
Black with Kids: Representation Matters, so be Intentional about It

By Shawnta S. Barnes - June 16, 2018

Indy/Ed, an education blog that is part of the Citizen/Ed network is adding a new series focusing on parenting black children. This series will continue indefinitely and highlight the struggles and successes of our writers who are parenting black children.



When I tell people, I am a teacher, I am typically thanked for serving in this profession and for good measure people normally add how hard my job is and glad they don't have to do it. Yes, being a teacher is hard, but it is not my most challenging job. The most challenging job is being a black parent. Children don't come with guidebooks and even if they did, they wouldn't be able to address navigating the world as a black parent.

I do the best I can. I am raising two black identical twin boys. I want them to have all the opportunities this world has to offer despite the barriers they may have to overcome. It's not enough

to help them obtain skills or tell them they can do any task, they have to believe it is possible and for many, believing comes by seeing. For them to believe any profession could be an option for them, they have to see people

who look like them in these fields repeatedly. Making that happen is harder than it seems. It is more than skin color for my husband and I, we want the people they are exposed to be talented *AND* black.

For my husband and I, the best way we have found to make this happen is to be intentional about exposing them to black professionals. Their pediatrician and dentist are black. Their principal is black and Asian. They also see us engaging with black professionals. Our trust and estate lawyer and realtor are black. We also surround ourselves with successful black professionals. My husband has black friends who include a human resource manager for a hospital and facilities manager for a college.

They can't just see these individuals, we also have to talk to them about what they do and how they had to learn their skills in school. The most important professionals they see are us. My husband is Senior Database Administrator – Technical Team Lead for the State of Indiana and I'm an educator. They have been to our jobs more than once and we took them to the college we attended – Boiler up!

Schools can be helpful in promoting college and careers, but many times they don't do a good job of showing kids of color people in those fields who look like them. This is the extra burden we have as black parents. We have to put in the work to help our kids believe the sky is their only limit...since one of our children wants to travel into space, I guess the sky isn't the limit.