

NATIONAL FAMILY PLANNING BOARD

An Agency of the Ministry Of Health

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CONTRIBUTED ARTICLE: THE COUNTRY OF PROVERBS

Hands down Jamaica must be the country with the most proverbs.

I thought that I had heard just about every one that there is, but reality has a way of slapping you in the head. Trust that there is one that's applicable to every conceivable situation – good or bad. Happily, proverbs are still a part of our cultural heritage that remain alive and well and enrich our speech, taking it to another level.

Take for example the local proverb “Wa de goat du, de kid falla”, when translated means children pay attention to and take on the behavioural cues of their parents and any other adults who impact their lives.

With this truth, the National Family Planning Board strongly recommends that adults make more concerted efforts to set great examples for the children of our society. Poor parenting practices have had the spin-off effect of festering all manner of ills in our society including crime and violence, incest, addiction, absenteeism, and broken homes.

From a sexual and reproductive health standpoint it instructs parents to speak with their children about the missteps that they or other persons they know may have made that resulted in a life altering situation such as adolescent pregnancy, or contraction of a sexually transmitted infection/HIV. The Knowledge, Attitudes, Behaviour and Practice Survey 2017 has identified that by age 12, 22.3% of boys compared to 2.2% of girls reported having engaged in their first act of sexual intercourse. Additionally, the median age of first sex is 15 for males and 17 for females - ages at which they are still enrolled in secondary school and should not be dealing with the emotional roller-coaster of sex.

Conversations about navigating peer pressure are also a responsibility of any well-thinking parent or older adult.

Also, when we realise that we are immersed in a culture that is heavily sexualised the magnanimity of the task is onerous. Music and dance deliver opportunities for the transmission of messages that run counter to the instruction of well-thinking parents. If we are to follow the guidance of the proverb, it reminds us to provide correction to young children who gravitate to and display highly sexualised dance movements and reel off lyrics inappropriate for their age. The kind of behaviours

that would embarrass you in polite company. Those who know better must do better and point out the folly to adults egging on the wining as 'cute' and the lyrics deemed as 'genius' because the child knows them word for word.

If we want healthy children the early conversations need to be held with them about the functioning of their bodies, appropriate and inappropriate touching, the importance of regular health checks to optimise wellness, and ultimately the use of contraceptive commodities to delay pregnancy. Withholding this information leaves them deficient. They need role models who they can follow and you should be equal to the task, so step up remembering that "Wa de goat du, de kid falla".

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