Who is Parenting my Children?

The forum looked at the critical influences on children's values and growth. The discussion delved into the roles of parents, schools, siblings, religion, the internet, and government in shaping young minds and fostering their development in today's dynamic world.

According to UNICEF, parenting is the job of providing nurturing care throughout childhood, preparing children to live in society, form relationships, learn, work and thrive. It further refers to parents with the understanding that a parent is not only a child's biological mother or father. The term refers to any caregiver or guardian who is responsible for the care of a child.

Available parent in a demanding world

The forum kicked off by looking at the concept of parenting in a demanding world. One of the panelists, Miss Tatiana Karanja, a content creator and mother of three, highlighted how parenting is deeply fulfilling, and she appreciates the flexibility of running a business while being a mother at the same time.

"I get to be very flexible with my time and I get to be fully present for my kid's school events, activities, and appointments. I'm also grateful for a career that allows me to prioritize my family," she says.

Professor Lukoye Atwoli, Dean, AKU Medical College, East Africa noted that we learned how to parent from how we were raised by our parents and by observing how our parents treated us. However, we must adapt our parenting approach to fit today's environment because our parents lived and were raised in a different world. Generally, we have good enough parenting because parenting is contextual depending on the goals of our society.

Parents' involvement in raising children

The experts emphasized the importance of parental involvement in raising children, highlighting that many parents prioritize work and financial stability over being present at home. This absence creates a disconnect, leading to a lack of parental guidance and contributing to discipline issues.

Mr Maurice Mugalizi, a teacher at Aga Khan Academy, Nairobi argues that most behavioral problems originate at home, because of the unavailability of both parents. He says that most of the discipline issues in schools, are created at home and as teachers, they struggle a lot to mitigate this problem. This is because teachers spend about 90% of the time with the children than their parents do, and he thinks that most parenting happens in schools rather than at home.

Balancing discipline and guidance in parenting

Experts at the forum critically discussed discipline, focusing on its role in punishing children. Prof Lukoye explained that the word "discipline" is derived from a Latin word meaning 'to teach' or 'to show the way.' However, it has often been misinterpreted to mean "inflict pain." Many believe learning requires suffering because past generations were shaped by hardship, but it doesn't have to be that way because we know that inflicting pain doesn't change behavior sustainably.

Dr Stanley Mukolwe, Director, Family Life Ministry at the Navigators in Africa had a slightly different opinion noting that while discipline is necessary for guiding our children, violence should never be an acceptable method. About 80% of Kenyans come from dysfunctional families. Many parents don't know how to love and value their children. Parents need to be firm but available and loving to their children. He believes that there should be some form of corrective measures or punishment that should be meted out in every training designed to bring children back to line. Instead of resorting to violence, parents should be trained in effective disciplinary techniques that correct behavior without causing harm.

Experts generally agreed that on the issue of discipline, violence meted out to children doesn't help in the long run. Building that parental relationship with your children is very important. Parents should be able to nurture the relationship with their children, give them their independence, support them, mentor them and let them choose their pathway.

Raising children in the Digital Age

In today's digital age, the internet and social media play a major role in shaping children's values, behavior, and overall development. While these platforms offer educational opportunities, they also pose significant risks and challenges.

Miss Tatiana believes that the internet offers a lot of educational materials, tutorials and games that can be very beneficial to the development of children. In her case, YouTube has offered various educational opportunities for her kids enabling them to use the internet positively.

Stella Njoroge, HR Partner, AKU initially restricted internet access at home but had to adapt when COVID-19 made it essential for schooling. She had to develop some rules to restrict the use of the internet and technology but eventually shifted to empowering her children to make informed choices and understand the consequences of their internet interactions and use of social media.

Dr Mukolwe underscored that while gadgets are neutral, the content they deliver is not. He emphasised that the internet connects users to the entire world, and because there are people out there whose objective is to develop programmes that can be harmful to the rest of the world, proper use of gadgets and the internet for education purposes must be taught in our homes.

Conclusion

The forum highlighted the importance of intentional parenting, collaboration among stakeholders, and creating a balanced environment where children can grow with strong values and character. It encouraged parents to be proactive in guiding their children while recognizing the broader societal factors at play.