follow school rules.
- Complete assignments early.

And if you're struggling in class?

Don't suffer quietly. Ask questions. Seek help.

A new school is not a punishment. It's a fresh chapter.



“Every difficult moment you face at school is shaping your strength.”

Brian Okwii,
Boy Child Advocate.

“Every new beginning comes with uncertainty, and that is part of life.”

Joyce Atimango, Adolescent Mentor & Executive Director, Trailblazers Mentoring

“Your circumstances do not define your destiny.”

Eunice Achola, Senior Project Officer, Trailblazers Mentoring Foundation.

“You do not need to be popular, but you should be friendly and approachable.”

Gillian Patricia Atuheire, Executive Director, Wema Uganda.

Starting at a new school can feel like being the new character in a series where everyone else already knows the script.

But with patience, courage, and a few good friends, the unfamiliar corridors eventually start to feel like home.

And one day, you might even be the senior student telling hilarious survival stories to the next batch of nervous newcomers.

Because every confident student you see today?

Once stood exactly where you are now.

TEENS REACT



New School, New Soul

Margaret Ahimbisibwe, St. Mbuga Vocational Secondary School.

My former classmates were toxic and nearly pushed me into depression, so I changed schools for A-level. The first weeks were lonely and even the dress code shocked me since I was used to long skirts. Being appointed Liturgy Prefect later helped me come out of my shell.



Cousin Compass

Vivian Mackline Ashaba, Dabani Girls SSS.

I previously studied at Kampala High School but always admired my cousin who was here. When I joined, she helped me settle by showing me around the school. Because of her support, I never felt lonely.



Village to Vibes

Fred Kyaterehera, St. Mbuga Vocational Secondary School, Makindye.

I joined Form Five after spending my whole life in Kyankwanzi. Kampala shocked me. The "planned kids" and even keeping time felt different. I spent my first term quietly observing before I finally fitted in.



Bully Breaker

Musa Multah Mutebi, Uganda Martyrs High School Lubaga.

When I joined, older students bullied newcomers and grabbed their snacks. I stood up against the behaviour. Now, as a member of the disciplinary committee, I ensure new students feel safe.



Dorm Maze

Jovia Christine Nalwenge, Dabani Girls SSS.

My first week was confusing even though the girls were friendly. I was too shy to ask for help and even struggled to find the kitchen. With twelve dormitories, I kept getting lost.



Beauty Backlash

Christine Noor Nattabi, Uganda Martyrs High School Lubaga.

Senior Two was difficult because some girls ganged up against me. They thought I was proud of being beautiful and brilliant, which wasn't true. A few loyal friends helped me through it, and I now keep a small circle.

Joseph Kakeeto, St. Mbuga Vocational Secondary School.

I studied O-level in a strict Catholic school in Masaka. When I came to Kampala, I felt lonely and even feared the students because my mother had warned me about drugs. I later convinced a former classmate to join the school and that helped me cope.

Fatumah Nabuzaale, St. Mbuga Vocational Secondary School.

Coming from a small school, the big compound and confident "planned kids" scared me. I even avoided meals and stayed in class because I feared being judged. Things changed when I met girls from the Miracle Centre Cathedral youth choir.

Muhsin Lusiba, Uganda Martyrs High School Lubaga.

Moving from a Muslim school to a Catholic one was difficult because Mass attendance was compulsory. As a devoted Muslim, I struggled with the change. Later we mobilised fellow Muslim students and formed an association.

Ruth Nangendo, Dabani Girls SS, Busia.

Moving from a mixed school to a girls' school was challenging. However, the girls were welcoming and the environment impressed me. My advice to new students is to stay focused, patient, and positive.

Humphrey's Next Gen

CLIQUE RESET! The Power of True Inclusion.

Ever been in a crowded school assembly, surrounded by hundreds of students, yet somehow felt completely alone? It's that strange moment when you're physically present but socially invisible. Now imagine feeling that way almost every day simply because people notice your disability before they notice you.

On March 21, the world marks World Down Syndrome Day 2026 under the theme "Together Against Loneliness." But fighting loneliness takes more than sharing the same classroom. Being present is not the same as being included.

Many schools assume inclusion is solved once a student with Down syndrome has a desk in class. But real inclusion isn't about floor space—it's about heart space. Loneliness is a serious issue, and for people with developmental disabilities, it can be worse when others talk about them instead of talking with them.

That's where your hidden superpower comes in: social awareness. It means noticing what others might miss—the student sitting quietly at the edge of the group, or the one giving short answers because they're unsure they belong.

These moments are chances to act.

Real inclusion isn't about grand speeches. It grows from small, everyday choices:

Listen like it matters. Sometimes the most powerful thing you can do is listen. When someone speaks, give them your full attention and show that their voice matters.

Invite, don't just observe. If someone seems interested in joining an activity or conversation, open the door. Ask their opinion during a group project or invite them into a game.

Grow together. Friendship isn't charity—it's shared experience. Try learning something new together, whether it's a game, a song, or a skill. Being beginners together builds genuine connection.

This week, try something simple but powerful: invite someone new to your table, your group, or your conversation. Education helps us understand the world—but empathy is what changes it.

Don't just be the student who shows up. Be the one who quietly makes sure no one else feels left out.

Humphrey Nabimanya is a community psychologist, sexual and reproductive health advocate and founder of Reach A Hand, Uganda.