**HIV BASICS**

What is the importance of circumcising boys and men? Vincent Vukoni, S1, Biyaya SS, Adjumani.

Dear Vukoni, Circumcision has many health benefits. It helps to reduce the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS. Studies show that safe male circumcision reduces the risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS in males by 60%. It also reduced the risk of penile cancer and improves personal hygiene. However, men and boys who are circumcised can still get infected with HIV if they have unprotected sex with an infected person.

Abstinence is the best protection against HIV/STDs. Counsellor; Dr Mariam Nabwire, Mulago hospital.

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**DRUG ABUSE IS NOT COOL**

In October, Straight Talk visited some students in Adjumani district. Some of the students are refugees from Southern Sudan. During our interactions, we found that many students were struggling with alcohol and drug abuse. They got into the trap of abusing alcohol and dangerous drugs such as: Kuba, Marijuana and Mijaji due to peer pressure, search for happiness, fame, feel cool, mature, brave or be able to go through difficult situations.

J Komakech, 18, S2, Biyaya SS, says: “I started taking alcohol and Kuba because I was depressed. This was after my mother passed on. I thought I had lost everything in life because she was the one laboring to raise my school fees. My dad didn’t matter to me. He had divorced my mum and didn’t care about me. Drugs were my only companion. I changed from a cool guy into a monster. I’m glad that with my sister’s help, I stopped taking alcohol. I’m back to school chasing my dream of being a doctor. The challenge is that I’m still addicted to Kuba. I even carry it to school. But I just want to quit this mess.”

Mazira Teddy, S3, Dzaipi SS, says: “I have a friend who takes alcohol to pass time. He also says that alcohol makes him feel mature and special.”

The future of many young people in Uganda is being shattered by alcohol and drug abuse. Drug abuse is a big problem, and it is all around us. In fact, some drugs like alcohol, tobacco and marijuana are part of our society and people including youth often abuse them.

Nasur Marudi Kurube, Inspector of Schools in Adjumani says, drugs and alcoholism are very common in schools. The district passed an education ordinance that bars and stops any of these habits. The schools are aware and we are sensitizing students. Schools should strengthen their rules and regulations that stop learners from these activities. Learners still find their way around especially opium, marijuana and Maruuni.

Research done by Uganda Development Link, shows that about 45% of the youths between ages 18-24 are using drugs and alcohol.

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**Good character keeps you safe**

Often, young people abuse alcohol and other dangerous drugs to appear different. However, there are better things to make you unique such as being disciplined, excelling in academics and respecting yourself and others.

Always strive to build a good character through your actions. Good character is based on what is right and not what is easy or what others are doing. It is about knowing the difference between right and wrong and always trying to do what is right.

These include; good behaviour, honesty, trustfulness and staying away from risky behaviors. Character is a habit that can be developed by the way you think and act. By Richard Nyadruma, teacher, Biyaya SS.

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**Dangers of drug abuse**

Drugs can make you ill and stop you from achieving anything in life. They affect your performance at school, cause you lose friends and become a problem. Drugs put you at risk of health problems including brain, liver, lungs, diseases. They expose you to early pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.
Alcohol and drugs, are not the answer

Sometimes, young people abuse alcohol and drugs to forget their problems or go through difficult situations.

Topista, S4, 17, Adjumani Model says: "I smoke and take alcohol. I take them and I get confused, cry, sweat and fall asleep. When I wake up, I feel better. I stop thinking about my parents and relative who were killed during the war in Southern Sudan."

Inyani Junior Jerry, 14, S2, Biyaya SS says: "I have a friend who takes alcohol to avoid stress. He is an orphan. He struggles to get school fees. Sometimes, his uncle in Kampala sends school fees but his elder brother who is also drunkard spends it on alcohol."

Eriga Simon Lourdel, teacher in Adjumani Model SS, says: Alcohol and drug abuse is not a better solution. They may give you a temporary feeling that things are better but end up exposing you to much more painful and devastating effects.

If you are facing a challenging situation, talk to someone for help like your teacher, friend or anyone who can help without hurting you. Don’t lose hope. There are many people facing similar problems but they choose to deal with them in a better way.

When you abuse alcohol and drugs, you lose focus of studies and become a problem to your school, family and country.

Some of our day scholars sneak into the school with alcohol especially during parties. We have strengthened measures to address alcohol abuse. We liaise with the guard at the school gate to check students every morning as they come to school.

Life is better with out drugs

You could be tempted to take alcohol or any other drugs just because you want to enjoy life be famous or fit in a group. However, wise Straight Talkers say life without alcohol is cool because it saves them from troubles that other young people face.

Godfrey Nyase, 18, Bayiya SS, says: "I have a friend who was very drunk. I refused but my friend wanted to beat me up. I advise young people to make good friends. Bad friends can influence you to go to the bar instead of going to school."

Raphael Igama, S2, Adjumani Model SS, says: "I had a friend who was addicted to marijuana, Mijaj and cocaine. He dropped out of school while in S2. He has now turned into a town dog that moves aimlessly."

Reida Kuli, S1, 16 Adjumani S5, says: "I have been offered alcohol especially at parties but I always refuse. I take soda because I’m too scared to disappoint my teachers, parents and myself. I want to be a doctor in future."

Editor: Dear Straight Talkers. Take charge of your life. Stay away from tempting situations. Manage peer pressure and don’t be forced to drink just because you want to be like your friends.

Remember, the choices you make today will determine your future.

Schools should play their role

Drug abuse is becoming a common habit in schools. There are ways schools can fight this vice. Be vigilant. Look out for changes in individual behavior and performance. Any changes should be investigated.

Involve parents and community leaders in the fight against drug abuse. If a student is involved in drug abuse, parents must be informed and involved in the process of behavioural change so that the war is fought within and outside the school.

Continuously educate and sensitize students on the negative effects of drug abuse. Guide and counsel them. Many students use drugs due to stress and peer influence. Help them deal with daily pressures of studies and life. Give them life skills such as resisting bad peer influence and problem solving skills.

Drug abusers need abundant support and reassurance to find their feet and realize that they do not need the drugs to fit in or be powerful. Teach them to believe in themselves and do the best they can without having to alter their state of mind.

By Ronald Omara, Education Specialist.

Drugs affect academic performance

Gideon, 18, S1, Beza SS, says: I’m addicted to mitig. I take it in the morning before I leave for school. I feel dizzy in class and fail to concentrate.

Ronal Omara, Education Specialist says: There are many negative effects of drug abuse on a learner’s education. When you abuse drugs, you lose concentration in class and fail to think logically. Depression also sets in especially when you use your pocket money or borrow to finance the habit.

Indiscipline often accompanies drug abuse. Once a student is “high” they lose self control and disrespect authorities, start a fight or become a nuisance. This may lead to suspension or expulsion.

Prolonged use of drugs causes a “flip”, which in lay terms means running mad. So avoid drugs completely, and if you have started, seek help immediately from your teachers, parents and rehabilitation centres in government hospitals in your district.

Please report any form of sexual harassment or abuse to: District Probation and Welfare officers – at all district headquarters • Child and Family Protection Office – at all Police Stations in Uganda • Non-Governmental Organisations including: FIDA, ANPPCCAN, Action Aid, Straight Talk Foundation, Hope After Rape and Raising Voices.
Spend your holiday wisely

The third term holiday is here. It comes with excitement and celebrations. But as you enjoy, take charge of your life and stay safe. Here are thoughts from your fellow learners. Read on!

Amadrio Gloria, 17, S2, Adjumani SS says: “During holidays, I normally cut grass and sell to get money for pads and uniform. I’m also a leader in our church. We will go out to support the needy.”

Akomir Emmaraking Rashidic, S2, Bezza SSS says: “I’m a musician. This holiday, I will be performing in clubs like Wireless and Zevule in Adjumani to earn money for school fees.”

Mawadri Simon Simon 18 S2 Bala SS says: “My parents died when I was young. During holidays, I will burn and sell charcoal in order to raise my school fees and take care of my siblings. I advise children who are like me to learn how to raise their own school fees.”

Kariode Robert, S2, Bezza SS says: “I play football and help my parents to harvest crops.”

Mr Ronald Omara, Education specialist says: “When you rush you crash.”

Delay sex and marriage

“When you rush you crash”

As you enjoy your holiday, do not let anyone steal your virginity. When you rush you crash.

Gideon Kuai, S1, 18, Bezza SS says: “In 2016, a girl from Ayilo Refugee camp in Adjumani was celebrating the end of year but the man from the same camp made her pregnant. She later got married.”

Muhumuza Alfred, Director of Studies in Bala SS says: Absenteeism and school dropout are high. Every term, over 10 students dropout because of different challenges including early marriage.

This year, three of our students got pregnant. Some parents do not care. Most of them don’t have control over their children. Such students should look for better solutions.

Talk to your headteacher or someone who can help keep you in school.

Early marriage is not a bed of roses. Many young people have tasted it but ran away because of its negative effects.

EJ, 28, S2, Bala SS says: “I dropped out of school and got married. I was in S2. Unfortunately, I lost my husband. I have decided to go back to school so that I can be able to take care of my four children.”

Rose, S2, Dzaipi SS says: “I got pregnant in 2013 and got married. I separated with my husband because of the harsh treatment. He could beat me and even refuse to provide for the family. I came back to school last year.

My fellow girls, don’t listen to the men’s lies. They will deceive you and once you get pregnant, they will mistreat you.”

THE POSITIVE DIARY

Face your life’s challenges

Josephine Nabukenya Tumsime, 22, was born with HIV. She says do not live in denial.

Everything works out for the good of you. Yes! I have come to realise this statement come true in my life. Most times when we are faced with challenges, we think it’s the end of life yet through such situations we get to appreciate life more and develop ourselves. Being born with HIV or acquiring HIV may be something that people never wish to happen to them which I agree with but there is always a way out. HIV can be managed.

Never blame anyone for your status. Accept your condition and take your medication everyday. I appreciate my ARVs because I know with them, I control the virus and live a healthy positive life.

I appreciate each day that comes my way and thank God for the gift of life. Studies show that with out treatment, 50 out of every 100 children born with HIV die before their second birthday. I used to fall sick from time to time when I was growing up. I had TB, Pneumonia, Herpizoster, and so many other diseases but I’m still alive because of the timely care and treatment I received.

I am now a powerful advocate. I have proven to the world that you can define yourself regardless of your HIV status. My fellow peers, in that challenging situation, figure out your positive way and shine through it.

Straight Talkers, Do you have questions for Josephine? Send them to PO BOX 22366, Kampala.
Dear Sharon. It is very possible for you to have a sugar mummy who gives you money. This can be a tricky situation. You also need to develop other alternatives such as party time work.

Dear Izima, Engage your parents in a polite way to let them know how their behaviour affects you. Encourage them to quit drinking. If they can’t listen to you, involve a responsible person at your church, school or local leadership to talk to them.

Dear Sharon, I had sex sometime back. I have started suffering from gonorrhea. What can I do? Exodus, 17, S3, Bala SS Adjumani.

Dear Exodus, do not go in for her demands. Having sex for money and with someone much older than you puts you in a tricky situation. You also need to develop other alternatives such as party time work.

Dear Izima, engage your parents in a polite way to let them know how their behaviour affects you. Encourage them to quit drinking. If they can’t listen to you, involve a responsible person at your church, school or local leadership to talk to them.

Dear Izama, engage your parents in a polite way to let them know how their behaviour affects you. Encourage them to quit drinking. If they can’t listen to you, involve a responsible person at your church, school or local leadership to talk to them.

Dear reader. Sexually transmitted infections can manifest in a number of ways including pain in the testicles. Please seek help from a nearby health centre for comprehensive examination.

What are the dangers of dating more than one girlfriend? Junior Jerry Inyani, S2, Adjumani Model.

Dear Jerry, When you have many girlfriends, you put yourself and each of them at risk of getting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Dear reader, it’s possible for a girl to get pregnant during menstruation. Some girls and women have short period cycles and can ovulate (release another egg) during their menstruation. Abstain from sex to get rid of such worries.

Dear reader, you still need ARTs. You are not safe yet; HIV cannot get into your body. You are encouraged to start ARTs, so that HIV doesn’t get an opportunity to multiply and weaken your body. You can go to Adjumani Hospital and get help.

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