

Black with Kids: We Have to Build Up Our Black Children Because the World Won't

By Shawnta S. Barnes - July 31, 2018

On Sunday, my husband, our boys, and I spent time at my husband's uncle and aunt's home after church for a family dinner. Typically, when my husband's mother's side of the family has dinner, it takes place at his uncle and aunt's home. This dinner was special. It was the back to school encouragement, affirmation, and prayer dinner.



All of the children in school from elementary through college sat on the floor and the rest of the family circled around them. You didn't have to be family; if you were in school and were there, you were included. Each of us gave the students in the family words of encouragement and advice. Being that I am an educator, I was asked to start the circle. I reminded my cousins, a cousin's boyfriend, and my niece to have fun in school but I also told them this:

I heard D.L. Hughley say that the most dangerous place for a black person is in a white person's imagination. Because I have seen it, I would also add, the most dangerous place for you could be in your teacher's imagination. Your teacher may not believe in you, but you have to believe in yourself and keep working hard.

As we continued around the circle, each adult shared part of his or her story in school and the life lessons they learned. A few people shared they quit college or thought about quitting. We spoke about failing a class and being treated unfairly by teachers. We talked about standing up for yourself and the appropriate ways to advocate for yourself. We talked about depression and anxiety. We were transparent about our stories and didn't sugar coat any part of our stories. Most importantly, we wanted them to know that even though it is hard to exist while black in this world, that someone in the family is always available for support and is willing to come alongside them. Last, we prayed over them.

It is hard to be a person of color; we are criminalized for just existing and participating in everyday activities. This is why it is important to encourage our black youth and let them know they should be proud of who they are and remind them they can make it in this world and in school. There are plenty of negatives voices in the world, so we have to continue to speak positivity into our black youth and affirm them.