Adolescence is the period between childhood and adulthood. If you are between 10 and 19 years old, then you are an adolescent.

During adolescence, you experience physical, emotional and mental changes. Your body may change in a way you like or don't like. Girls for example, develop breasts and start menstruation periods. Boys experience wet dreams, frequent erections, facial hair and their voice deepens. Both girls and boys start to have sexual feelings, grow pubic and armpit hair, and their sweat glands become more active.

As you grow, you may also try out new things, make new friends, compare yourself with your peers or engage in behaviors that may affect your health or education.

Good friends
Solomon, 14, Bbembe PS, Namayumba says: “I avoid bad peer groups. Bad friends teach others bad manners like taking alcohol, stealing, watching bad movies and engaging in early sex.”

Abstinence
Madinah, 14, Kaabale C/U PS Masulita, says: “I abstain from sex. I don’t take money from men who want to defile me.”

Abstinence is both an interesting and a challenging stage. You may say, “I’m mature enough, let me enjoy life,” and you end up getting problems.

Mudondo Claire, Senior woman teacher, Malangata Gayaza Light SDA PS Namayumba, says: You can get through adolescence safely. Make decisions that are good for you and others.

Get the right information about your changing body and how to manage the changes. For example, know what to do when you get your periods, handle sexual feelings or experience a wet dream, how to avoid pregnancy, STDs and drug abuse.

Respect girls
Abbas, 13, St Joseph PS Kanzize, says: “I have friends who are girls. We revise together. When bad men send me to call them, I refuse and run away.”

Adulthood is a big responsibility. Prepare for it well.
Dangers of bad decisions

As you grow up, you start making decisions. A decision is a choice that you make about something. It could be a bad or good choice. Abstaining from sex is a good decision. It helps you stay healthy, while engaging in early sex, is a bad decision. It exposes you to early pregnancy, school dropout and STDs.

Many children suffer because they took bad decisions as shared by some of you. Read on!

Dropout of school
Jordan, 12, Malangata Gayaza Light SDA PS says: “There is a boy in our village who was a drunkard. One day, he was knocked by a motorcycle and stopped coming to school.”

PREVENTION
Eddy, 12, Kabaale C/U PS Masulita says: “A certain girl used to have many lovers. When she got pregnant, they all left her.”

HIV/AIDS
Janat, 13, St Joseph PS, Kanzize says: “Some children escape from home to go to discos and video halls. Some are defiled and they contract HIV/AIDS.”

DEFILEMENT
Chance, 14, Light and Grammar Katikamu PS, says: “My Friend told me that his uncle’s wife defeils him whenever his uncle is away. He fears to report. The woman said she would kill him.”

DEATH
Joan, 13, Head prefect Nakedde PS Namayumba, says: “When some girls develop breasts, they think they are mature. I heard over the radio that a certain girl went for an outing with men who later killed her.”

For teachers!
MUTASHABA WILLIAM, INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS WAKISO SAYS:
• Discuss with children problems that affect them.
• Be friendly so that children can open up.
• Teach children communication skills. Let them know when to say yes or no. Remind parents of their roles and that periods are not a sign that a girl is ready for marriage.
• Talk to community members about the dangers of defiling children.
• Report cases of child abuse to Police and organisations like; Save the Children, Raising Voices, ANFPCAN, Straight Talk Foundation, or call 116 Sauti, the government’s toll free helpline.

Beware of DANGEROUS places and people

touching your private parts, breasts or giving you gifts you have not worked for, requests to meet you when you are alone or from the bush. Some of you shared what you do to avoid danger.

Achileo, 11, Nagulu UMEA PS, says: “I avoid lonely places. Criminals like hiding there.”

Erick, 14, Malangata PS, says: “I walk in a group. There is safety in numbers.”

Norah, 13, Kabaale C/U PS, says: “I avoid gifts and lifts from strangers.”

Janat, 13, St Joseph PS Kanzize, says: “I avoid bad touches. My body is special.”

Okwii John, Security guard Wakiso says: Anyone can be dangerous including some parents, teachers, relatives and the person next to you. There are signs to help you sense danger such as someone:

PEP will save you from HIV
If you are defiled or raped, go immediately to the hospital for treatment to reduce the risk of acquiring HIV.
This treatment is called PEP(Post Exposure Prophylaxis). It is given to boys and girls who have been defiled or raped, people involved in accidents and health workers who are pierced by needles while treating patients especially those living with HIV.
For PEP to work well, you MUST get it within three days of exposure.
PEP only works if you do not have HIV already. If you are defiled, report to police after getting PEP. Girls will also be given medicine to prevent pregnancy. PEP is found in all hospitals where ARVs are available. It is free. Reviewed by Dr Nabwire Mariam Mulago Hospital.

Think critically
Before you decide to do anything, think critically about it’s consequences. This will help you find a better solution to your problems.

If you need pads, stealing or having sex to get money for pads is not a good solution. Instead, learn to make pads or talk to someone who can help you without asking for sex.

NABATANZI YUDAAYA, SENIOR WOMAN TEACHER, NAGGULU UMEA PS, NAMAYUMBA.

Pupils of Malangata PS, making pads

As you grow up, you start making decisions. A decision is a choice that you make about something. It could be a bad or good choice. Abstaining from sex is a good decision. It helps you stay healthy, while engaging in early sex, is a bad decision. It exposes you to early pregnancy, school dropout and STDs.
At 13 years, Mary (not her real name), a former P.5 pupil of Light and Grammar PS in Masulita, is already a wife and a mother. Her friend Joan, 11 says: “Mary is married to a boda boda rider who used to give her lifts. Dear children, avoid gifts and lifts from people who can destroy your future.”

Mr Masengere Samuel, a teacher in Light and Grammar PS Wakiso says: “Mary is among the three of our girls who got pregnant last year. She was secretly married off by her parents. Some bodaboda riders and brick layers are a problem. They entice girls with money and defile them.”

Topista,12, Naggulu UMEA PS, says” My friend got pregnant, but the man responsible ran to Sudan. She aborted and got married to another man.”

This is sad. Child marriage affects both boys and girls, but girls are most affected. Child marriage denies you of your rights to education, good health and a violent free childhood.

Every year, 15 million girls are forced into marriage globally. In Uganda, 25 out of 100 adolescents aged 15-19 have begun childbearing and 19 out of 100 girls aged 15-19 have given birth according to available information from 2016 health survey.

About 36 out of 100 school dropouts in Uganda is due to teenage marriages according to the World Bank data.

The Deputy District Director of Health Services Wakiso, Dr Mathias Seviiri, says: A bстain from sex and stay in school to achieve your dreams. Marriage can wait. Child marriage can expose you to STDs like HIV/AIDS, imprisonment, school dropout, early pregnancy, unsafe abortions, and complications like fistula or even death.


FRANCIS AND CLAIRE, MALANGATA PS SAY “BE PATIENT. THERE IS TIME FOR EVERYTHING.”

Having sex when you are young can harm your life physically or emotionally and may even lead to loss of life. Complete the crossword puzzle to list sixteen consequences of early sex.

Across

1. A general word for a disease caught through sex such as syphilis or Gonorrhea (3)
2. Worst thing that could happen from catching a disease such as HIV through early sex or having an abortion (5)
3. Feel sorry about having early sex and wish that you had waited (6)
4. Deadly disease caused by HIV that is often spread through sex (4)
5. The feeling of great sadness and hopelessness that most young people experience after giving in to early sex (10)
6. Abbreviation for Sexually Transmitted Infection (3)
7. Be fearful and keep thinking about the possibility that you might be pregnant after having sex (5)
8. Unhappy feelings resulting from knowing you’ve done wrong to have early sex (4)
9. Reproductive organ for boys (6)
10. Sometimes some young people commit ...... when they cannot face the consequences of early sex (7)
11. What most girls fear about early sex (9)
12. Ill, not in good health because of a disease caught through sex (4)
13. Rubber sheath that may not completely protect you from pregnancy (6)
14. Illness caused by an infection, for example herpes or cervical cancer (7)
15. To drop ...... of school is to leave school and not finish studies because of pregnancy (3)
16. End a pregnancy early so that a baby does not grow (5)

Down

1. Body changes are not a sign that you are ready for sex or marriage stay in school (7)
2. Abbreviation for Sexually Transmitted Infection (3)
3. Feel sorry about having early sex and wish that you had waited (6)
4. Unhappy feelings resulting from knowing you’ve done wrong to have early sex (4)
5. Reproductive organ for boys (6)
6. Rubber sheath that may not completely protect you from pregnancy (6)
How can we prevent STDs in children?

Jetricia, 12, Light and Grammar PS.

Dear Jetricia, children can get Sexually Transmitted Diseases when they have unprotected sex with an infected person. Some children can also contract STDs like HIV/AIDS from their HIV positive mothers during pregnancy, birth and breast feeding.

To prevent STDs, avoid early sex as much as possible.

What is Menstruation?

Topista, 12, Naggulu UMEA PS.

Dear Topista, Menstruation is when a girl’s body releases blood from the womb through the vagina. The blood flows slowly for 3 to 7 days. Girls start getting their menstrual period between the age of 10 and 15 years. Some start earlier or later.

Why do we produce bad smell in our private parts?

Lawrence, 17, Kabaale C/U, PS.

Dear Lawrence, private parts are those hidden parts of the body, and they sweat a lot. Your hygiene should be emphasized especially if you are in adolescence. Bathe regularly and keep your underwears clean.

What causes Gonorrhea? How can we prevent it?

Herman 16, St Joseph Kanzize.

Gonorrhea is a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) caused by a bacteria. Signs include; a burning feeling when urinating, discharge from the penis or vagina, and pain. If not treated early, Gonorrhea can cause infertility. Abstain from sex to avoid contracting STDs like gonorrhea.

Is it true that boys who are circumcised cannot contract HIV/AIDS?

Kenneth, 14, Bembe C/U, PS.

Dear Kenneth, This is not true. Circumcision reduces the risk of transmission of HIV and other STDs significantly, but doesn’t stop it. Circumcised males can still get HIV if they have unprotected sex with an infected person. Abstaining from sex is the best protection against STDs.

Where did AIDS come from?

Nakalembe, 14, St Joseph Kanzize PS.

Dear Nakalembe, There are a number of beliefs about the origin of HIV and none of them have been proven to be true or false. The most important thing for you is to abstain from sex to avoid contracting HIV. If you are living with HIV, seek medical care. With proper treatment, children living with HIV can live longer and study well.

Counsellor:
Dr. Joel Lwasa, St Charles Lwanga Hospital Buikwe.

Be friends with your parents

During adolescence, some children have trouble getting along with parents. They feel their parents are old fashioned or traditional.

Amuria Christine, parent says: You are blessed to have parents. Be friends with them. Ask them all the questions that you need answers to. It could be about growing up, friends, body changes or studies. When you have a good relationship with your parents, you freely share your problems and avoid wrong choices that you might get from your peers. Respect your parents. Greet them, help with work, thank them for taking care of you and apologise when you make a mistake.

Science Corner

What are wet dreams? Amos, 11, Kabaale C/U PS.

A wet dream is when semen (whitish sticky fluid containing sperms) is discharged from the penis while a boy is a sleep. You may wake up and find a wet part on your bed or clothes.

A Wet dreams is one of the body changes that boys experience during adolescence. You cannot do anything to stop yourself from having wet dreams because it is a normal and natural process.