

Report and Recommendations



Child protection in Kampala, Uganda: Experiences of parents and guardians and their engagement with the NGO, Kids Club Kampala

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kids Club Kampala (KCK) is an NGO dedicated to supporting vulnerable children and their families across Kampala's slum-settlements. This report was produced using data collected via interviews and secondary data. 21 participants were interviewed in Kampala during June and July 2025.

This research aimed to explore the experiences of parents/guardians regarding child protection within Kampala's urban slum settlements, focusing on their engagement with KCK's initiatives.

This research confirms that numerous barriers, including socio-economic challenges, limited access to education, and poverty, impact a parent's capacity to protect their children. Despite this, parents/guardians in Kampala demonstrate a strong desire for self-sustaining child protection strategies. This research concludes that to effectively address these challenges, KCK's initiatives should be strengthened by adopting a parent-led approach to child protection.

This report proposes **four recommendations** aimed at educating parents to provide long-lasting child protection. The researcher acknowledges the strengths of existing KCK programmes, and the recommendations build on those strengths.

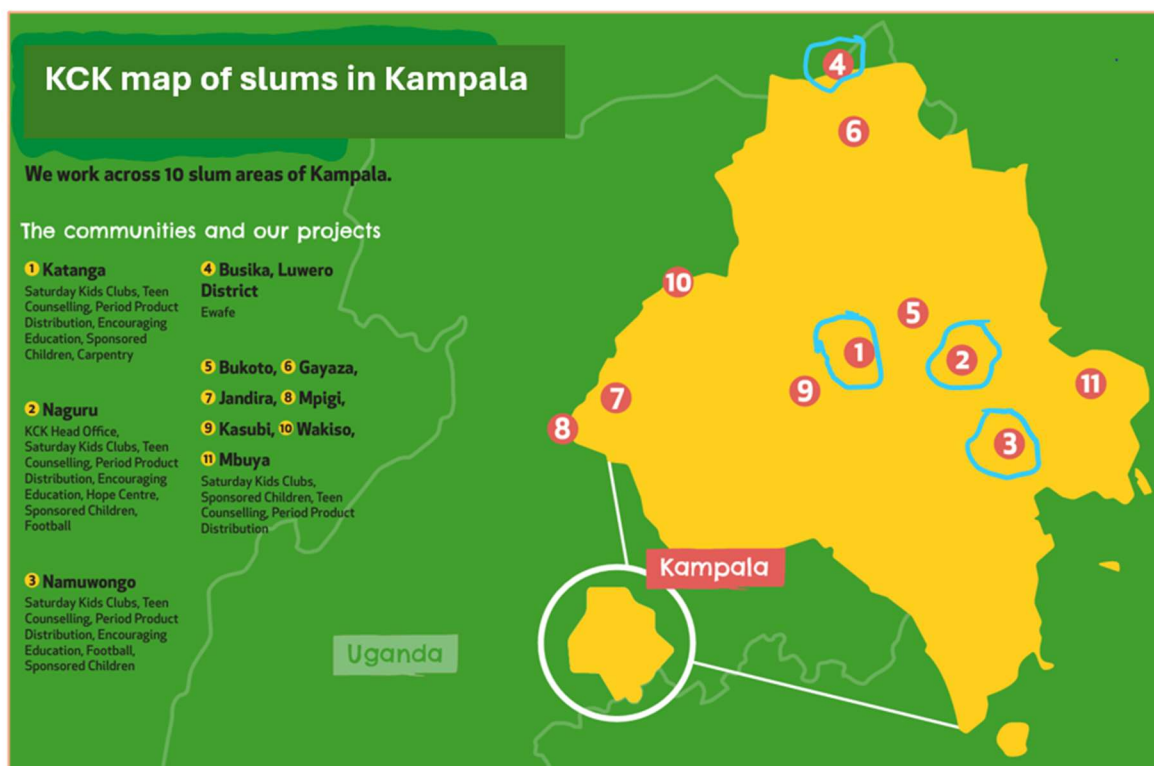
1. Establish training for parents/guardians as a new and distinct engagement programme within KCK.
2. Develop inclusive child protection resources for families to use.
3. Promote KCK's role providing dedicated support to parents/guardians through development of website and social media.
4. Establish partnerships with more organisations to share knowledge, resources, and expertise to enhance long-term child protection.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report has been commissioned by KCK to provide an analysis of experiences of parents/guardians surrounding child protection. The primary audience for this report is KCK's management team, programme staff, and key stakeholders. **Figure 1** shows the areas where KCK operates, and four sites where the researcher conducted the research.

Figure 1

Map of slum areas where KCK operates, and areas where research undertaken



NOTE: Areas circled in blue are where observations and interviews were conducted.

KCK Impact Report (2023) adapted by author

2 CHILD PROTECTION ISSUES IN KAMPALA

- 2.1 The primary issue of this report is the widespread challenge of child protection. While parents are the first line of defence, their ability to protect children is often compromised by external factors such as socio-economic challenges like financial poverty and family breakdown, as well as systemic issues like limited access to education and climate change. These issues are often compounded by low parental confidence¹.
- 2.2 Issues include high rates of violence against children, high rates of school dropouts, teenage pregnancy, child labour, neglect and trafficking². Financial and multidimensional poverty are major drivers of child rights issues, with 20.3% of Ugandans living in income poverty, while 64.82% experience multidimensional poverty³.
- 2.3 While NGOs play a crucial role in child protection, their initiatives can sometimes be short-term and fail to adequately equip parents with long-term strategies⁴.

¹ Horn, G., N. B. Wessells & H. M. Wessells (2013). "Child Protection in Uganda." In Child Protection in Africa: A Case Study of Uganda. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.

² Save the Children International (2024). End Violence Against Children Report: Uganda. Kampala: Save the Children International.

³ UNICEF (2025). Uganda Country Programme 2021-2025. Kampala: United Nations Children's Fund.

⁴ Save the Children International (2024). End Violence Against Children Report: Uganda. Kampala: Save the Children International.

3 RESEARCH APPROACH

3.1 This research used a qualitative research approach, focusing on interviews with parents/guardians and KCK staff. This approach was chosen to provide a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of respondents.

Desk-based research

3.2 The research began with a review of secondary documents, including KCK impact reports and programme documentation, and wider academic, governmental and NGO literature. This provided contextual information on KCK's strategies.

Field observations

3.3 Before interviews, the researcher spent eight days observing KCK projects. This provided contextual understanding of the local environment and KCK's initiatives.

Semi-structured interviews

3.4 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted: Sixteen with parents/guardians, two with KCK project alumni, and three with KCK staff. **Tables 1, 2 and 3** provide details of respondents. Participants were chosen by sampling to ensure a diverse range of insights.

Table 1

Parent and guardian respondents and demographics: P1 = parent 1

Respondent	Age	Gender	Occupation	Married	Child	Education	Religion	Location
P1	49	F	Tailoring	N	4	Senior	Christian	Bukoola village
P2	18	F	Sells mangoes	N	1	None	Christian	Naguru slum
P3	40	F	Salon	Y	1	Senior	Christian	Naguru slum
P4	53	F	Cook	Y	2	Primary 5	Christian	Naguru slum
P5	35	M	Security	Y	3	Senior	Christian	Naguru slum
P6	29	F	Teacher	Y	4	Senior	Christian	Naguru slum
P7	34	M	Teacher	Y	4	Senior	Christian	Naguru slum
P8	35	F	Teacher	Y	2	Senior	Christian	Naguru slum
P9	25	F	None	N	1	Senior 4	Christian	Naguru slum
P10	38	F	Market	N	4	Primary	Christian	Kanyanya slum
P11	29	F	Market	Y	3	Senior 4	Christian	Kanyanya slum
P12	39	F	Washing clothes	N	3	Primary 5	Christian	Kanyanya slum
P13	42	F	Market	Y	3	Senior	Muslim	Kanyanya slum
P14	29	F	Market	Y	6	Primary	Christian	Katanga slum
P15	53	M	Farmer	Y	12	Senior	Christian	Bukoola village
P16	35	F	Selling food	Y	12	Senior 4	Christian	Bukoola village

Author (2025)

Table 2

KCK Alumni (previous participants of KCK now over 18) respondents and demographics: A1 = alumni 1

Respondent	Age	Gender	Occupation	Married	Children	Education	Religion	Location
A1	20	F	Mother	N	1	Senior	Christian	Katanga slum
A2	22	F	Mother	N	1	Primary	Christian	Katanga slum

Author (2025)

Table 3

KCK staff respondents and relevant demographic characteristics

Respondent	Job Title	KCK Programme
KCK 1	Safeguarding Officer/ Project Coordinator	Keeping Children Safe
KCK 2	Project Coordinator	EWAFE Abandoned Children
KCK 3	Project Coordinator	Access to Education

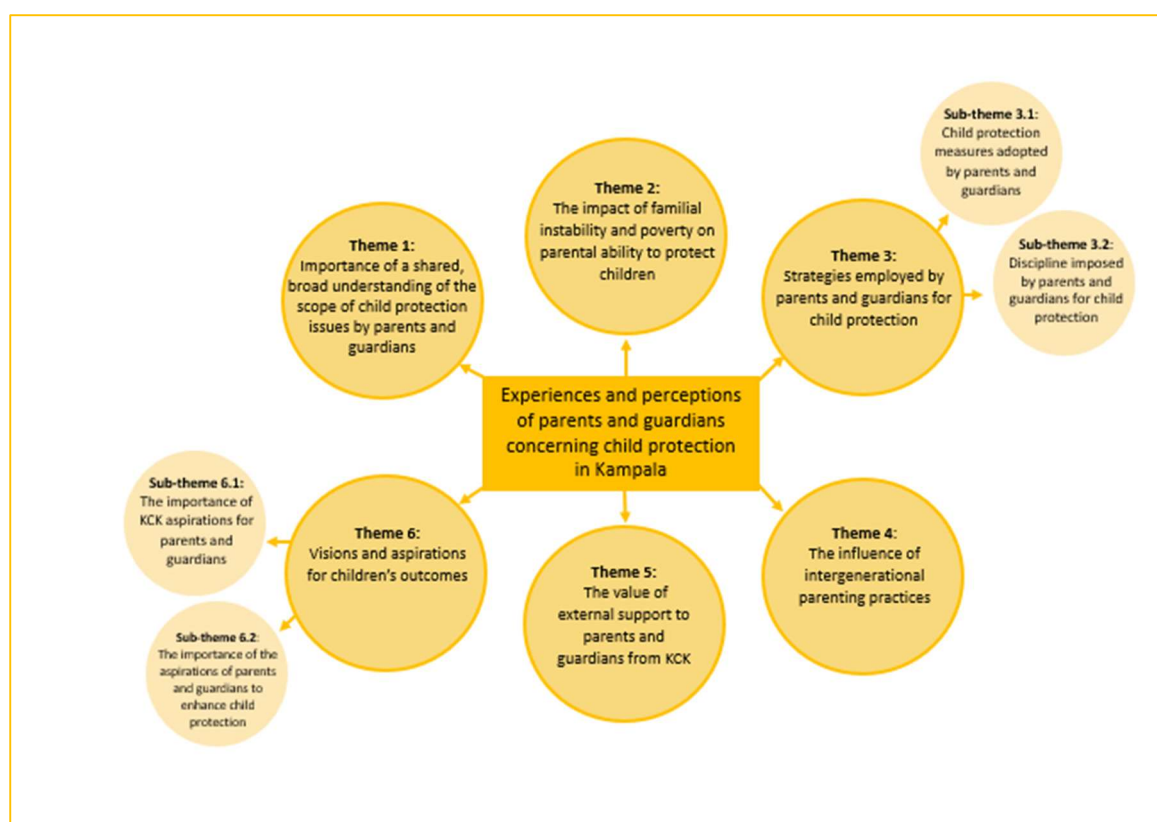
Author, (2025)

4 KEY FINDINGS

4.1 Following analysis of interviews, six themes were identified. The themes reflected the experiences of parents/guardians concerning child protection issues, and opportunities for improvement. The themes are summarised in **Figure 2**.

Figure 2

Summary of key themes



Author, 2025

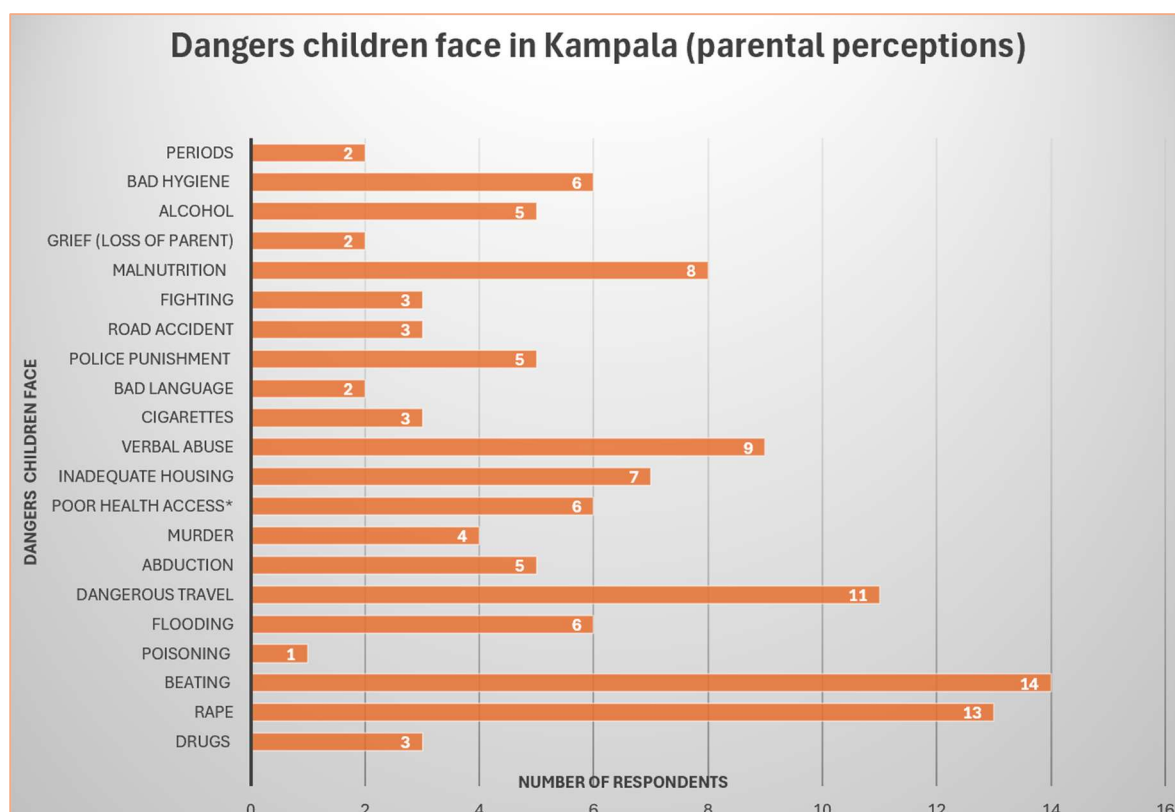
Theme 1: Importance of a shared, broad understanding of the scope of child protection issues by parents and guardians

4.2 Parents/guardians demonstrated that their understanding of the term ‘child protection’ is centred on the tangible responsibilities of caregivers, such as providing food, clothing, shelter, and medical care. These definitions are aligned with those provided by KCK staff, who emphasised a holistic approach to child protection. This alignment suggests a successful transmission of KCK's definition into the community it serves. **Figure 3**

shows the dangers faced by children as perceived by parents/guardians identified during interviews.

Figure 3

Dangers faced by children as perceived by their parents/guardians



* Example of poor health access is hospitals being too far away/ inaccessible.

Author (2025)

4.3 The findings underscore the significance of locally defined concepts, and challenges the potential dominance of a top-down, Western interpretation of child protection.

Theme 2: The impact of familial instability and poverty on parental ability to protect children

4.4 The research reveals familial instability as a key barrier to protecting children. Responses highlight how breakdown of family structures, often due to separation, divorce, or death of a parent, erodes informal support systems. This instability is compounded by the emotional and practical burden on the remaining parent to protect their child.

4.5 The findings confirm a strong link between multidimensional poverty and child protection issues. All participants experienced significant financial struggles that extended beyond a simple lack of income (**Table 4**).

Table 4

Complex barriers parents face to protect their children

Issue	Description
Barriers to education	Many parents and guardians reported being unable to afford school fees, which directly impacts their children's access to education.
Food insecurity	Participants described difficulties providing regular meals for their children, with some facing challenges related to climate and lack of access to affordable food.
Lack of health and sanitation resources	The research noted that poverty prevented parents and guardians from affording essential items like sanitary products and limited access to healthcare, with one parent mentioning the need to travel long distances to a hospital.
Inadequate housing	Participants described poor living conditions, such as multiple children sharing a small room, which poses additional risks to their well-being.

4.6 The research demonstrates that interconnected deprivations collectively create barriers to child protection.

Theme 3: Strategies employed by parents/guardians for child protection

Sub-theme 3.1: Child protection measures adopted by parents/guardians

4.7 Parents/guardians demonstrated a focus on preventative strategies to child protection. Respondents noted collective supervision as a primary strategy, encouraging children to move in groups. Some also adopted a restrictive approach by limiting time spent outside, viewing home and school as safe spaces to protect children from external dangers.

4.8 The importance of fostering strong parent-child bonds was a recurrent theme. Respondents emphasised ongoing counselling to guide children and build their resilience.

4.9 Parents viewed providing basic needs such as food, education, and shelter as a fundamental aspect of child protection. Participants showed resourcefulness, with some

growing their own food to ensure their children were fed. Despite their own educational challenges, some parents prioritised their children's schooling, seeing it as a crucial child protection measure.

- 4.10 The findings reveal a sense of collective responsibility, suggesting that community-level protection mechanisms are essential. However, some parents/guardians expressed a preference for personal awareness over their children's safety.

Sub-theme 3.2: Discipline imposed by parents/guardians for child protection

- 4.11 The research reveals a critical challenge at the intersection of local cultural norms and international human rights standards. Respondents confirmed the widespread use of corporal punishment and other forms of harsh discipline. Participants often viewed these methods as necessary to ensure children's obedience. The findings highlight that while informal methods may be culturally sensitive, they often divert from international standards, underscoring the need for culturally-informed interventions that respect local traditions while promoting universal child welfare.

Theme 4: The value of family, community and social networks for child protection

- 4.12 The research shows that parenting practices are often passed through generations. Many parents/guardians reported using the same violent disciplinary methods their parents used.
- 4.13 However, some parents recognised their own mistakes, seeking to adopt new parenting methods. The desire for a better generation was evident among those who had participated in KCK interventions, which reinforced their capacity to move away from harmful practices.
- 4.14 Generational influence was not entirely negative. One participant raised by the community highlighted the importance of a collective network for child protection, showing that intergenerational cycles can also transmit positive values and resilience, providing a powerful source of informal support.

Theme 5: The value of external support to parents/guardians from KCK

- 4.15 The research highlights the critical role of external support systems like KCK in strengthening parental capacity to protect children. While KCK does not offer a distinct, child protection training programme for parents/guardians, their existing supplementary parent meetings are in high demand. These meetings provide a platform for parents to gain knowledge and skills.
- 4.16 Support from KCK provides a holistic form of assistance that reduces parental stress. This includes educational support, material and health assistance, and emotional and psychological support. One respondent noted that counselling from KCK helped them feel less isolated and more able to handle their problems.
- 4.17 Parent meetings and counselling enhance parental confidence and reduces stress, which are crucial factors in preventing child maltreatment⁵. The findings provide a strong argument for the effectiveness of community-based programmes which actively contribute to breaking cycles of abuse.

Theme 6: Visions and aspirations for children's outcomes***Sub-theme 6.1: The importance of KCK aspirations for parents/guardians***

- 4.18 KCK aims to build parent confidence and end harsh punishment by reminding them of their responsibilities. KCK promotes non-violent disciplinary methods through consistent communication and counselling. Enhancing parenting skills and confidence can lead to significant positive changes in family dynamics⁶.
- 4.19 KCK staff aim to use accessible platforms like community radio and market-talks to educate a wider audience on positive parenting. This approach demonstrates a deep understanding of the local context and a commitment to creating lasting change for the community.

⁵ Musendo, J. (2024). The Role of Parental Confidence in Protecting Children from External Threats. Grey Literature. London: Save the Children.

⁶ Ibid

Sub-theme 6.2: The importance of the aspirations of parents/guardians to enhance child protection

4.20 While KCK aims to provide for basic needs, parents articulated an unmet demand for support that goes beyond current initiatives. Their aspirations fall into two main, intersecting categories:

1. Parents demonstrated a strong desire for continued guidance from KCK. They requested more training on discipline, hygiene, and safety. This highlights a willingness to learn new skills and a recognition of the need to move away from harmful practices.
2. Parents expressed an understanding of how broader structural issues impact their ability to protect their children. They called for systemic improvements to their living conditions, including better sanitation, affordable healthcare, and financial assistance for necessities like school fees.

4.21 While interventions focused on parental skills are important, they are not a complete solution. Long-term child protection in environments like Kampala's slums requires addressing the fundamental structural inequalities that create risk. The shared aspirations of parents/guardians and KCK for a more educational environment suggest that interventions combining parental skills training with advocacy for broader systemic change are essential for creating a truly protective environment.

5 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 The research findings reveal a strong desire from parents/guardians for skills training on child protection for the home environment. While respondents expressed satisfaction with the support their children receive from KCK, significant barriers within the home and community hinder their ability to implement protective strategies. The study emphasises the importance of empowering parents, reducing dependency on NGOs, and promoting distinct initiatives for parents/guardians to protect children.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Feedback during interviews from parents/guardians demonstrated great appreciation for KCK's programmes which support children directly. Building on KCK's strong existing programmes, and building on issues raised during interviews, recommendations are made below, focusing strongly on the development of support directly to parents/guardians.

Recommendation 1: Establish training for parents/guardians as a new and distinct engagement programme within KCK

6.2 This research recommends that a distinct engagement programme is developed to provide parents/guardians with practical knowledge and skills for child protection and alternative discipline methods. KCK's parental engagement is limited to parent meetings that are supplementary to programmes. In one KCK parent meeting, 38 parents arrived against an expected turnout of 15. Findings show that many parents/guardians have requested further safeguarding support and parent training.

Actions

- ✓ Design and implement a new training programme for parents/guardians.
- ✓ Conduct regular in-person workshops providing up-to-date safeguarding and child protection knowledge for parents/guardians, with a focus on practical application within the home. Use scenario-based practice to enhance understanding and retention of safeguarding principles.
- ✓ Make meetings accessible by considering factors such as convenient timings and locations and provision for children to be supervised by KCK staff.
- ✓ Create and distribute materials like infographics or simple booklets that parents can reference at home. These resources should be available in multiple formats to cater to varying literacy levels (see **Recommendation 2**).

- ✓ Ensure the programme is led by local facilitators trained in child protection.
- ✓ Create a clear feedback and evaluation mechanism. Design a simple survey or feedback session at the end of training sessions to gather input from parents/guardians. This ensures the programme remains relevant, addressing their specific needs.

Recommendation 2: Develop inclusive child protection resources for families to use

6.3 To ensure that child protection training is inclusive and accessible to all parents/guardians, including those who are illiterate, it is recommended that KCK provide durable visual aids for use at home and during training sessions. These resources would also serve to ensure the retention of skills learned⁷.

Actions

- ✓ Develop posters and/or visual aids with clear diagrams for broader accessibility to child protection measures at home.
- ✓ Acquire a laminator: Laminate all the resources to protect them from water/environmental damage.
- ✓ Test the visual aids with a small group of parents/guardians. Gather their feedback on clarity, comprehension, and usability to ensure the visuals are effective/culturally appropriate.
- ✓ Create a simple system to record which families have received the resources. This can help with follow-up, identifying resource gaps, and ensuring the materials are reaching those who need them most.

6.4 Boxes 1-4 give examples of resources which could be developed.

⁷ Autism Toolbox (2019). *Visual Supports | Autism Toolbox Autism Toolbox*. [online] Autism Toolbox. Available at: <https://www.autismtoolbox.co.uk/supporting-learners-and-families/effective-partnerships-and-communication/visual-supports/>.

Box 1: Example 1 of visual aid

The researcher observed an informative infographic within the EWAFE office (**Figure A**). The resource provides detailed strategies for parents/guardians on how to care for their children. However, the infographic is inaccessible to individuals who cannot read. Its title, "Parents and caregivers are heroes protecting our children in a crisis," is in small print. **Figure B** illustrates how KCK could adapt this resource to improve its accessibility.

Figure A

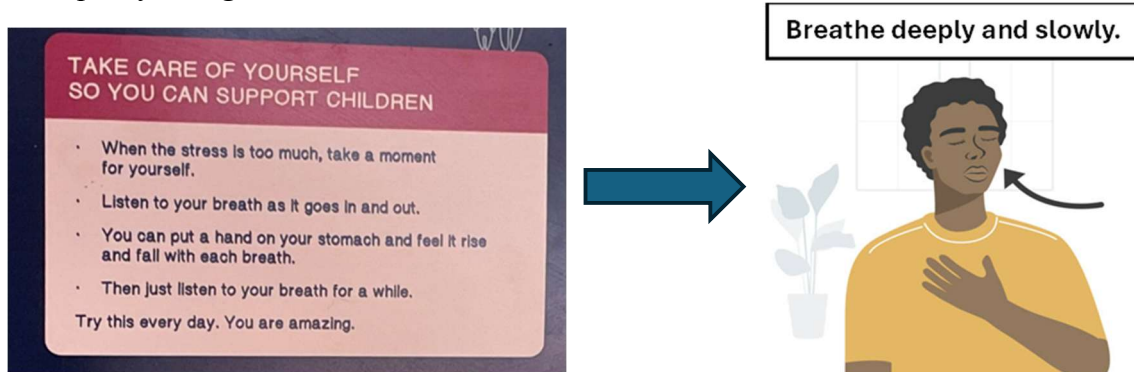
Infographic of parental child protection advice on display in KCK EWAFE office



Picture by Author; KCK Ewafe office, June 2025.

Figure B

Example of changed resource to be more inclusive



Picture by Author; KCK Ewafe office, June 2025.

Author; 2025

Box 2: Example 2 of suggested visual aids

Figure C provides examples of visual aids designed to support positive parenting practices and encourage improved behaviour in children. These visuals should be customised to meet the specific needs of each family, for example, by providing versions in Luganda instead of English.

While the visuals can be grouped together as a poster and displayed on a wall, it is recommended that they be cut out individually and placed on a lanyard. A breakaway safety clip is advised for the lanyard. This allows parents and guardians to easily show the relevant visual aid to a child at eye level.

Figure C

Visual aids to encourage positive behaviour and communication



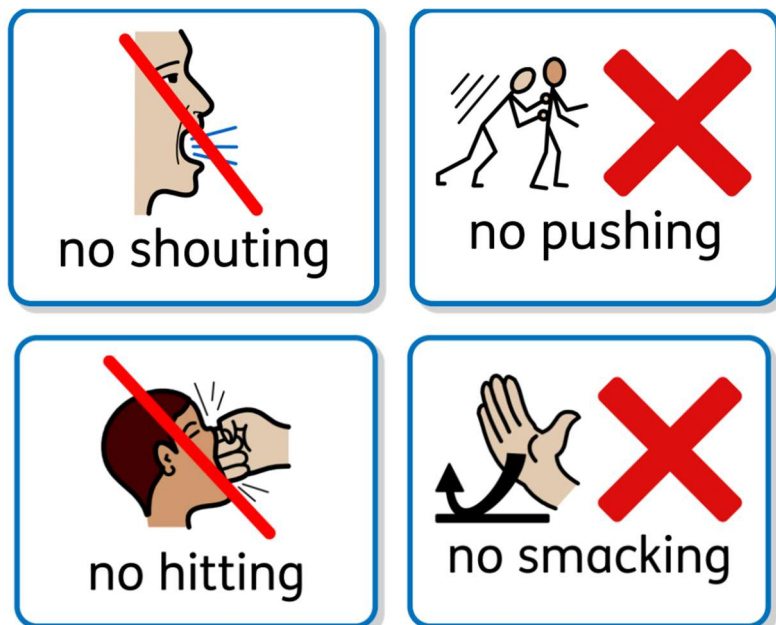
Created by Author using Widgit Online, 2025

Box 3: Example 3 of visual aids

Figure D displays example visuals for parents/guardians, or children in urgent situations where positive behaviour encouragement has been unsuccessful. These visuals should be used as a last resort, specifically for individuals who require immediate intervention to halt violent behaviour.

Figure D

Visual aids to stop violent behaviour in children and parents



Created by Author using Widgit Online 2025

Recommendation 3: Promote KCK's role providing dedicated support to parents/guardians through development of website and social media

6.5 Parental feedback indicates a strong demand for parent-specific training. A review of KCK's website reveals that this focus is not clearly articulated. Promoting KCK's role as an organisation that directly supports parents/guardians in child protection will not only address a clear community need but could also attract donors and fundraisers interested in directly supporting parent-focused initiatives.

Actions

- ✓ Website refinement: Create a dedicated section on the KCK website, titled "Educating and Training Parents and Guardians in Child Protection". This section should clearly outline KCK's parental support initiatives, resources, and training opportunities and should come under KCK Programmes.
 - Update the "About Us" section: Revise KCK's mission/vision to explicitly mention its commitment to empowering parents as a core part of its child protection strategy.
 - Develop a clear appeal that directly links donor contributions to the expansion of parent/guardian support programmes. Showcase how a donation can lead to tangible outcomes, such as training a specific number of parents or developing new visual resources.
- ✓ Elevate the visibility and accessibility of KCK's safeguarding policy (beyond small print at the page bottom of website). Develop a simplified, accessible summary of the safeguarding policy for parents/guardians, using clear language and visuals.
- ✓ Use platforms like Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn to share engaging videos, infographics, and testimonials highlighting the success of parent/guardian training programmes.
- ✓ Create a process where partners, like health clinics or schools, can refer parents/guardians who they believe would benefit from KCK's support. This helps identify and reach families in need more effectively.

Recommendation 4: Establish partnerships with local organisations to share knowledge, resources, and expertise to enhance long-term child protection

- 6.6 To further strengthen its child protection impact in Kampala, KCK should continue to collaborate with other organisations (such as its partnership with The Mango Tree) that have expertise in educating parents/guardians, such as Slum Aid Project⁸, Joy for Children Uganda⁹, and Raising Voices¹⁰.
- 6.7 These partnerships would support KCK's creation of a robust parent-training programme. Sharing resources and expertise can enhance long-term child protection by equipping parents/guardians with the skills and resources needed to protect their children outside of KCK.

⁸ Slumaidproject.org. (2024). *Slum Aid Project – Slum Aid Project (SAP) is a development, women, child care, and advocacy non governmental organization working with communities and other stakeholders to improve the lives of the poor and vulnerable people living in the slum areas.* [online] Available at: <https://slumaidproject.org/>

⁹ Joy For Children (2025.). *Home.* [online] Joy For Children Uganda. Available at: <https://joyforchildren.org/>.

¹⁰ Raising Voices. (2025.). *Values & Story.* [online] Available at: <https://raisingvoices.org/about-us/raising-voices-story-values/>

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