


**BY RANEL DICKSON
NSEREKO**

For teens from broken homes, or those grieving someone, the season is a reminder of what's missing. Not what's merry. You see, December is marketed as joy.

Lights everywhere. Meat on the menu. Relatives you haven't seen since Primary Five suddenly calling you "my child."

But for many teens, the festive season isn't happiness, it's stress. It's interrogation.

It's pretending you're fine while your data bundle dies at 2AM, mid-scroll, your **WhatsApp** status is a recycled "Season's greetings", and your mind is louder than New Year's fireworks in the sky.

**TO BE HAPPY (SOFT
LIFE IS A SCAM).**

December comes with rules nobody voted for: smile, dress well, take photos, don't embarrass the family.

Meanwhile, **Instagram** is busy showing teens on boat cruises, beaches, at concerts, or holding iced

drinks with captions like "grateful." You're at home, watching TV with a remote that only works when you slap it twice and bite the batteries.

"Every time I open **Instagram**, someone is living soft," says Patricia Abel, 16, Kitintale. "I start feeling like my life is boring. I pretend I'm okay, but inside I feel left out."

Social media turns Christmas into a

competition... who travelled, who went for brunch, who glowed up, who looks happiest. And if you're not winning, you're losing quietly.

**LONELY, EVEN
WITH A FULL
SITTING ROOM.**

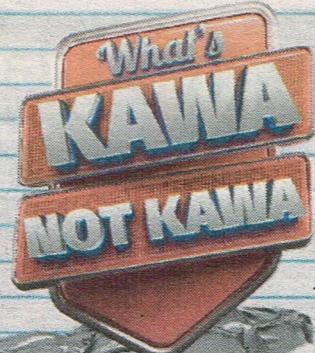
Holidays mean visitors.

>> CONTINUED ON PAGE 18-19.

Lots of them. Aunties. Uncles. Cousins who eat your snacks and ask personal questions.

"My house is always full," says Samson Kalema, 17, Mbarara. "But no one asks how I'm really doing. They just say, 'You've grown.' I spend most of the day in my room because I feel invisible."

December noise doesn't always mean December warmth.



GETTING A FTINAG, 17YRS, FORM FOUR,
MAKERE COLLEGE.



KAWA?
...when we are taught things
that are practical and useful in
our everyday lives.

NOT KAWA?

...when we study about things
that we don't relate with like
Gipiri and Labong.

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!

Let me say this like someone who's watched too many teens burn out trying to be superheroes. You don't win life by running on empty. Rest isn't quitting; it's refueling. It's choosing tomorrow over flexing exhaustion today. Put the phone down. Breathe. Sleep. Your dreams don't need a tired version of you, they need a whole one.

You're allowed to pause without guilt. Trust me. Real growth happens when you stop hustling for approval and start listening to your body.

You've got this, always.

HUMPHREY WAMPULA
hwampula@newvision.co.ug

TEEN VISION

<< CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17.

WHEN FAMILY GATHERINGS BECOME ORAL EXAMS.

Family parties often feel like UNEB for some teens, except the marking is emotional.

Questions fly:
"How were your results?"
"Why did you drop from first to fifth?"

"Which school are you joining next year?"

"You've gained weight, are you eating too much?"

To adults, it's just conversation.

To teens, it's pressure wrapped in jokes.

"I fear Christmas," says Angela, 14, Kyanja. "Everyone asks about my results. They don't know how stressful it is when you already disappointed yourself."

Counsellors call this the "report-card season", when teens are expected to perform, explain, and smile at the same time.

CHRISTMAS IN A BROKEN HOME HITS DIFFERENT.

For teens whose parents are separated, December can feel like being passed around like a plate of food.

"Christmas is the worst," says JJ Kalibala, Kampala. "My parents argue over who I should spend the day with. It makes me feel like I'm the reason they separated."

Psychologists say this kind of instability hits harder during holidays, when peace is expected but tension shows up early, like that one uncle.

COPING, UGANDAN-TEEN EDITION.

To survive December, teens escape:

- headphones on,
- sleeping the whole afternoon,
- binge-watching shows,
- endless scrolling until the data finishes,
- or staying out with friends longer than usual. It helps. Briefly. But it doesn't heal.

Counsellors suggest healthier resets: journaling, talking to one safe person, stepping outside the house, reducing social media time, checking in with yourself daily, even if it's just admitting, "Today was heavy."

WHAT TEENS ARE ACTUALLY ASKING FOR

Teens aren't demanding perfect holidays.

They want fewer questions and more listening. Less pressure, more patience.

Space to rest without being called lazy.

Room to breathe without pretending.

Because sometimes, behind the Christmas outfit and the WhatsApp status, a teen isn't celebrating. They're surviving.

How were your grades?

You've gained weight!

Is Buddo your first choice?

Does your brain work?

HOLIDAY QUESTIONS THAT TEENS SAY HIT HARDER THAN ADULTS REALISE.



ILLUSTRATION BY GOOGLE BANANA/
PROMPT BY HUMPHREY WAMPULA.



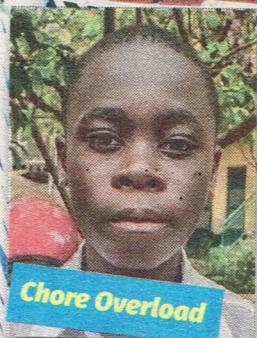
EXPERT'S NUGGET

Joselyn Kajumba, a neuropsychologist working with Parliament of Uganda under the Mental Health Forum, says December exposes emotional cracks families usually ignore. "Teens need to feel safe at home," she says. "That starts with listening, not correcting, not comparing."

She urges parents to validate feelings, respect their teenagers' personal space because they are growing into adults, and avoid turning conversations into interrogations. "A hug, a high-five, even a hand on the shoulder can mean a lot," she says, while noting that, withdrawal doesn't

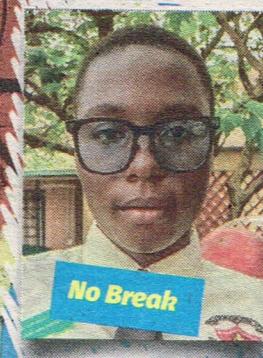
always mean rebellion. Sometimes, it's recovery. Red flags to watch for include prolonged sadness, isolation, risky behaviour, sleep changes, aggression, or talk of self-harm. "Seek help early from professional counsellors," Kajumba warns.

<< CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18.

TEENS
REACT ?WHAT TRIGGERS YOUR STRESS DURING THE
LONG CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY?
PEAS HORIZON HIGH SCHOOL, BOMBO, KALULE STUDENTS

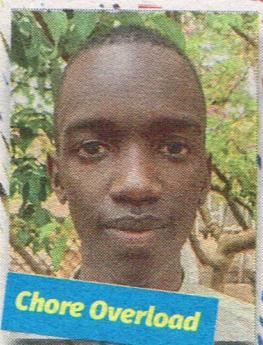
Kakumba Joram, Form One West

"The endless house chores. You wash utensils and before you're done, they've already sent you for something else. It gets confusing and exhausting. Being home also comes with too much idleness sometimes, which makes everything boring compared to school. And don't even get me started on the TV screen time. Adults always control what to watch. *Sawa ya agattaliko nfufu?* Excuse me."



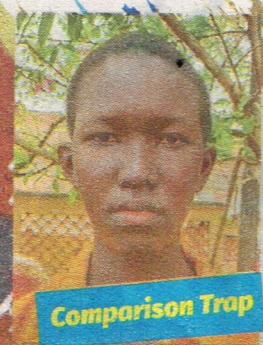
Nakacwa Milly, Form One

"The most stressful thing about being home during the holidays is babysitting siblings and cooking. There's barely time to relax. I don't feel bad when they ask about my grades because I perform well."



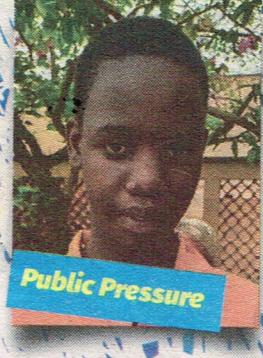
Kakumba Joram, Form One West

"Holidays stress me because I end up taking care of my siblings and washing clothes and dishes instead of resting and revising. When I tell my parents about my career choice and they look at each other before suggesting something else, it really discourages me."



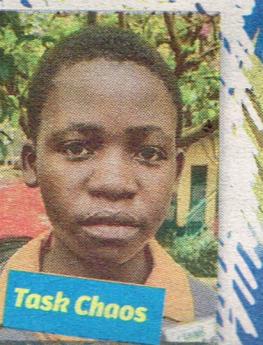
Namatovu Sandra Stellah, Form One

"Waking up at 5AM to go and dig in the garden until midday triggers me a lot. Eating late and fetching water every day makes me hate holidays."



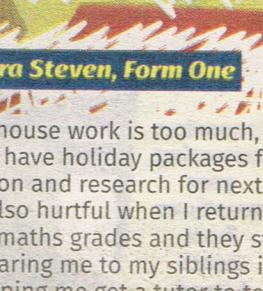
Kakumba Joram, Form One West

"I'd rather be engaged in job activities during the holidays, but it's hard to find opportunities, which is stressful. I also don't like community comments about students misbehaving. When relatives ask about my grades, it doesn't offend me because it shows they care about my future."



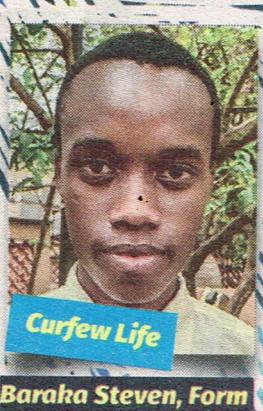
Nakiryowa Shaluwa, Form One

"Holidays are stressful because sometimes you're told to do many tasks at the same time. Being asked about my grades actually makes me feel loved and cared for."



Mabira Steven, Form One

"The house work is too much, yet I also have holiday packages for revision and research for next term. It is also hurtful when I return with poor maths grades and they start comparing me to my siblings instead of helping me get a tutor to teach me."



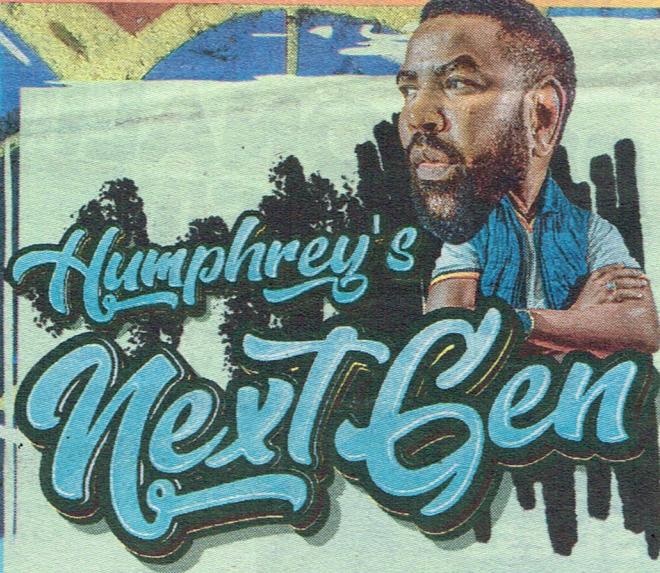
Baraka Steven, Form Three

"Being put under very tight and strict curfew during holidays and not being allowed to leave the house, even when I'm just going nearby. It feels like a prison."



Nakiryowa Shaluwa, Form One

"The most stressful thing about holidays is revision. Sometimes the break is too short, and there's no time to rest. Whenever relatives ask about my grades or my future career, I get stressed. Every small mistake I make, they ask if that's the kind of lawyer I want to become."

PRESENTS FADE!
PRESENCE STAYS!
THE ART OF
MEANINGFUL GIFTING.

soccer match. Say nothing. Your presence says enough.

• **For your friends:** Skip the generic gifts. Offer a shared moment instead.

Learn something together. Laugh at how bad you both are before you get better.

Time, given freely, is unforgettable.

• 3. The Gift of Awareness

Read the room. Listen to what isn't being said.

• Short replies might mean someone needs space.

• Leaning in means someone wants to connect.

Noticing these small signals tells people, "You matter."

This holiday, give your flowers through small, meaningful actions. Say a sincere thank you to the quiet heroes in your home. Remember, emotional intelligence is a real-life superpower. It turns confusion into clarity, distance into dialogue, and ordinary moments into lasting memories.

Because in the end, the best gift you can offer the world is a version of you that is present, kind, and truly there.

• 2. The Gift of Time

We often take the people closest to us for granted.

• **For your parents:** Dad's love may be quiet; fixing things, driving you around, showing up without drama. Return the favour. Sit with him. Watch his favourite

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

PERSONALITY TEST

INSTRUCTIONS: To answer, circle the option that best identifies you. Flip paper upside-down to view results.

Stress Trigger Challenge

TEST

When relatives start asking about your grades or future plans, you usually...

- A. Feel anxious or stressed, even if you don't say anything.
- B. Answer politely but replay the questions in your head later.
- C. Don't mind. You see it as concern.
- D. Feel frustrated or annoyed but keep quiet.

During holidays at home, your emotions are mostly...

- A. Overwhelmed. Too many expectations at once.
- B. Quiet and tired, even when the house is full.
- C. Mostly calm and okay.
- D. Mixed. Some good moments, some really hard ones.

When you feel stressed or lonely during the holidays, you usually cope by...

- A. Withdrawing and spending time alone.
- B. Scrolling on your phone or watching shows for hours.
- C. Talking to a friend or trusted person.
- D. Keeping busy with chores or responsibilities.

Social media during December makes you feel...

- A. Like you're falling behind compared to others.
- B. Pressured to look happy even when you're not.
- C. Inspired or entertained.
- D. Indifferent. You don't take it seriously.

When family conflict or tension happens during the holidays, you...

- A. Feel like it's somehow your fault.

Results:

Mostly A's - The Silent Carrier
Mostly B's - The Quiet Drifter
Mostly C's - The Grounded Navigator
Mostly D's - The Emotional Balancer

- B. Try to stay invisible and avoid the situation.
C. Accept it as part of family life.
D. Feel emotionally drained afterward.

At the end of a holiday day, you often feel...

- A. Exhausted, mentally and emotionally.
- B. Lonely, even if people were around.
- C. Content and rested.
- D. Unsure, not terrible, but not okay either.

WORRR'D

Mostly A's - The Silent Carrier

You carry a lot inside without showing it. Holiday pressure, expectations, and conflict weigh heavily on you, even when others don't notice. This doesn't mean you're weak, it means you're absorbing more than you should.

Advice: Talking to a trusted person, or checking in with a counselor can help release what you're carrying.

Mostly B's - The Quiet Drifter

You often feel unseen during the holidays. Even in a full house, loneliness follows you.

Advice: Loneliness isn't about being alone, it's about not feeling understood. Try small connections: one honest conversation, one walk outside, or reducing social media comparisons.

Mostly C's - The Grounded Navigator

You manage holiday stress relatively well. You understand that family questions, chores, and pressure aren't always meant to hurt you, even when they're uncomfortable.

Advice: Keep practicing healthy communication and balance.

Mostly D's - The Emotional Balancer

Some moments feel okay, others feel heavy. You may not fully understand what affects you most, but you sense something isn't quite settled.

Advice: Self-awareness is your next step. Try daily emotional check-ins: What drained me today? What helped me today? Understanding your triggers helps you manage them better.

TEEN VISION



GOT QUESTIONS? GOT CHALLENGES AT SCHOOL? IN YOUR LIFE? WRITE TO US AT teenvision@newvision.co.ug

DEAR TEEN VISION

Kevin, 18, Ntare School, Mbarara.

I have never had sex, never used drugs, and I try to live carefully. Yet the thought of going for an HIV test terrifies me. My friends test and talk about it freely, but I feel like if I test, I might "invite bad news." Is it normal to fear testing even when you think you're safe?

Advice:

Kevin, fear of testing is not always about risk. Sometimes it's about what the result represents emotionally. An HIV test forces you to confront reality instead of assumptions, and that can feel overwhelming for all human beings. But testing is not a punishment or a prophecy; it is simply information.

Knowing your status does not change who you are, it gives you clarity and control. Many young people delay testing because of anxiety, not behaviour. Choosing to test when you are ready is an act of courage, not fear. When done calmly and voluntarily, testing often brings relief, not regret.

Linda, 16, Bweranyangi Girls' Senior Secondary School, Bushenyi

In my class, when girls quarrel, they insult each other by saying, "You probably have HIV." Teachers tell us to stop, but it keeps happening. I feel disturbed because it makes HIV sound like a curse or shame. Why do people use HIV as an insult, and how should I deal with this?

Advice:

Linda, when HIV is used as an insult, it shows fear and ignorance, not truth. Young people sometimes weaponise illness to hurt others because they don't fully understand it. This behaviour deepens stigma and silences those who may need help.

You are right to feel uncomfortable. You can choose not to participate, gently shut down such language, or walk away from conversations that turn cruel. Respecting human dignity is a sign of maturity. When HIV is treated as shameful, prevention suffers. But when it's discussed responsibly, lives are protected.

Joshua, 17, Bishop Stuart University Secondary School, Mbarara.

At church, we are told that faith alone protects us from diseases like HIV. At school, we are told prevention and knowledge matter. I believe in God, but I'm confused, which one should guide my choices?

Advice:

Joshua, faith and knowledge are not enemies, they serve different purposes. Faith gives moral grounding, strength, and values. Knowledge gives practical guidance for protecting health. One does not cancel the other. Believing in God does not mean ignoring medical reality. Many people of faith still seek treatment, testing, and education. Wisdom lies in combining values with responsibility. Protecting your health is not a lack of faith, it is stewardship of the life you've been given.

Counselors answering your questions from Reach A Hand, Uganda.



JOASH SSEBUGULU



JOAN ATUHAIRWE MUGASA



SHAROT ARAHIMA