



Black with Kids: The Adultification of Black Children in School

By Shawnta S. Barnes – December 19, 2018

Being a parent is hard, but being a parent of a black child can be even harder. There are situations black parents have to navigate that white parents many times don't. Don't be fooled; having a middle class or high social-economic status won't bring immunity from these situations.

This week, a woman, whom I have known since we were little girls, was concerned about an incident involving her black son. She explained that her nine-year-old son was participating in a “your mama” session at school. For those of you who don’t know, this is when you try to come up with the best joke about someone else’s mother. Typically, the listeners of the joke battle determine the winner. Her son was trying to drop a hardcore comeback, so he said, “I will eat your mama.” Admittedly, I laughed when I heard his ‘joke.’ I interpreted his statement as him saying he would eat this classmate’s mom like an animal would eat prey. Instead, the teacher had a different interpretation. She thought he was referring to an oral sex act. She called home to relay her concerns.

Unfortunately, I have my own stories about my twin sons, but I will only recount one. When my sons were four, they attended a Catholic preschool. One day, the principal called about an incident that took place on the playground. My husband and I put her on speaker, so we could both talk to her. When she said it was a playground incident, I assumed it was about one of my boys being too rough with the other kids. They played roughly with each other and preschool was helping them learn that all kids don’t want to play that way.

What came out of the principal mouth was unexpected. She said, “Has your son seen any adult movies or the two of you engaged in adult activities?” I turned, looked at my husband, and gave him the, ‘what the hell’ look. We, of course, said no. She went on to explain that she felt that one of my sons had grabbed a girl around the waist and bent her over the playground equipment inappropriately. I immediately responded with, “Do you mean like he grabs his brother and tackles him?” The principal went on to explain how she had to make sure all students felt safe and welcomed. What she didn’t realize is she made us feel unwelcomed. She called us during the evening to accuse our four-year-old son of simulating a sex act on his female classmate. Why did she assume my black child had bad intentions or even knew what sex was at four?

The article, “Black Boys Viewed as Older, Less Innocent Than Whites, Research Finds” highlights the research completed in 2014 about the perception of black boys. The article states:

Black boys as young as 10 may not be viewed in the same light of childhood innocence as their white peers, but are instead more likely to be mistaken as older, be perceived as guilty and face police violence if accused of a crime, according to new research published by the American Psychological Association.

My son and my friend's son did not even get to make it to age ten before being wrongly accused. Adultifying black children rips away their innocence. It puts black parents in the position of having to explain to their children why they are being accused of acts they did not do and many times don't even understand.

If you are ever in a situation with any child, don't jump to conclusions. Investigate before thinking the worse. Life is can be hard for black people, but school shouldn't be one of the places making it harder and ripping away black children's innocence.