

# Boy child advocacy: A strong support system is not optional

There is a Luganda saying that goes, "*omwana takula ye-ka*" to mean that a child does not grow up alone. Yet many parents are raising children in emotional isolation, especially when it comes to the boy child.

When a once-jolly boy becomes withdrawn, angry, or distant, our first instinct is often to harden up: "Boys must be strong." "He will grow out of it." "Let him learn to handle life." But what if that silence is not strength, but a cry for support?

Many boys are raised to suppress emotion early. Tears are discouraged. Vulnerability is mocked. Affection is rationed. By the time they reach adolescence, they have learnt one powerful lesson: Do not need anyone. And so, when life overwhelms them, as it inevitably does, they shut down instead of reaching out.

For parents, this shutdown can feel terrifying. You look at your son and wonder where the child you knew went. You question your parenting. You feel rejected, frustrated, and even helpless.

And yet, in that moment, parenting becomes less about control and more about connection. Something no parent can rebuild alone.

This is where support systems matter deeply. In many Ugandan homes, parenting is still seen as an individual duty, often falling heavily on one parent, usually the mother.

Even in marriage, emotional labour is uneven. Yet boys especially need multiple safe adults, fathers, uncles, mentors, teachers, to help them process the world. When one bridge breaks, another must exist.

The boy child needs to see men who talk, who listen, who apologise, who sit in discomfort in-



stead of exploding or disappearing.

A present father or father figure is not a luxury, it is protection. When men step in to slow things down, to interpret silence, to model emotional language, boys learn that masculinity does not mean isolation.

Parents, we must also acknowledge the pressures on our boys today: Economic uncertainty, academic competition, social media expectations, and shrinking spaces for healthy

male identity.

Without support, these pressures harden into anger, withdrawal, or risk-taking behaviours. We then punish what we failed to understand. Asking for help is not weakness. It is wisdom.

There is no trophy for parental burnout. No medal for suffering in silence.

Raising emotionally healthy boys requires community, humility, and intentional partnership. If your son feels unreach-

able, it may not be because you failed but because you were never meant to carry him alone.

To raise boys who can love, lead, and live well, we must first show them that support is not optional but survival.

And in doing so, we heal not only our sons, but our families, and ultimately, our nation.

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