



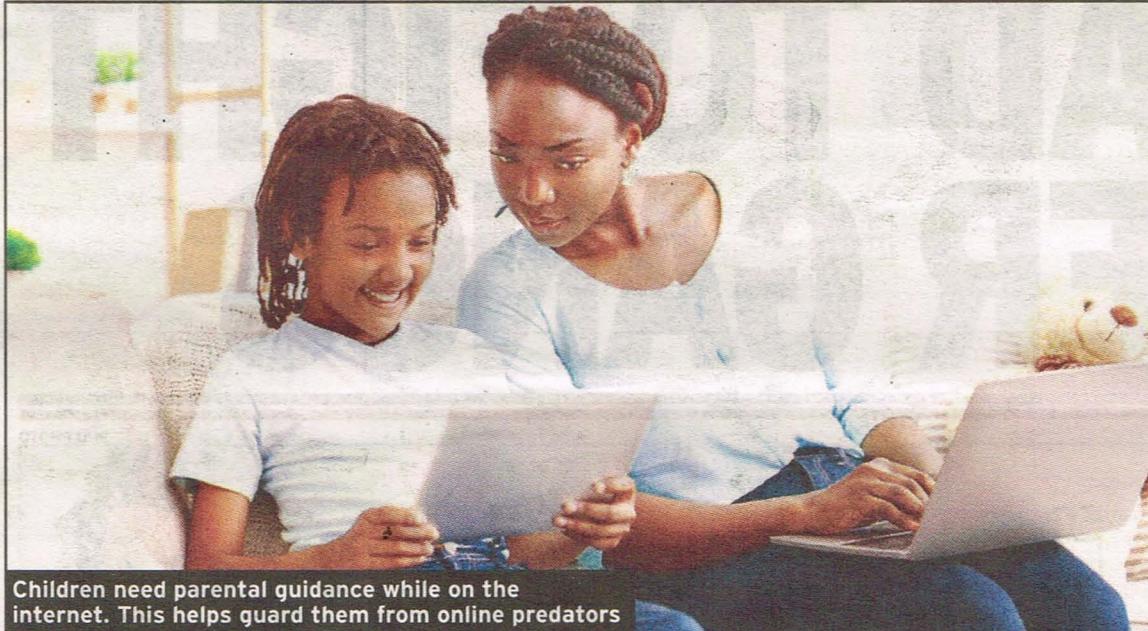
How a teacher foiled an online predator

By Aloysious Kasoma

"We thought our daughter was safe because she was always at home. We had no idea the danger was in her phone. When the teacher showed us the messages, I broke down," says a mother, who asked not to be named to protect her child.

When a Senior Four teacher, Sarah Nabirye (40), also a former educator at Kazo Hill College in Kawempe, Kampala, noticed a sudden change in her student's behaviour, she did not immediately think of an online predator. The 15-year-old girl had become withdrawn and anxious. But by chance, a classroom conversation about internet safety changed everything.

"I asked them how they use social



Children need parental guidance while on the internet. This helps guard them from online predators

media and one girl froze," Nabirye recalls.

"After class, she lingered behind and quietly told me someone online had promised her a modelling opportunity abroad," Nabirye says.

The man, who claimed to be a

football talent scout based in Europe, had been communicating with the teenagers for weeks via WhatsApp and Instagram. He showered her with compliments, encouraged secrecy and gradually asked for personal photos. Nabirye says the language used was

"too polished and too persuasive."

"I have attended child protection trainings, and this fits the pattern of grooming," the teacher says.

"I knew we had to act immediately but carefully, without frightening the child."

Nabirye alerted the school administration and contacted the girl's parents, who were initially shocked.

The school worked with a local child protection non-governmental organisation and Police cybercrime officers to preserve the evidence and further block contact.

Investigators later confirmed the account was linked to a network known for targeting minors in East Africa.

EXPERT WARNING

"Online grooming is rarely obvious at the beginning," Dr Godfrey Siu Etyang, an academic researcher at Makerere University, says.

"Offenders start with normal conversations, building trust over time. The difference is the hidden motive, which often involves exploitation. It doesn't happen once; it is a process."

National Information Technology Authority-Uganda (NITA-U) warns that predators often disguise harmful intentions as care and friendship.

SAFETY TIP

NITA-U advises users never to download images or files from unknown sources and to avoid sharing personal information online.

Engage with us on email via safetyonline@newvision.co.ug